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## **'I feel really good now!' – Emotions and independence in undergraduate supervision**

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### **Abstract**

Within Swedish higher education, there is an explicit focus on the importance of independence, not least in relation to degree projects, which makes it a significant issue within supervision. What student independence comprises and how it may be achieved, however, is rarely discussed, even though the expectations of independence may be a stressful aspect of degree projects for students. This article examines the role emotions may play in undergraduate supervision in relation to student independence, through analysing recorded supervision meetings and focus group interviews with supervisors. Based in a theoretical framework centred on the concepts affective practices, anticipated emotions and anticipatory emotions, it discusses how supervisors handled students' expressions of fear and anxiety, joy and relief, and how anticipated emotions could be used as a didactic tool.

**Keywords:** higher education, student independence, degree projects, undergraduate supervision, emotions, didactic tools

As one of many European countries, Sweden participated in the Bologna process around the turn of the millennium, a process that, built on the Bologna declaration in 1999, aimed to create a common area for higher education in Europe (European Ministers in charge of Higher Education 1999). One of the goals of the Bologna process was to enable students in Europe to move more freely between countries, something which demanded a higher degree of similarity and comparability in the organisation of higher education in the participating countries. Even though one of the original aims was to further similarities in higher education systems and thus facilitate movement of students, there are still variations and differences within higher education between countries that were all part of the Bologna Process since the declaration has been interpreted and implemented in different ways (see Curaj et al. 2012; Kooij 2015; Pursiainen and Medvedev 2005).

In Sweden there is for instance an explicit and distinct focus on the importance and value of independence or autonomy, something which is highly visible in the Swedish Higher Education

Ordinance. In Annex 2 of the ordinance, where the requirements and qualifications for all the various degrees within Swedish higher education are specified, the requirement of autonomy or working autonomously is repeatedly mentioned, for example in the descriptions of what competencies and skills a student shall have acquired when obtaining a bachelor's degree or a primary education teacher's degree:

**For a Degree of Bachelor the student shall**

- demonstrate the ability to identify, formulate and solve problems autonomously and to complete tasks within predetermined time frames.

(Swedish Council for Higher Education 1993b)

**For a Degree of Master of Arts in Primary Education<sup>1</sup> /.../ the student shall:**

- display enhanced capacity to benefit from, systematise and reflect critically and autonomously on personal experience, the experience of others and relevant research findings and thereby contribute to professional development and the formation of knowledge in the field of professional practice.

(Swedish Council for Higher Education 1993b)

Similar formulations are found in the descriptions of the expected outcomes concerning students' competencies and skills for most of the degrees regulated in the Higher Education Ordinance (Swedish Council for Higher Education 1993b). The focus on independence is also evident in that students have to write clearly labelled 'independent projects', as an obligatory part of their education (*självständiga arbeten*) (Swedish Council for Higher Education 1993a).<sup>2</sup> As the choice of terminology suggests, the 'independent project', is one part of the undergraduate education where the ideal of student independence is given most attention and also where it is most clearly assessed. For their degree project<sup>3</sup> students are generally expected to survey previous research on the field they are writing within, gather empirical material of some kind, and use what they have learnt throughout their education, including theories and literature, to identify, discuss and analyse a relevant topic or problem, all of this in an independent or autonomous way. Syllabi and assessment criteria for different degree project courses also indicate that independence normally constitutes one of the main aspects the students are graded on (see Magnusson 2015).

But even though independence and autonomy, or '*självständighet*', are emphasised within Swedish higher education, and then particularly in relation to the degree project, there is not much research or

discussion about what the idea or ideal of independence actually comprises, how it should be understood, and, not least, how it may be encouraged among students. In the larger research project of which this article is a part, this is the main focus. The overarching aim of the project is to explore how the concept independence is understood and used in the supervision of degree projects in two education programmes, teacher education and journalism, in two different countries - Russia and Sweden. The analysis in this article is based on a particular section of the material collected within the whole project, namely recorded supervision meetings and focus group interviews in two Swedish universities.

The aim of the article is to examine the role emotions may play in undergraduate supervision, with respect to the existing ideal of independence as well as to the didactic choices of the supervisors. First, I will look into how anticipatory emotions of fear and anxiety concerning writing, and in particular finishing, the degree project, could be visible in the interaction. Then I will look closer at what role joy and relief, also primarily as anticipatory emotions, could be said to play in the supervision processes. Finally, I will look at how the supervisors during the supervision sessions referred to emotions they anticipated the students would have, and how this could be used as a didactic tool.

