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A Study Program for Doctoral Supervisors – a Vehicle for Development

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9th Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference – Educating Researchers
for the 21st Century, April 2010, Adelaide



Overview of this presentation

- **Challenges for doctoral education today in Sweden**
- **Some important tensions in the design of the study program**
- **Overview of the study program**
- **The program as a vehicle for development**
- **How far we have come**
- **A call for collaboration**



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Background

Sweden has a long tradition of higher education (HE) teacher training. At Lund University teacher training began as early as in the late sixties. In 2002 the Swedish HE Ordinance made teacher training compulsory for tenure as junior or senior lecturer. The Ordinance also states that all supervisors of doctoral students should have some training. The content, goals, learning outcomes and duration is not specified by the Ordinance. In 2005 a pilot project at Lund University led to a national agreement between the Swedish HE institutions on how the mandatory teacher training for the position as junior or senior lecturer should look¹. The agreement is based around a set of learning outcomes and a duration equivalent of 10 weeks full time. No agreement is made on supervisor training and practices vary between institutions.

Training for doctoral supervisors gained momentum in Sweden in the late nineties. Many institutions began to offer training for supervisors and Lund University was one of them. Between the years 1999 and 2002 a three-week program was developed and run four times. This program had a fairly large budget and could among other things boost seminars with prominent scholars in the field of supervision. The program was also voluntary. Several other universities had similar programs. However, in 2003, Lund University took another approach that was not mirrored at other universities. It was decided that all supervisors, irrespective of supervision experience, should attend a two-day workshop. The three-week program was cancelled. Up to 2009 supervisors, up to 160 per year, attended these workshops. The workshops had in comparison to the three-week program a very limited budget and, for the last three years, cohorts were large - 40 participants per workshop. These developments led, understandingly, to the workshop getting a bad reputation in some contexts. Also, the workshop facilitators were frustrated with the situation and with only having two days at hand for such an important topic as doctoral supervision. However, the participants were to a very large extent happy with what they had learnt during the workshop.

In 2008 Lund University decided to develop a new study program for doctoral supervisors. This program will be presented here.

¹ Lindberg-Sand, Å. and A. Sonesson (2008). **Compulsory Higher Education Teacher Training in Sweden: Development of a national standards framework based on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**. Tertiary Education and Management 14(2): 123-139.

Challenges for doctoral education and supervision in Sweden

Doctoral education is:

- an *educational task* with new demands
- the *traditional gateway to the academy*
- an important *contributor to research production*
- a *means for the qualification of the researcher/supervisor*
- *important for funding*



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Some challenges for doctoral education and supervision in Sweden

Doctoral education is at the heart of the university, for good and for bad. It is:

- an *educational task* with new demands
 - In the European Union, doctoral education – the third cycle in the European HE Area – is increasingly being expected to contribute to society and societal growth.
 - The academy is expected to produce doctors in larger numbers than it in the end can accommodate and for professions and roles also outside the university.
 - This raises, among other things, the question of what the students should learn and be prepared for, and how this could be afforded
- the *traditional gateway to the academy*
 - Where “the wheat is separated from the chaff” – where the academy’s standards are kept
 - It is not only *who* gets in to the academy but also *what*: what paradigms, what research orientations etc
 - Not necessarily compatible with political ambitions to increase work force competence, or to increase the speed of through-put
- an important *contributor to research production*
 - and thus important for supervisors, groups, departments and institutions
 - risk for managerial approach to doctoral education at all levels - the supervisor as “boss” and the student as “labourer” is one possible example
- a *means for the qualification of the researcher/supervisor*
 - Supervision is often a necessary step to seniority. In many cases the supervisor-student pairing is a result of the supervisor’s needs, rather than *vice versa*
 - Many become supervisors before they have gathered enough of a scientific or economic platform
- often *important for funding*
 - Supervision will often be viewed as evidence for research skills, and having many PhD-students in your group looks good (and often is good too)
 - You can rarely receive funding for employing assistants and becoming a supervisor can be a way also to get the job done

Doctoral education thus is not a peripheral activity at the university, but a central one. It is easy to visualize how the context just described could affect the experience, learning and development of the individual doctoral student in negative ways. However, one could also visualize the opposite, where the legitimate peripheral participation in a community of research – i.e. as a junior colleague rather than as a student – could have a very positive and powerful impact on the doctoral student. To avoid the former and utilize the latter, supervisors, departments and the university at large need to face both pedagogical and ethical challenges. We believe our program is one way of doing this.

