

Rethinking roles and relationships in conducting, organising and funding research and development in education

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Objective

This paper explores the organisation of research and development programs conducted by the research institute Ifous and answers in which ways Ifous' model challenges the roles and relationships between research, practice and policy, and what the effects are.

The R&D-programs runs for three years and are funded by 5-10 educational providers with a common need to improve student's learning. All organisational levels of the educational providers are involved and collaborate with a group of researchers. Ifous leads the process and edit final reports. Ownership rests with a steering group consisting of leaders from the educational providers.

Ifous is a non-profit company and has since 2012 finished five R&D-programs and is currently running 7 programs involving 1000 teachers, principals, leaders and researchers (Ifous, 2018).

Theoretical framework, data and methods

To analyse Ifous' model, three themes that conceptualise existing problems faced by schools are used (Dimmock, 2016): 1) mobilising knowledge more effectively through knowledge producers and consumers working collaboratively; 2) integrating both tacit and academic knowledge; 3) raising the professionalism of teachers and leaders. To analyse effects four levels of effects have been used (Kock & Ellström, 2011): Satisfaction; New knowledge; Change in practice; Improvement of the quality.

A hermeneutic approach has been utilized to analyse published reports from the five finished programs. Based on this a comparison is made between Ifous's model and four traditional ways to improve quality of schools.

Results and educational importance

Ifous' model addresses all three themes by Dimmock (2016). Especially the mobilising role seems important and unique.

There is evidence of the three first levels of effects. For example, the programs have resulted in 4 doctoral thesis, 5 licentiate thesis and 30 published research articles. In order to analyse the fourth level further analysis is needed.

Comparing Ifous' model to other initiatives points to important aspects. In comparison to

- a course at the university, Ifous' program does not focus on learning, but on changing practice and building new scientific knowledge.
- a PD-programs run by the National Agency, the ownership of the organisation of the work in Ifous rests with the practitioners and increase the possibility to gain sustainable effects.
- participating in regular research projects, the ownership of the research question in Ifous' program rests with the practitioners
- development work, Ifous' program gets documented making it possible to share

I will finally raise three concerns:

- For policy: That Ifous is a company challenges Swedish tradition and raises questions of independence, even if Ifous is non-profit.

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- For theory: The program mainly involves qualitative research. The large number of practitioners in the program could enhance the development of new methods.
- For practice: To which extent educational providers have the resources to finance R&D is unclear. Sharing costs might not be enough to guarantee equity.

Question to discuss: In what way can we improve the quality and effectiveness of research-and development in education?

Connection to the conference strand 1: Rethinking roles and relationships

References

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- Dimmock, C. (2016). Conceptualising the research–practice–professional development nexus: mobilising schools as ‘research-engaged’ professional learning communities, *Professional Development in Education*, 42(1), 36-53.