### **Method and material**

Degree projects are an obligatory requirement of both journalism education programs and teacher education programs in Sweden. The exact forms for these projects may, however, differ between universities and departments. Within primary school teacher education programs, students may be required to write two separate degree projects, each representing 15 ECTS points, or ten weeks of full time studies. Often, but not always, one of these is at the bachelor level and the other at the master level. Universities are free to instead let the students write one, longer project, representing 30 ECTS points or twenty weeks of full time studies, even though this is less common. Within journalism education, students normally write one degree project in order to obtain their Bachelor's degree. There is generally some kind of preparatory course in connection with the degree project, often with a focus on theory and method, and sometimes also on the more advanced aspects of academic writing. How many hours of supervision the students are entitled to, is normally regulated in course manuals or other steering documents connected to the degree project. The more precise forms the supervision should take may also be regulated in course manuals, but supervisors usually have the opportunity to influence aspects such as how many supervision meetings should consist of group supervision, and how many should be individual.

The research project from which this article is drawn has a problem-oriented methodological approach based on mixed methods. A wide range of material has been collected in order to illuminate the central question of how independence is regarded and used in the supervision of degree projects. It includes syllabi and course plans from programmes and courses within teacher education and journalism, recorded supervision meetings, focus group interviews with supervisors, individual interviews with supervisors, comments on drafts and e-mail correspondence between supervisors and students. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses are used for different parts of the material.<sup>4</sup>

As stated above, the analysis in this article is primarily based on a selection of recorded supervision meetings from two Swedish universities, but I also use some results from the focus group interviews done at the Swedish universities in order to add extra depth and nuances to the analysis and discussion.<sup>5</sup> I have chosen to concentrate on four of the supervision processes included in the material, two within teacher education and two within journalism education, in order to be able to discuss the actions and interaction of the people involved in a more thorough way. All of these were on the first degree, undergraduate level project for the teacher education students. The material comprises 12 recorded supervision meetings altogether, and include both the early meetings, when the supervisors sometimes gathered all the students they supervised in a particular course to a joint meeting, and later meetings, when the students had individual supervision, or, when writing in pairs, supervision in couples.

It was the supervisors who handled the recordings and the researcher was thus not present during the supervision meetings. The recordings have been transcribed and then analysed through qualitative content analysis, in other words a systematic categorisation of the material, in this case focused on the implicit or explicit expression of emotions (Schreier 2012). The relevant examples have then been interpreted from an emotion theoretical framework which is further described below.

### **Survey of the field**

That supervision of undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations may pose a whole range of different challenges, is evident in that there are a number of handbooks that deal with questions around how to supervise students in the best possible way (for example, Emsheimer 2016; Norberg Brorsson and Ekberg 2012; Tanggaard and Wegener 2016; Wilson and Thomas 2016). There is also research done on various aspects of the supervision process, as well as the supervisors' experiences and needs,

supervisory styles and the special challenges presented by online supervision (for example, Augustsson and Jaldemark 2014; Baker et al. 2014; Berg 2016; Carlson et al. 2016; Eriksson and Gustavsson 2016; Kamler and Thomson 2014; Scholefield and Cox 2016; Sveen and Magnusson 2013; Wiggins et al. 2016).

The role of emotions and feelings in the supervision process has not been given that much attention in research on undergraduate supervision. There are some studies where this has been discussed, for instance Todd et al. (2006) note that both students and staff may experience feelings of uncertainty during the process. In their book on learning and teaching in higher education, Light et al. also underline that there are emotional aspects connected to the supervision not only of Master's dissertations and PhD theses, but also undergraduate projects (Light et al 2009: 154ff). The role of emotions and feelings in the supervision process has, however, been more frequently discussed within research on postgraduate supervision. As for example in a longitudinal study of supervisors' reflective practices by Sue Clegg, where she showed that supervisors regularly described emotional reactions and invoked emotional states when reflecting on their own supervision practices. They did this in relation to the PhD students they supervised but also in relation to colleagues and the institutional context more broadly. Both positive and negative emotions were described as powerful enablers and inhibitors of action (Clegg 2000: 460).

Other examples of how emotions may be of significance in postgraduate supervision as well as in the doctoral learning processes are presented by Sara Cotterall who followed a number of international PhD candidates in Australia over a two-year period in her study (Cotterall 2013). Doloriert et al (2012) and Sambrook et al. (2008) have also examined the relation between emotion and power in the supervision of PhD students, from the perspective of both the supervisors and the doctoral students. That there may be connections between the emotional experiences and reactions of the students and the writing process, has been pointed out by Castello et al. (2009) who in a study on self-regulated academic writing argue that a lack of awareness of the writing process among doctoral students may contribute to them feeling more anxious during the process, while Coralie McCormack (2009) has argued that emotions tied to supervisor-student interaction may not only influence how the PhD period is experienced by the doctoral students, but also its outcomes.

