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### **Boosting an f2f peer group with chat meetings**

A model for multidisciplinary peer support group for enhancing students' master's thesis process has been developed at University of Oulu (Karhu & Kultalahti). The groups have been offered since 2004, and they have been very popular and successful. The basic model is 1) group is multidisciplinary, 2) concentrates on master's thesis process not on the subject matter, and 3) meetings are f2f.

I organised one group at the term 2009-10 that was otherwise according to the model, but I combined f2f meetings with a social media tool (Ning) and especially used its chat option. Scheduled chat meetings were considered to be a good addition both by students attending the group and by tutor (me). Especially the freedom from place was appreciated. From the tutor a chat meeting demands different kinds of attitude and presence in a meeting compared to an f2f meeting. For example, accepting silence is much easier f2f than in front of a computer. On the other hand, as chatting is more informal than f2f meeting is, no matter how task oriented we tried to be, it helped us to know each other better, thus enhancing group cohesion in f2f meetings.