

## English summary

**Magnus Levinsson: Developmental leaders on scientific basis: tensions between evidence-based practice and action research/ Utvecklingsledare på vetenskaplig grund: spänningsfälten mellan evidensbaserad praktik och aktionsforskning/. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 241–262. Stockholm: ISSN 1401-6788**

In Sweden and elsewhere there has been a clear government focus on making teaching a research-based profession. Following on from this, many studies have been concerned with examining the ways teachers engage with research, and not least with the barriers which prevent them from doing so. One suggested alternative to support teachers in this endeavor is to involve mediators in between the worlds of research and practice. The mediating role of developmental leaders is put forward as important.

However, the different approaches to educational research in this particular matter appear to make different demands on developmental leaders: should developmental leaders help teachers to practice evidence-based teaching strategies or should developmental leaders facilitate action research that teachers carry out themselves? What comes out of the debates about these matters is the issue of the skills necessary for and knowledge required of developmental leaders.

Regardless of the differences in approach, action research has been put forward in Sweden and elsewhere as a ›stepping stone‹ to evidence-based practice in education. Policymakers seem to assume that providing teachers with opportunities to engage in action research will extend their capacity to apply research findings and contribute to the development of a culture of evidence-based practice.

The aim of this article is to explore possibilities and constraints associated with this assumption. Focus is upon the demands that the idea of evidence-based practice respectively the critical action research tradition make on developmental leaders, particularly as regards to the skills necessary and knowledge required in relation to the professional development of teachers within the educational landscape of Sweden.

### *Evidence-based practice and its requirements on developmental leaders*

Since the 90s, the evidence-based practice movement in education has increased its importance around the world. In the ›classical model‹ of evidence-

based practice, research is regarded to have a rather direct influence on practice by providing evaluations of the effectiveness of various teaching and learning activities. In this approach, teachers are expected to apply to their classroom practice research evidence for ›what works‹. However, a number of advocates acknowledge the difficulties in this endeavor, and argue that the translation of research into classroom practice involves complex processes, some of which need the mediation of developmental leaders.

Results from systematic reviews of continuing professional development emphasize the importance of developmental leaders in the progress of evidence-based practice, and show that mediation is accomplished through an array of skills, ranging from specialist content knowledge to in-depth knowledge of effective professional development in school settings. Successful developmental leaders undertake mediating activities such as identifying teachers' needs, presentation of research-based teaching strategies, implementation of these strategies in teachers' classrooms, and discussion about their efficiency based on evidence from pupils' learning. They also encourage teachers to support each other.

To sum up, what is required of developmental leaders within the evidence-based practice movement is to effectively connect the teachers' present concerns in educational settings to research outcomes.

#### *Action research and its requirements on developmental leaders*

Action research has been suggested as more ›educational‹ in relation to the evidence-based approach to professional development, here often seen as governed by technical rationality. In action research, the idea is that research should be carried out by teachers themselves in order to improve practice and to deepen their understanding of the situations in which they work. In Sweden, the critical action research tradition aims at emancipation and teachers' self-governed liberation from powers associated with experiences of ignorance and irrationality.

However, a number of action research projects prove the value of developmental leaders as facilitators, in particular to strengthen teachers' ability to take responsibility for their own professional development. It requires developmental leaders to be responsive to the characteristics of action research, to the degree to which it is practical, collaborative and self-reflective. A successful developmental leader facilitates action research by making teachers familiar with the different tools needed, and by helping them to organize cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection. They also deal with developmental dilemmas related to processes of teacher change. Some advocates argue that this task call for experiences of first-person action research in educational settings.

To sum up, what is required of developmental leaders within the critical action research tradition is to give the ownership of action research to teachers by providing them with opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills necessary.

*Tensions between evidence-based practice and action research*

The analyses in this article show that evidence-based practice and critical action research make significantly different demands on developmental leaders. These differences generate opposing conditions for professional development, whose relation to each other is here described in terms of tensions; tensions between technical and critical rationality, centralized and decentralized responsibility, mediating and facilitating roles, dependent and independent relations, ›traditional‹ academic and practical validation, product and process orientation, as well as tensions between predetermined and undetermined ends for teacher's professional development. Consequently, it seems unreasonable for policymakers and others to assume that critical action research is able to contribute to the development of a culture of evidence-based practice in the educational landscape of Sweden.

Finally, this article discusses the potential for evidence-based practice and critical action research as independent approaches in the contemporary effort to make teaching a research-based profession. However, this discussion takes the established criticism of these two approaches into account, and question whether each of them are realistic from the perspective of developmental leaders. In this respect, the need of other alternatives that allow educational research to play a variety of roles in the professional development of teachers is discussed.

In conclusion, developmental leaders with insights into the tensions between and within evidence-based practice and critical action research seem to be far more capable than policymakers to judge how educational research and practice should be related to each other in their daily work.