Writing a doctoral thesis is of course something quite different from writing a degree project, and the time frames differ markedly. These differences could be expected to influence the relationship between the student and the supervisor. Still, I would argue that emotions may also play an important role in the supervision of undergraduate students, as a result of the particular conditions that surround this part of the education, as also Light et al and Todd et al have emphasized (Light et al 2009:154ff; Todd et al 2006:162f). The relation between teacher and student is quite different during the supervision process than in most other kinds of teaching, since undergraduate supervision to a large extent comprises one-to-one interaction and takes place during an extended period of time compared to regular courses. The relations are, furthermore, influenced by the pressures and expectations concerning time-frames and academic standards that both supervisors and supervisees have to handle. This is the argument behind my choice to use an emotion theoretical framework for the analysis in this article, which will be further developed below.

### **Theoretical approach**

The starting point for the emotion theoretical framework in this article is Margaret Wetherell's work on affect, emotions and affective practices. Wetherell argues that affect is something always simmering and ongoing within the individual, but that in certain situations and moments these ongoing processes may be more concretely expressed or articulated, which she describes using the term *affective practices* (Wetherell 2012: 12). She furthermore emphasizes the relational nature of emotions and how affect and affective practices are always about interaction and intersection. It is through the terms, concepts and narratives that are connected to emotions that a certain affect may be articulated and turned into something more specific, and Wetherell sees this kind of articulation as connected to existing power relations and hierarchies (Wetherell 2012: 24). How, when and if the ongoing affective processes are articulated, is thus related to the particular situation and context the individuals find themselves in, as well as to the relations and interaction between them.

Wetherell's theories thus form the foundation for the analysis in this article, but her theoretical approach will also be connected to the distinction made in an article by Barsics et.al. (2016) between *anticipatory emotions* and *anticipated emotions*. They argue that one of the instances when people experience emotional or affective reactions is when anticipating future events and projecting ourselves into the future, so called future thoughts or 'prospection' (Barsics et al. 2016: 218f). Through differentiating between *anticipatory emotions* - emotions or affective reactions experienced when

thinking of the short-term or long-term future, and *anticipated emotions* - emotions one expects to have in the future, they aim to better understand the affective reactions taking place during future thinking or prospection (Barsics et al. 2016: 219).

The research by Barsics et.al focuses on the ‘future thoughts’ themselves, and the emotional reactions they seemed to spark within the participants of the study, something which they tried to capture through an experimental study where the participants noted what they saw as future thoughts, and the possible emotional reactions they experienced when thinking these thoughts (Barsics et al. 2016: 220ff). Even if I do not, as Barsics et al, have the ambition to capture and discuss future thoughts in themselves, I find the concepts and distinction useful in the analysis of my material, not least since the supervision context and situation in several ways could be said to trigger future thoughts, or prospection. One could in fact argue that this is one of the main purposes of supervision, to encourage, or force, students to think about the future, and how to reach the envisioned goal of a finished degree project. The supervision interaction could in other words be expected to comprise affective practices that include the articulation of both anticipatory emotions and anticipated emotions (cf Barsics et al. 2016: 218f; Wetherell 2012: 10ff). Through the recorded supervision sessions we might not get access to the actual simmering and ongoing affect that Wetherell (2012) identifies, or to the future thoughts themselves, but it does provide an excellent source for seeing how such thoughts and affective reactions may come to show in the ongoing interaction between the students and the supervisors, and how this may play a part in the supervision process.

## **Results and discussion**

An overview of the supervision sessions recorded throughout the project, shows that both students and supervisors referred to or expressed anticipatory and anticipated emotions in the interaction and in various ways. This was sometimes done quite explicitly, with individuals articulating clearly defined emotions, such as being happy, scared or anxious, but at other times more implicitly in the sense that it was rather the choice of words, tone of voice or occurrence of laughter that indicated that the conversation taking place was somehow based in or linked to anticipatory or anticipated emotions. Both students and supervisors could be said to take part in such affective practices even if they did so in partly different ways. The students tended to use the supervision interaction as a way to handle anticipatory emotions they had experienced while working with their projects and which were often

brought to the fore in the particular context the supervision sessions constituted. The supervisors, on the other hand, had to somehow handle the anticipatory emotions that came up during the supervision session, but also took the opportunity to prepare the students for coming emotional experiences – the emotions they anticipated the students would have at one time or another while working on their projects.

***What if it comes to nothing? Fear and anxiety***

Among the most common anticipatory emotions that could be discerned in the recorded interaction, were fear and anxiety. In this sense our material mirrored the study by Castello et al. (2009) where anxiety was constantly present in the doctoral students' comments on their own writing process. In our study the students were anxious about whether the degree project would be finished on time and if it would be good enough. Sometimes these anticipatory emotions were explicitly articulated or commented on by the students, as in the following examples:

Supervisor E: That [the student's plan for the work] ... that seems, you know, quite sensible.

Student C: Great! (laughs) Yeah, well 'cause that's what I was afraid of – that I'm completely off track!

