Facilitating school improvement: the problematic relationship between researchers and practitioners

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Promoting local development in order to support school improvement is an important aspect of contemporary educational policy in Sweden. Recent state initiatives have sought to combine curriculum and teacher development. A common form of cooperation is facilitation, where academics support groups of teachers in their school projects. This article is based on an interview study on facilitation in the form of meetings between teachers, school managers and university researchers. The results show that several tensions concerning expectations and assumptions about facilitation are present in such meetings. Sometimes the parties’ expectations and conceptions are entirely contradictory. The study reveals that inadequate attention is paid to the need for dialogue and about the purpose and process of the cooperation at the outset of facilitation. Both dialogue and discourse are aspects of the meeting that require further development if this kind of cooperation is to succeed.

Introduction

Our aim, in this article, is to focus on encounters between the fields of educational research and teaching practice in which academics, teachers and head teachers work collaboratively to facilitate educational progress. The article is based on data from a special four-year in-service education programme, funded by the Swedish National Agency for Education, in which academics and groups of teachers worked with facilitation. Facilitation can here be seen as the constitution of a meeting between different parties in which differing expectations are held with regard to the nature of the facilitation process and how it should be carried out. Since facilitation is used in school development with increasing frequency, we believe that it is important to explore the characteristics of such meetings. The article is divided into three parts. In

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the first part, we provide a contextual description of the Swedish education system. This is followed by the presentation of an empirical study based on interviews with academics, teachers and head teachers.1 In the final section we discuss what facilitation means in relation to similar studies where encounters between the academy and schools have been investigated.

Towards a changing practice of in-service training

In Sweden, local development work has a strong tradition and has been part of the body of reforms in recent decades in which the provision of education has been decentralised. Although there were groups of teachers at the beginning of the twentieth century who actively supported the progressive reform movement, and documented it in their own publication *The Teachers Journal* (*Lärarnas tidsskrift*), supporting teachers via facilitation, and thereby improving schools, while still a comparatively new phenomena in Sweden, is being used with increasing frequency in the in-service training relating to local development work. This can be understood in the light of the ways that the advisory system has changed during recent decades, in which development work, since the beginning of the 1980s, has become an indirect method of directing the focus of teachers’ work in the newly decentralised system. The gradual shift from a centralised to a decentralised system will, in the paragraphs that follow, be presented in the light of in-service training as a series of changes in different stages that can be seen as a way of transforming the relationship between educational research and school practice. The connection between these two fields had, previously, been based on a view that had adopted a top-down perspective, where research was transformed into models of teaching. These models were subsequently conveyed to teachers via a centralised in-service training programme with the aim of achieving equal standards of education throughout the country.

The first stage was established in 1982 when a new system of in-service training for teachers, as a consequence of attempts to decentralise the Swedish school system, was introduced. New ways of promoting change within schools were introduced by means of special funding. The monetary resources set aside for local development were allocated by the State to municipalities where the politically elected school boards used the funds for both their teacher’s own development work, as well as for specific courses provided by the universities. Local development was seen as a strategy for in-service training (Ahlström & Kallós, 1995). From the teachers’ perspective, the direction of teachers’ work by means of funding required them to take an active role in applying for such funds. In order to access funding, teachers had to write a project plan and compete with colleagues within the municipality. In a study conducted by Carlgren (1987) teacher’s funding applications were examined and teachers were interviewed about the purpose of the development work and how they characterised it. Two main purposes emerged; the desire to establish a practice in accordance with the curriculum guidelines, and the need to improve existing practice. Four different kinds of development were identified: development of new practice as content, testing of new practice as content, the adoption of new practice as content, and establishing
new practice as form. The fourth type, establishing a new practice as form, may constitute a solution. While it may not be rational from an individual perspective, it is from a reform perspective. Carlgren was able to conclude that ‘When the new form is established the individual will after some time getting used to it, conceive of the form as natural and start developing rational projects within the new frames’ (1987, p. 101). Lindblad (1994) evaluated the new strategy of in-service training and noted that teachers used their own experiences, rather than either literature or research, in their work. Cooperation between teachers was rare and the dissemination of ideas and results meagre (Ahlström & Kallös, 1995).

