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Learning activities of student-teachers during action-research

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EAPRIL conference 2011, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Goal(s)/question(s)/problem(s)

Action research is an important tool in upgrading the level of theoretical knowledge and improving the quality of education by reflection (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). Implementing action research in the curricula of pre-service teacher training is an effective way to implement action research at the secondary schools. But how do people learn to carry out action research? In order to get a better understanding of this learning process, 14 student teachers who have been working in a Professional Development School (PDS) were followed in a course on action research. The research question was: Which Personal Learning and Action Theory (PLAT) (van der Sanden, 2004) do student teachers have, what learning activities do they perform during the process of action research and what learning outcomes do students describe in a learning environment designed to support action research.

Procedure and/or instruments

Student-teachers were asked to write digital logs three-weekly. In these logs three questions were answered?□.

- 1) Which learning activities did you undertake last three weeks?
- 2) Which benefits did you obtain from action research during the last three weeks?
- 3) To what learning objectives do these activities belong ? To answer this question student teachers choose from the list —objectives for action research□ which was described in the reader.

To identify the PLAT the logs were analysed with a classification into 6 goals as described by Van de Sande (2004). The answers of the students were scored using this classification. For the identification of the learning activities the statements were scored using the classification of Vermunt (1992). He distinguishes cognitive, meta cognitive and affective learning activities. The learning results were analysed and an inventory of the objectives that were mentioned was made.

Findings and interpretations

At the first research-question student-teachers described without prompting, subject related instructional strategies. At the third research-question concerning the learning results student-teachers described how to organise instructional strategies in the subject area. These two findings suggest that as a result of carrying out action-research the perception of the subject changes. It seems obvious to modify the objective list and add subject related teaching methods. Perhaps this is a way to make the connection between carrying out action-research and —becoming a better subject-teacher□. In the PLAT student teachers make many statements about how they perceive their own competence while there are few remarks about this in the learning actions. In the first logs student teachers already described learning results (research question 3). This is remarkable because normally people presume that learning results arise after some time. The use of the logs is a manner to make student-teachers aware.

Relevance for practice and/or policy

Policy-makers expect a lot of benefits from the teacher—as-researcher. In the Netherlands the government allocated extra money and manpower for the implementation and the development of action research in education. It is important to follow the implementation of this action research at the PDS so that we can gain insight in the effectiveness and the learning results of this implementation. This research focused on one jigsaw part and tried to find an answer to the question which learning process has been developed in the seven months the research took place in the surroundings of the PDS. The

research focussed on the Personal Learning and Action Theory, the learning activities and the learning results.

Interactivity of the session

In our paper session we will briefly give some background information about our theoretical framework (5 minutes). After that we will present the context and the results (15 minutes). We end our presentation with some questions and input for discussion. The audience is not only invited to join the discussion about our analytical framework but also will also be stimulated to react towards a central dilemma connected to our work and experience while analysing cases. We would also like to invite the audience to share their ideas about the practical implications of our study for schools. We would appreciate the participants' input as sparring partners.

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