(Supervisor E, Group supervision 1, 2016-03-03)

Student R: And then you sit there... writing your degree project but your material doesn't match at all. It all amounted to nothing. That's my horror anyway.

(Supervisor A, Group supervision 2, 2016-03-02)

At other times the ongoing affective processes were conveyed more indirectly, as in the following example:

Supervisor U: Why are you interested in this [topic] that you have...

Student E: Well, yeah, because it's really interesting how you describe people differently and, sort of portray them differently based on gender. And then I think that journalism is supposed to strive towards being objective, and, you know, it depends on the words you choose and the facts you tell. But how objective is that really?

Student A: So what we want to find out is if it is like that in XX (major Swedish newspaper) or not.

Student E: Yeah.

Supervisor U: Mhmm.

Student A: It might turn out to be as we imagine it will be.

Student E: Yes.

Student A: It might also turn out that it's not like that at all.

Student E: Yes.

Supervisor U: Mhm.

Student A: So I guess we hope we'll find something! [laughter]

Student E: Two months and then we find nothing! [laughs]

Student A: Yeah.

Supervisor U: So, what is objectivity then?

(Supervisor U, Supervision meeting 2, 2016-03-31)

In this example the students did not explicitly mention being afraid or anxious, but their choice of words and expression as well as their tone of voice and use of non-verbal signals such as a slightly nervous laughter, indicates that they did experience a certain kind of anxiety when thinking about the future. An anxiety that in this particular case primarily concerned the risk that all the work they realised they would put in during the two months the course was scheduled for, would amount to nothing. Interesting to note is that the supervisor U chose not to pick up on the students' signals of feeling anxious or worried. Instead he reached back to one of the issues the students raised right at the beginning of this exchange – the presumed objectivity of journalists - and turned the conversation back to that topic. The affective practice that could be said to take place at this particular moment was in other words influenced by how the supervisor did not join in the laughter, reassure them that everything would be alright or comment on the concern they expressed that their work would amount to nothing. There were, however, other examples in the material of how the students' more or less clearly expressed fear and anxiety could be discussed in the ongoing conversation. This was especially frequent in the group supervision meetings, a kind of supervision that was common in the early phases of the process, where the supervisor gathered all the students s/he supervised, normally around five of them, and discussed their initial plans. In these settings, where the students present were expected to

give feedback on each other's ideas, they also tended to respond to the concerns voiced by the others, as in the following example:

Student R: I find it difficult that everything must be up to standard. What you collect... your material. And then you write and then you have this: 'Is this relevant?' And then at the end nothing fits together and you want to just pull your hair. Why doesn't it fit together? Earlier it's been other people's thoughts. You know when we've had literature courses and you write exams and there is a right and a wrong. ... While now you're the one who is supposed to examine something and you should make sure that it is good enough. And I find that scary.

Supervisor A: Yeah, alright.

Student F: I think that it's related to that you have to make all the choices, sort of. All the time you have to: 'Okay – so I choose to go in this direction 'cause then...' And then you make new choices the whole time [giggling]. Make up your mind.

Supervisor A: Mhm.

Student S: It's the first time we really stand on our own two feet as well.

(Supervisor A, Group supervision 1, 2016-02-17)

As in the previous example, it is the students' realisation that they will spend half a semester to write the degree project, and that they cannot know if it will actually work out in the end, that seems to spark an affective reaction involving fear and anxiety. But another factor that comes across as making the process of writing the degree project scary, as Student R put it, is the high level of independence that is expected of the students. It was this in particular that the other students in the group connected to in the comments they made as a response to the concerns R voiced. This is an aspect that also came up in several of the focus group interviews we made with supervisors in journalism and teacher education – that the prospect of independence, and the freedom but also expectations and responsibility that would involve, was regularly regarded by the students they supervised as quite intimidating (Focus group interviews 2016-09-29, 2016-10-04, 2016-11-04). Even though some supervisors had also experienced that certain students saw the chance of being independent as one of the most positive aspects of writing a degree project (Focus group interviews 2016-09-29, 2016-10-04, 2016-11-04).

The recorded conversation following directly after the example above, displayed how not only the fellow students but also the supervisor picked up on the concerns, or anticipatory emotions, expressed

by the students. He directed the conversation towards a further discussion on independence and on the one hand stressed that being independent, as in making the necessary choices and decisions, was something that was expected of the students at this stage of their education. On the other hand, he underlined that he would be there for them as a supervisor, trying to support them in their work (Supervisor A, Group supervision 1, 2016-02-17). His way to handle the fear and anxiety expressed by the students thus differed quite markedly from how supervisor U reacted in the previous example. The differences could, of course, be connected to the degree of explicitness in which the students expressed their concerns, where student R talked vividly about pulling her hair and finding it scary, while the concerns of students E and A were more implied. In the ongoing affective practices, their worry was, consequently, both more difficult to notice during the ongoing conversation, and easier to disregard than if it had been expressed more explicitly.