The strategy for local development was extended in a second stage in the 1980s. Special funding, which was available for a period of eight years and which was targeted at different levels of the compulsory school (four years of primary school and four years of secondary school), was made available and functioned as a supplement to the general development strategy. The strategy can be seen as a means for the government to implement specific policies (such as the integration of age groups in the classroom; collaboration between pre-primary and primary school) as part of the reforms brought about by the new curriculum (Lgr80). Resources were awarded nationally to local teacher-initiated projects, and applications for funding were competitive. In each regional education authority, one person was responsible for maintaining contact with and visiting the teachers whose project had received funding, something that, in the subsequent evaluation, was regarded by teachers as evidence of the importance that was attached to their project (Rönnerman, 1993). After the first four years of the project (primary school) the evaluation revealed that teachers from all municipalities in Sweden had applied for this special funding. Eight different development projects were selected for assessment and were studied by Rönnerman (1993) over the duration of a year. Each project was visited on three occasions during these 12 months and a final follow-up visit was made three years later. At the time of the final follow-up visit, the practice innovations were still taking place, although on a smaller scale and only in those cases where the teachers had themselves initiated the project. Rönnerman’s field-studies had their focus on everyday classroom work. The purpose of the development work was, in most cases, either to find new ways to deal with children who had difficulty concentrating in the classroom, or ways of broadening the knowledge of the group of children in the class. Cooperation among teachers increased in various ways, and the teachers involved emphasised that they felt a greater sense of security with one another and that activities tended to tie the teachers’ personality and career more firmly together. Patterns in which teachers drew on their own experiences in the ongoing development work emerged, as indeed Lindblad has found in similar studies (Lindblad, 1994). In addition to their own personal development, the teachers felt that the projects led to closer and more enhanced cooperation in schools. Furthermore, teachers also noted that staff-room pedagogical discussions were intensified, which, in turn, led to a desire to obtain further knowledge. It also became clear that the teachers regarded this knowledge as an important means of improving their professional competency. Rönnerman (1993) discusses this in relation to career paths, in terms of providing
opportunities for a vertical, as opposed to a horizontal career, which involves changing positions from teaching to management.

The furthest step, so far, in the process of decentralisation came with the new National Curriculum in 1995—the Lpo-94, to give it its Swedish acronym. The curriculum was the final outcome of an ongoing process of change regarding the regulation of teachers and their work in schools. With the new curriculum, school education is provided in accordance with a goal-related and achievement-related system. In the process of developing the new curriculum, much energy has been devoted to the question of how to transfer more power and responsibility to classroom teachers, thus promoting the development of a pedagogy relevant to the goals of the curriculum. The National Curriculum (Lpo-94) does not include any centralised models for teaching. Instead, teachers have the freedom to choose both the subject content and their own teaching methods in order to achieve nationally prescribed goals. To ensure that all schools fulfil the aims of the curriculum, national evaluations and tests are used. With the responsibility for school development placed at a local level, there is no longer any centralised in-service training for teachers. The policy is that each school should seek the in-service training that is most appropriate for their needs in order to improve their own school. Furthermore, the policy provides that in-service training for teachers should be commensurate with the school’s own strategies for improvement. The Ministry of Education, however, emphasises aspects such as encouraging teachers to work in teams, and the importance of student influence in the life of their school.

As a means of implementing the changes in focus envisaged by this new system of educational provision, a third funding strategy was initiated in the late 1990s when the National Agency for Education (Skolverket) and the Ministry of Education announced funding for local school development. This approach to funding teachers’ development work differs from the two previous approaches in several ways. In the first place, applications for funding are sent directly to the National Agency for Education, which means that funds are no longer allocated to local authorities for school development. Secondly, teachers compete for funding on a national basis, and not just at the local level. Finally, it is clearly stipulated that the money should be used in cooperation with an institute of higher education. This requirement for cooperation provides the basic rationale for facilitation. Facilitation has been presented as the ‘answer’ for in-service training and replaced the models based on lecturing or teaching that had been used in previous decades. Swedish studies indicate that, through projects involving facilitation, teachers acquire increased awareness and self-confidence, they learn more about their work and they change their activities in conscious directions (Frykhammar, 2000; Molander, 2003; Runesson, 2000; Rönnerman, 2000). Some of the aforementioned studies (Frykhammar, 2000; Rönnerman, 2000) are related to action research, which is sometimes identified as a means of stimulating teachers’ professional development. Action research can be linked to personal development, professional development and a means of increasing the social status of teachers’ activities (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). A critical aspect in many of the projects developed in Sweden is facilitation,
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which is here defined as the way that academics regularly meet teachers in groups to support, but also to challenge, their learning (Groundwater-Smith & Kemmis, 2005). Although many studies highlight the success that can be achieved through this way of conducting in-service training, it is open to question whether such an approach really is successful, since this aspect of the inter-professional encounters between researchers and teachers is seldom problematised in the literature. Indeed, it would appear that success is very often an assumption that is, from the outset, taken for granted. The meetings that take place during the process of facilitation are invariably preceded by expectations concerning the appropriate nature of the other party’s contribution to the enrichment of learning. It emerges sometimes in the literature that these expectations are uncomplicated and exclusively positive. Since this approach to in-service training is still in its infancy, it is important that it is examined from different perspectives. When this is done, as will be shown later in this article, unanticipated tensions arise.

To summarise, local development work has not only been a strategy for in-service training, but also a strategy for implementing new reforms and curricula. Funding in all three stages has been linked to certain specific criteria. These were all in line with certain ideas in the curriculum. By means of strategies of in-service training, the state, despite the recent extensive programme of decentralising legislation, is still able to maintain its control of school development.