Some important tensions in the design of the study program

Prescriptive	——	Discursive
Private	——	Collegial
Know-How	——	Professional Competence
Verified by close peers	——	Verified by professional community
Personal transformation	——	Transformation of extended community



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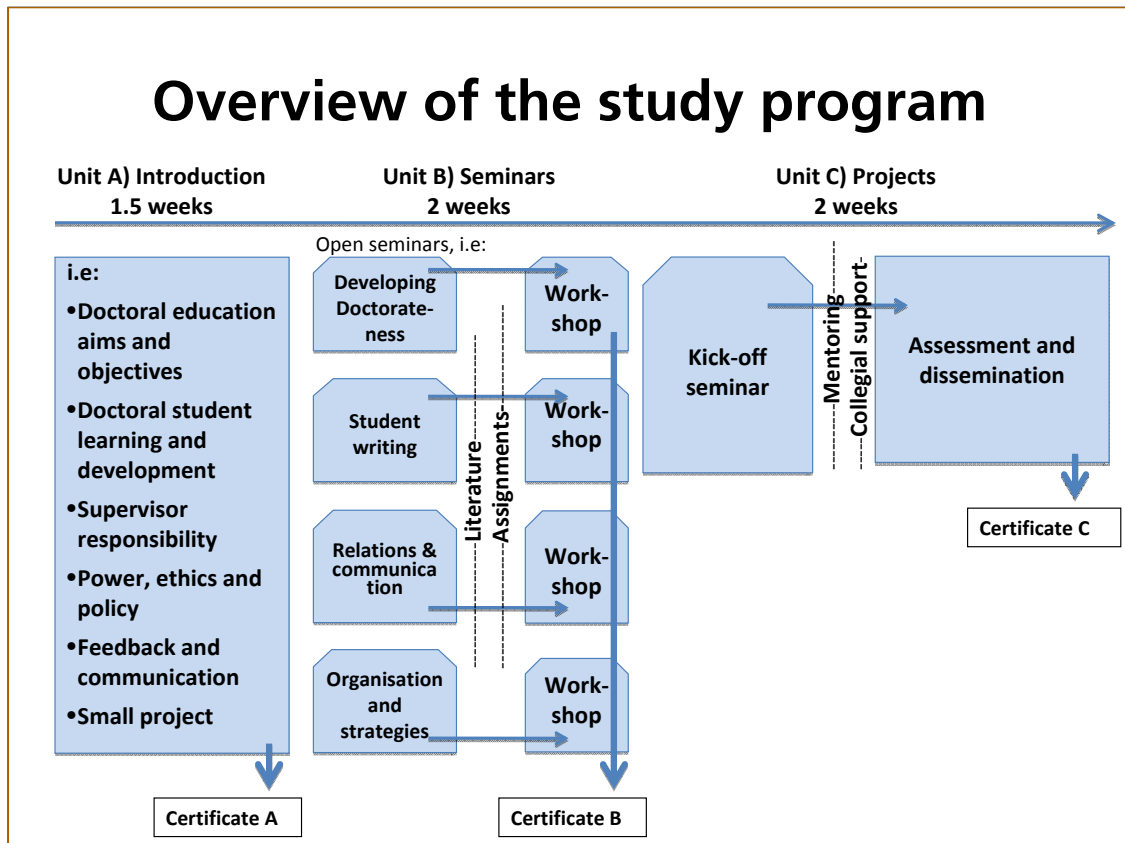


Some important tensions in the design of the study program

A study program with the overarching aim to develop doctoral education will have to face some important tensions. We have described five such tensions or dimensions (above), derived from the concept of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as described by Lindberg-Sand & Sonesson (2008). The items in the left and right columns should not be seen as dichotomies but more as fields of tensions, inside and between the supervisors, the facilitators, and the university administrators. When conceptualizing a study program it is all too easy to have the items in the left column in focus. But we are striving for a professional competence that is not just transformative on a personal level but also able to develop doctoral education on an organizational and cultural level. This calls for a program that is both discursive and collegial as well as scholarly. We see the right column as inclusive of the left and not in opposition. How we practically will handle these tensions can be seen in the later slides.

Lindberg-Sand, Å. and A. Sonesson (2008). **Compulsory Higher Education Teacher Training in Sweden: Development of a national standards framework based on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**. Tertiary Education and Management 14(2): 123-139.

Overview of the study program



Unit A:

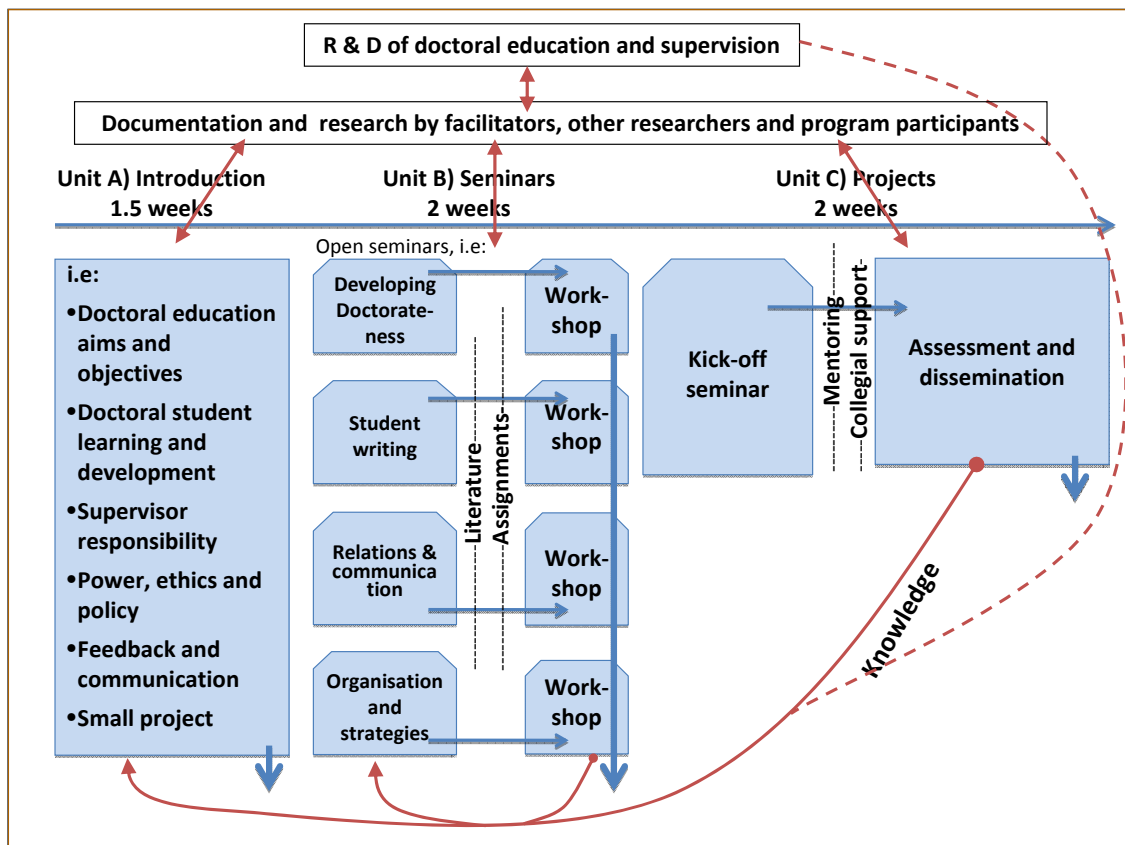
The first unit is an introduction for supervisors early on, or to be. It gives a broad overview of policies and procedures but also has a strong focus on what the doctoral student should learn and be able to do and the pedagogical challenges associated with this. Also, ethics and policies are discussed in connection with issues of power and the challenges we presented in slide 3. These challenges are not only pedagogical but ethical too. A number of assignments are done, the largest being a small project (2-3 days worth) of relevance to doctoral education or supervision in the participant's home-context.

Unit B:

The second unit is based upon a series of seminars that are open to anyone. In order to receive credits, one has to attend a follow-up workshop and do some reading and assignments. After four of these (in no particular order or speed) a reflective summary is handed in and a certificate is issued. The seminars will change over time.

Unit 3:

The third unit is a project. The project should be anchored in the department or research group of the supervisor and focus on doctoral student learning and development. Support and feedback will be received primarily from other participants in the unit but also from the facilitators. A critical colleague "at home" should be asked to assess and provide feedback on the final report and the project should also be presented at the home department or where it is most relevant. The projects are public and participants will be encouraged to present also for a wider community, at the university's conference on teaching and learning or at the national counterpart, or in a journal.



The study program as a vehicle for development – three strategies

Strategy 1

(See the red arrows in the bottom half of the model) The knowledge produced, mainly in unit three but also in unit two and to some extent in unit one too, will be used as content for the next cohorts of participants. Especially relevant and good projects could become material for the seminars in unit two. In this way, the knowledge will accumulate, be learnt and used by others, be built upon and critiqued. We already have examples of this functioning from other programs.

Strategy 2

(See the dotted red line) Enhancement projects and education development that has to be done anyway could be done in a context of unit C. In this way such projects will benefit from collegial support and views from other contexts, and the academic will receive credits and a merit.

Strategy 3

(See the red arrows in the upper half of the model) Finally, the program facilitators and other researchers and, potentially, program participants will document and research doctoral education and supervision during the program. We see four major purposes for this:

1. The resulting knowledge will be fed back in the program. It will also be presented to committees or such were important decisions are made on doctoral education and supervision
2. We will also learn about the program as such and be able to develop it and to assert the quality of the program – i.e. quality assurance in a scholarly way.
3. We will be able to evaluate the model as such – will it work? is it transformative?
4. The idea with national and international collaboration and dissemination is a way for us as developers to develop our own competence, to get verification by a professional community and perhaps also to transform this community and its practices.

The red arrows denote research, knowledge, sharing, and critique and it is primarily here we seek your collaboration.

A call for collaboration

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