Another way to interpret the recorded conversations is, however, that the concerned supervisors used different didactic tools in these situations. That Supervisor U did not pick up on the anxiety expressed by the students, could very well be the result of a more or less conscious choice to disregard such aspects, to be able instead to direct attention to other issues, such as in this case if it would be relevant to talk about the objectivity of journalists or not. Supervisor A, on the other hand, seemed to use anticipatory emotions conveyed by the students as a tool to discuss various aspects of the writing process. The recorded supervision sessions with this particular supervisor are full of instances where the students in different ways expressed their feelings about writing the theses. Often, albeit not always, the supervisor made active use of such expressed feelings, as in the following example from the second group supervision with the same group:

Student F: Yeah, 'cause my horror scenario, or what I sort of hear is like, there is an examiner who says: 'Well why didn't you write a dissertation on what Social science is about', sort of [laughs]. You know, that it'll be like well: 'That's what you should do'.

Supervisor A: Mhm. And that's what you are going to build in good answers to now. That you direct your degree project so that you build in good answers to your question [laughs].

(Supervisor A, Group supervision 2, 2016-03-02)

Instead of ignoring or disregarding the fear and anxiety the student gave voice to when talking about what he saw as a 'horror scenario', or, for that matter, trying to comfort the student by assuring him

that it will not necessarily be as bad as he imagined, Supervisor A thus responded with encouraging a particular action from the student to prevent this scenario from actually taking place. There were also other examples when this particular supervisor seemed to be aiming to turn the fear and anxiety, or sometimes anger and frustration, the students conveyed more or less explicitly, into something useful in the process of writing the independent project: If this is what you fear, then do your best to avoid ending up there. In this way, the anticipatory emotions that the students voiced, could optimally be turned into a driving force for their future work. In that sense, the didactic tool used by the supervisor could also be seen as contributing to the student's independence, in a different way than if he had for instance offered the student his help to tackle this imagined horror scenario.

*It feels as if we are on a roll! Joy and relief*

In addition to expressing their fear and anxiety in various ways during the supervision sessions, the students tended to give voice to their joy and enthusiasm. The prospection, i.e. the thoughts around what the future would look like, thus not only sparked what in this case must be considered negative emotions, such as fear and anxiety, but also positive ones (cf Barsics et al. 2016: 221). The students did for instance from time to time express how excited they were and how they looked forward to the upcoming work:

Student A: That sounds good!

Student E: And fun I think! [laughs]

Student A: Yes. It'll be exciting to get started!

(Supervisor U, Supervision meeting 2, 2016-03-31)

Student O: I think it's really fun! I think that I learn a lot through working with this!

(Supervisor A, Supervision meeting 3, 2016-04-01)

Student B: That was that. That felt good!

Supervisor S: Yeah, mhmm.

Student C: It feels as if we are on a roll! [laughs]

(Supervisor S, Supervision meeting 1, 2016-04-01)

Still, as is evident also in the above examples, the joy the students expressed during the supervision sessions was often interwoven with expressions of relief. A relief that appeared to stem mainly from help or feedback that made them a bit less anxious and afraid about the outcome of the work they were doing. That the relief and joy they expressed often tended to be connected to feedback or advice from the supervisor is quite interesting in view of how student independence was described and understood in the focus group interviews made within the project (see Magnusson and Zackariasson 2018). Even though the focus group interviews showed that student independence could be understood in a number of ways, there were also certain common understandings that could be seen in all of the focus groups. One such common understanding was that the desired independence should include students making the relevant and necessary decisions and choices for the degree project. The supervisor's role should be to encourage and guide the students, but not necessarily or primarily telling them what to do (Focus group interviews 2016-09-29, 2016-10-04, 2016-11-04). A more directive supervision, where supervisors actively and distinctly help students structure and plan their work and possibly even assist in writing and formulating research questions, was generally regarded as something less desirable (cf Wichmann-Hansen and Herrmann 2016).

In the recorded supervision sessions there were, however, several examples of how students actively tried to get more directive supervision from the supervisors, for instance through asking them if they had done things the right way, and, not least, if they had done enough:

Student A: Do you think I, like, have enough material now?

Supervisor E: Oh yeah, yeah. You do. But as I said, I think that it all falls into place unusually well I would say. You have previous research and you have theories and you're putting the analysis together.

Student A: Mhmm.

Supervisor E: There's some work to do but like...

Student A: Yeah, really. But it feels great that I've done more at least! [laughs]

(Supervisor E, Supervision meeting 2, 2016-03-30)

Sometimes the students quite explicitly asked for help to make certain decisions and choices, both concerning more overarching questions and concerning a more detailed level of the writing of the degree project, as below:

Student C: This is the smallest problem we have at the moment.

