Students and parents benefit from knowing their teachers are working with the latest teaching methods and tailoring them specifically to the needs of their classrooms. At a broader level, society benefits by having teachers take an active role in addressing local problems and making improvements.

How can you get involved?

The English Subject in Teacher Education at Örebro University invites local teachers to get involved. We would like to work with teachers in the Örebro area to learn what issues are relevant to you and your classroom and to develop local projects to address those issues.

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www.oru.se/ruc

ACTION RESEARCH

A Model for Collaborative Research between the English Subject at Örebro University and Teachers in the Örebro Region
TEACHING AND RESEARCH CAN (AND SHOULD) MIX!

“That doesn’t apply to me and my students.”
“That might work somewhere else, but not at my school.”
Those researchers don’t really understand my context.”

When some teachers hear the word research mentioned, their first thoughts might be similar. However, there is a research model that targets the local and contextualized needs of specific teachers and classrooms: Action Research (AR). This model allows stakeholders to identify, investigate, and find solutions for elements of teaching and learning that may be in need of change. And since good teachers are constantly searching for what works best for their current group of learners, AR can be a powerful tool for localized solutions.

What is Action Research?
AR in teaching is a process of inquiry meant to identify and improve local teaching and learning situations through systematic evaluation of pedagogic change or intervention. Examples include minor modifications to classroom practice—such as student groupings, activities, order of instruction, or materials—as well as larger changes such as adopting a new pedagogic approach or adjusting course content. AR typically consists of four core stages: plan, act, observe, and reflect. At the planning stage, practitioners identify an area in need of attention or change and plan an intervention, which is put into practice during the action stage. During the observation phase, data are systematically collected from participants. These data are crucial to the reflection phase, when practitioners evaluate the extent to which the pedagogic intervention was successful. Findings then feed into a subsequent planning phase, and the cycle repeats itself until the intervention has reached a satisfactory level.

An illustration
Imagine, for example, that you a teacher of English and your students are having trouble improving their listening skills. As a teacher, you evaluate your current materials and how you use them. By problematizing or focusing on a specific area that you feel is in need of improvement, you consider what is happening now and whether and how it might be changed for the better. You consider your options: keeping with the status quo or trying something new. You decide to begin incorporating authentic listening materials from YouTube and podcasts into your listening lessons. This seems to be an improvement. But just making changes to your classroom practice is not enough: you want measurable data to determine
how effective the change was or whether it was even effective at all. So you also conduct a survey to measure student interest in and motivation for listening to authentic materials, and you interview some of your students to find out how they feel about listening to authentic materials and whether they think that their listening has improved. You might even include listening pre- and post-tests. You then reflect on what you can learn from that data collection and make adjustments to the authentic listening materials for the next semester. Perhaps students said they want to listen to a slower rate of speech or that they want to read a transcript after listening. These are adjustments you can make. Then the cycle of planning, observation, and reflection continues. You’ve just done your first AR project!

**Opportunities for cooperation and collaboration**

When teachers and researchers collaborate in AR projects, they work together to identify and improve local teaching and learning situations. Cooperation and collaboration can come at each of the four main AR stages. In the planning phase, researchers can elicit teacher perspectives on specific areas in need of improvement. These might stem from areas of frustration for the teacher or areas in which learners seem to underperform. Researchers can work with teachers to plan the action phase, where the pedagogic change or innovation is implemented. Researchers can also collaborate with teachers in the creation of data collection tools such as questionnaires, interview prompts, and proficiency tests used during the observation phase when the effects of the intervention are documented. Teachers and researchers can also collaborate at the reflection stage by bringing their multiple perspectives to bear on the data collected in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and decide whether and how it should be adapted in future iterations.

**Benefits for teachers, schools, and the broader teaching community**

Once a series of AR cycles (at least two; more if desired) has been completed, findings from the local level can begin to be disseminated further afield through presentations and publications. This means that findings from individual classrooms can benefit teachers working at different educational levels as well as in other schools and school districts. As findings spread throughout the community, so do benefits. The teaching and learning lives of students and teachers in their everyday classrooms improve as they develop more flexible practices. School administrators benefit from having active faculty who are determined to find better ways of doing things.
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