

Student teachers doing action research

by Marit Ulvik

Facing a complex profession in a changing society it is impossible to fully prepare student teachers for all challenges they might encounter throughout their careers. Teacher education should therefore enable future teachers to develop their own work and build a basis for further professional development. This paper explores how student teachers document action research (AR) as a means to promote professional development, aiming to get a deeper understanding of the AR approach in teacher education. The study was conducted within an integrated teacher education program for teachers in secondary school at a university in Norway. The questions asked were: What themes do they address and why? How do they understand AR? What are the challenges and possibilities they face? What do they state to have learned? How can their views be interpreted in light of professional development?

The concept AR is here understood as interplay between research on own practice and the actual practice, a process that both impacts the practice and its theoretical understanding. AR is a systematic investigation into own behavior (McNiff, 2002; Hopkins, 2008). Through AR the student teacher purposely searches for new answers and develops knowledge, which can be characterized as an advanced stage in professional development (Eraut, 1994). The aim of the approach is to improve teaching and learning.

Literature describes AR as a complex, challenging and time consuming process that needs guidance (Ponte et al., 2004). Consequently it could be difficult to complete AR during initial teacher education with limited a practicum experience. However, when introduced to AR during teacher education, teachers are more likely to utilize the tool later in their careers (Ponte et al., 2004). Furthermore, once implemented, AR has the potential to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to nurture professional development (Clarke, P.A.J. & Fournillier, J.B., 2012; Smith & Sela, 2005).

The paper is based on analysis of 38 student teachers AR-reports (their exams). The analysis revealed that student teachers find AR both frustrating and exiting. What they find exiting is to generate new knowledge and to be able to influence teaching and learning. The frustrations are connected to simultaneously dealing with multiple roles, like being a student, a teacher and a researcher.

References

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