Student B: Yes, the smallest problem, but we said that S (the supervisor) gets to decide what she thinks looks best and then we can go from there.

Supervisor S: Yes. [laughs]

Student B: [laughs] Let's see if I can find it. (sounds of computer mouse) It's like when it says like 'Aim and Scientific questions'. Like... either it says 'and', like that, or it says 'and' with one of these...

Student C: An ampersand.

Supervisor S: Oh.

Student B: So it's like what you think looks the best.

Student C: It's just a matter of taste.

Supervisor S: Well, ehrrm – you want me to have an opinion?

Student C: Yes.

Student B: Please.

Supervisor S: Well, if you write like that, then no one will notice at all, but if you write an ampersand, some people will react.

Students B and C: Mhmm.

Supervisor S: And then they get stuck on the wrong things.

Student C: So you are saying 'and' with letters?

Supervisor S: Yes.

Student C: Yes.

Supervisor S: [laughs]

Student C: It feels so good! Oh I feel really good now!

(Supervisor S, Supervision meeting 2, 2016-05-04)

Even though the students at the start of the dialogue above claimed that it was just a small problem they were struggling with, the reaction from student C when it was resolved, is quite striking. Her exclamations of how good she feels once the issue has been settled, indicates that the anticipatory emotions she had when thinking about this particular detail were rather troubled, but that they turned into relief and a feeling of well-being when they received very clear advice, or rather, an actual decision, from the supervisor. Other parts of the recorded supervision interaction reveal that this was

not the only issue where these particular students, who were expected to write the degree project together, had difficulties resolving their different opinions on how things should be done. It thus also illustrates that writing in pairs, which was obligatory in the journalism course they were taking, adds yet more dimensions to the whole issue of student independence, relating to how and to what extent students can be independent when working together.

Even if the supervisors in the above examples gave the students quite clear answers and advice that elicited expressions of relief from the students, there were other examples in the recorded material where supervisors were more reluctant to be so decisive, rather saying that the students were the ones who knew their work best and that they would need to make the decisions themselves. This links to the general view of the supervisors in the focus groups that a more directive supervision was a didactic tool that certainly could be useful, not least in relation to getting the students to finish their work on time and with a high enough quality, but which, ideally, should only be used when it was clearly needed, in other words when the students failed, or appeared to fail, to make independent choices and decisions (Focus group interviews 2016-09-29, 2016-10-04, 2016-11-04) (cf Wichmann-Hansen and Herrmann 2016).

Still, seeing that such more directive supervision, with direct advice or approval from the supervisors, often triggered expressions of relief in the recorded supervision interaction, one could argue that this kind of supervision might help students not only through telling them what would probably be the best way of doing things, but also through turning negative anticipatory emotions connected to the expectations of making independent choices, into more positive anticipatory emotions of relief and enthusiasm. Or, to put it differently, maintaining an unswervingly Socratic supervision ideal, where the supervisor only asks questions and does not give the answers, poses a risk that during the supervision sessions affective processes mainly involve negative anticipatory emotions like worry and fear, which could have a negative impact on the students' work (cf Castello et al. 2009; McCormack 2009; Wetherell 2012).

### ***You are going to hate me! Anticipated emotions***

Anticipatory emotions did thus seem to play an integral part in the affective practices that were taking place during the supervision sessions, and, as the examples above show, they could be handled quite differently by the supervisors. As I mentioned initially, the affective practices taking place during the

supervision sessions, also included expressions of or references to anticipated emotions (cf Barsics et al. 2016: 218f). Sometimes it was the students who talked about how they would feel in the future, but in several instances it was the supervisors who, more or less explicitly, referred to emotions or affective states, which they anticipated the students would experience in the course of writing the degree project.

In some cases, the acknowledgement of anticipated emotions was primarily used as a way to comfort or reassure the students, through recognising that they at some point or other might become worried or stressed, but that they probably had no real cause for this, or at least were not alone in experiencing that. At other times the supervisors used their references to anticipated emotions as a quite distinct didactic tool, for instance when it came to reminding the students that they did not have an unlimited amount of time to finish their work. As in the following example:

Supervisor U: The most important thing (now) is that you get the analysis done

Student A: Yeah, exactly.

Supervisor U: Results and... ehm... the second, level two of the analysis and the final discussion.

Students E & A: Mhmm.

Supervisor U: 'Cause the clock is ticking now.

Student A: Yeah.

Student E: Yeah, we feel that too that...

Student A: Now it's time for ten-hour days at the library.

(Supervisor U, Supervision meeting 8, 2016-05-11)

In this example, the supervisor gives the students quite directive supervision, in the sense that he explicitly tells them how they should structure their work (Wichmann-Hansen and Herrmann 2016: 3f). But in comparison to the examples above, where the students in different ways expressed relief after having received directive supervision, the affective practice here does not at all circle around or end up in relief. Neither does the aim of the supervisor seem to be to reassure the students and relieve them of some of the worry and anxiety they might be feeling, but, rather, to *raise* some worry and concern in the students. The affective practice ends up suggesting they should not be too complacent, and the didactic aim appears to be to make them take the final part of the work on the degree project seriously. The supervisor uses his more extensive experience of what the writing process normally looks like, or

what it should look like, in order to increase the chances of the students actually finishing on time and puts extra weight behind his direct recommendation for them to concentrate on the analysis, through alluding to the risk of them running out of time. That his comment about the ticking clock is not just some neutral reference to the time frame for the writing of the degree project but could also be seen as part of the affective practices taking place, is evident both in his choice of expression, and in how Student E remarks that they ‘feel that too’. She may thus be said to acknowledge the anticipated emotion, in this case the stress and worry, the supervisor implicitly conveys.

Supervisor A, who as we saw above regularly used anticipatory emotions as a didactic tool, also tended to use anticipated emotions actively in the supervision process. Once he animatedly described an imagined scenario where the students had put off inserting references into the text, tried to correct this right before deadline, but realized that they had already handed the books back to the library (Supervisor A, Group supervision 1, 2016-02-17). Through vividly talking about this potential outcome as a nightmare, instead of just telling the students that they should be careful with making notes of references, he could thus be said to use anticipated emotions to give his argument extra force.

Another way that Supervisor A used anticipated emotions in the supervision interaction was as a means of preparing the students for what the writing process would be like, and then in particular stressing that it would be no bed of roses:

Supervisor A: (You should) find a topic that you feel... This is exciting, this is something interesting. This is something that I am motivated to work with, that I want to work with. That’s really important, ‘cause as I said... You will... several of you will pull your hair the last week and feel ‘Why did I ever get into this?’ [pretend crying]. ‘I’ll leave teacher education!’ And then it’s very important that you have a topic that you feel ... Yeah, well this is still exciting. (Supervisor A, Group supervision 1, 2016-02-17)

This is thus yet another example of how the supervisors could use their extensive experience of the writing process to let the students know what to anticipate, and not only what to anticipate practically or intellectually but also emotionally. That emotional work is a significant mechanism in higher education in general and in supervision processes in particular, as Susan Clegg among others has argued, is something supervisor A seems to be quite aware of, and, furthermore, something he finds

important to convey to the students (Clegg 2000: 460f; see also Cotterall 2013: 183). But, as in the earlier examples, he also appears to have a didactic goal with his use of anticipated emotions in the supervision, which in this case comprises making the students carefully consider and think through their choice of topic for the degree project. In that way his statement could also be said to contribute to encouraging student independence, in the sense that making an independent choice of a topic they were actually interested in is presented as something that will enhance their chances of succeeding.

In the recorded material it became evident that Supervisor A used anticipated emotions in yet another way, namely to prepare the students for what the relation between him and them would or might look like towards the end:

Supervisor A: Then I'll prepare you for one thing that you should be aware of, that... my role will be, especially towards the end, to be as obnoxious as possible. To be really hopeless and horrible [laughs]. If I do my job well then, I'll be... You are going to hate me for [laughs] criticizing ... I'll search your text for everything that is problematic and complain about that! ... And that is obviously to help you, to as much as possible give you the chance to make the last version of your text as good as possible. So at the end you'll think: 'I never want to see A again for the rest of my life!' [laughter]

(Supervisor A, Group supervision 1, 2016-02-17)

Castello et al. (2009) argue that having knowledge of the writing process might help relieve the levels of anxiety that the students, in their case doctoral students, might experience. In the above examples, both Supervisor U and Supervisor A could in different ways be said to use anticipated emotions as a tool to prepare the students for what the writing process might entail. Supervisor U did this by emphasizing the need to get things done in order not to run into problems with the time available, something he was not alone among the supervisors to underline. Supervisor A, on the other hand, used anticipated emotions both as a tool to introduce and direct the attention to potential problems with a rather straightforward solution, such as the risk of not being able to locate quotes and references, and to prepare the students for more complex obstacles they might run into, such as the risk of losing the enthusiasm along the way or the risk of being heavily criticised by the supervisor himself.

Worth noting is that all three of the above given examples from Supervisor A stem from the very first supervision meeting, where he met the students he was supervising for the first time. The students had, in other words, not come very far in the writing process, which meant that the discussion by necessity mainly concerned what would happen later on. This could be assumed to contribute to the frequent presence of anticipated emotions on this particular occasion. Still, even if the other supervisors also used anticipated emotions in order to prepare the students, they did not do it to the same extent, or as explicitly, as Supervisor A. His use of and attitude towards anticipated emotions could thus be said to be in line with his use of anticipatory emotions, in the sense that he to a comparatively great extent tended to use them as a kind of didactic tool in his supervision practice.

### **Concluding remarks**

The analysis of the recorded supervision sessions shows that emotions, both anticipated and anticipatory, were quite evident in the interaction between the supervisors and the students, something that highlights the affective practices that were taking place (Wetherell 2012). The different ways in which such emotional aspects were handled by the various supervisors, could be seen partly as a question of personal supervisory style. Some supervisors might find it rather intimidating to get into discussions about feelings and emotions, or view it as an obstacle to efficient supervision, while others find it quite uncontroversial or regard it as a useful approach. The same could be said of the attitudes towards a more Socratic supervisory style, where the supervisors take the role of asking questions rather than giving answers, or a more directive supervisory style where the supervisor gives clear advice and recommendations to the students. Being more aware of the practices that are taking place during supervision, may, however, help supervisors notice their own tendencies and more or less conscious strategies, and enable them to use them as didactic tools that may actually help students in their work with the degree project, not make them lose their enthusiasm or make them get stuck in fear and anxiety.

The analysis shows that there appeared to be a tangible tension between on the one hand the ideal of independence, as it is expressed in the Swedish Higher education ordinance, in course manuals and assessment criteria as well as in focus group interviews conducted within the project, and on the other hand the students' wish for or need for directive supervision. The issues that most of all appeared to evoke feelings of fear or anxiety among the students, were whether they would finish on time or not and if the finished product would be good enough. They were also expected to make a number of

independent choices and decisions, in a different way from their previous courses. The things they worried about were, thus, to a large extent related to the expectations on them to work independently and autonomously. In comparison, getting clear feedback on whether they were on the right track, if they had done enough, or how they should structure their work, appeared to spark feelings of joy and relief among the students. If, as Castello et al. (2009) argue, knowledge about the writing process tends to lower students' levels of anxiety and worry, and thus to promote the work, then the students' wish for, or expressed relief at, receiving directive supervision, could be interpreted as a way to tap into the supervisors' decidedly more extensive knowledge of the whole process of writing a degree project.

Yet another aspect of this was that supervisors could actually try to induce a certain amount of worry and anxiety among the students, in an effort to make them work harder or more efficiently. Even though Supervisor A did stand out when it came to the extent to which he raised the issue of what kind of emotions the students might expect to experience throughout the work with the degree project, it was a didactic tool that was used also by other supervisors, particularly through emphasizing how the students would probably be quite stressed and harried towards the end of the writing process.

On the one hand this could be seen as a way of helping the students prepare for what lay ahead – and thus as an example of how the supervisors may use their knowledge of the writing process in order to aid the students. It may also be a rather efficient didactic tool, since it made the students more aware of what they needed to do in order to succeed, not only on an intellectual but also on an emotional level. On the other hand, this use of anticipated emotions in the supervision practices, through depicting a future where the students would experience negative feelings if they did not shape up or work hard enough, could also be seen as something that might hinder student independence, since it put extra weight behind the supervisors' arguments for how the students should structure their work, and thus made the supervision even more directive for the students' work.

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understandings in different academic contexts' in *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 2018, written together with Jenny Magnusson and 'Loving and Forgiving? Emotions and Emotion Work in the Youth Organization Equmenia' in *Ethnologia Europaea*, 45(1) 2015.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Since the education program to become a primary school teacher in Sweden comprises four years of study, the students automatically reach the Master's level during the course of the programme and obtain a Master's degree once they are finished. The major part of the education is thus on an undergraduate, or Bachelor level, and the last parts are on a Master level. It is generally not possible to obtain a Bachelor's degree after parts of the programme, all students must fulfil the full four years of study in order to graduate and obtain a degree.

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<sup>2</sup> The word '*självständig*' in Swedish can be translated to both autonomous and independent, and thus signifies a rather broad concept that in this context encompasses not only, or even primarily, working on one's own, but also aspects such as having a critical and reflective approach (Magnusson and Zackariasson 2018). This is evident in the official English translation of Annex 2 of the Higher Education Ordinance, where '*självständigt*' is most often translated by 'autonomously', and recurrently paired with aspects such as professionalism or critical reflection. While, at the same time, 'independent' has been used to signify '*självständig*' in the translation of the term for the degree projects: '*självständiga arbeten*' (Swedish Council for Higher Education 1993b).

<sup>3</sup> The degree project is termed differently in different academic contexts. Sometimes it is called 'undergraduate project' or 'bachelor essay'. I have chosen to use the rather neutral "degree project" throughout the article, since the teacher education students actually reach the Master level once they finish.

<sup>4</sup> All material involving human participation has been collected with informed consent and all participants have been anonymized.

<sup>5</sup> The research project's complete focus group and recorded supervision material from the Swedish universities consisted of four focus groups interviews, each lasting one hour and involving 4-6 supervisors from either journalism or teacher education, and 36 recordings of supervision meetings, involving eight different supervisors.