A study of facilitation as a complex meeting

An ongoing issue in the field of education is the relationship between the domains of educational research and teaching practice. It is often stated that these two domains should have closer proximity. The question commonly discussed, however, is ‘how to bridge the gap’ (Holmstrand & Härnsten, 1995). That the gap between these two worlds requires bridging has been emphasised in different ways and attention has been focused on different enablement strategies. However, it would appear that, so far, little progress seems to have been made.

In accordance with the recent reforms, schools are supposed to apply for in-service training, particularly that which is related to team and classroom development. In order to encourage collaboration between universities and schools, the National Agency for Education provides funding for such projects. At Göteborg University, for example, collaborative projects with schools and participation in local facilitation projects were commonplace during the end of the 1990s. Both university academics and teachers from local schools were involved in different projects funded by the National Agency for Education. Facilitation can thus be regarded as constituting the meeting of different parties who have differing expectations about the nature of facilitation, what it involves and how it should be carried out. Since facilitation is now central to competence and school development, it is, in our opinion, of crucial importance that the characteristics of these encounters are identified. Thus, in this article, rather than focusing on the content or processes of different specific projects, we have chosen to focus on the concept of facilitation,
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our aim being to discuss the nature of facilitation in the context of the interaction of two different domains.

The aim of the study, which drew on the perspectives of teachers, school managers and academics, was to develop knowledge about facilitation, both conceptually and how it is shaped in practice in schools, as well as in institutions of higher education. The study was carried out by means of a series of interviews conducted during February and March 2000. Teachers, school managers and academics responded to questions concerning facilitation in relation to competence and school development. In total, four projects were chosen for inclusion in the study. A total of 19 individuals were interviewed (four school managers, nine teachers and six academics). A good cross-section of school staff was interviewed in the study. Teachers working with lower ages, as well as those working with higher age groups, are both represented among the interviewees. Furthermore, teachers who teach theoretical subjects as well as practical/artistic subjects are also well represented. The group of interviewees also comprises staff of different sexes and ages. The facilitators were all academics, one man and five women, from the same department at the university. The school managers came from large as well as small schools in both urban and rural locations. All of them were women. The interviews were conducted in accordance with a guide that contained four main question areas: expectations, experiences of the meeting, conceptions about the different parties and conceptions about school development. The interviews were carried out by three researchers, all of whom were from Göteborg University. One person interviewed all the academics, while the other two interviewed the teachers and school managers at the four different schools. The interviews were taped, transcribed and subsequently analysed. Some of the most important findings can be described as tensions between the three parties, and are presented in the next section of the article.

Tensions between different parties in facilitation

In the interview material, we have identified a number of areas that we consider essential to facilitation and where the parties have widely diverging opinions, and, furthermore, where they are unaware of each other's opinions. These areas can be categorised as follows: expectations about the facilitation, opinions about the legitimacy of the facilitators, and opinions about the process of establishing mutual understanding. Because of the apparent mutual unawareness of the existence of these areas, they are not ventilated in the facilitation process and, as a consequence, appear to contribute to the creation of tensions during facilitation.

Different expectations of facilitation

The collision of divergent expectations prior to the commencement of facilitation is likely to be a contributory factor to failures in facilitation. Our study revealed that there were wide-ranging possibilities for such collisions. Here are some voices from the study:
The aim of the facilitation is that the teachers should change and that schoolwork will be more successful. I have very great expectations of the facilitators from university. (School manager)

I have no idea of what will happen. I am afraid about getting further work, but it would be great if we got some realistic ideas for teaching—something useful. (Teacher)

I hope the teachers will discover their own capabilities and to reflect over their teaching through the facilitation. Perhaps some changes in the classroom will emerge, but I have rather low expectations. Development takes time. (Academic)

The teachers expected to be provided with the outlines of specific tasks, while the facilitators assumed a certain degree of dynamics, since the expectation is that each working team develops their own questions accordingly. Teachers want new knowledge, whereas the aim of the facilitators is to help teachers to identify and reflect on the knowledge they already possessed. Teachers indicated that, above all, they needed something new in order to be able to change their working practice, such as, for example, good lectures, ideas about books, study visits to other schools and recent research findings. The facilitators, however, assumed that teachers needed to discover their own capabilities and what they have done by means of describing their activities and, from these departure points, to be able to analyse, interpret and draw general conclusions. Both teachers and school managers were anxious to be informed about current research. Research, in this sense, is viewed as an additional aspect of knowledge and as a means of support and information for the practitioners. The academics, however, viewed research as a means of reciprocal questioning and investigation.

Our study clearly reveals the divergent expectations of school managers, teachers and academics. On occasion these expectations are entirely contradictory. Thus, if these expectations are not consciously articulated, the risk is that none will be realised. The inevitable consequence is thus that the project cannot succeed, which in turn can lead to doubts about the efficacy of facilitation as a means of developing school competence. If, however, time is afforded to identifying and discussing the various expectations of the parties involved, then this can provide a foundation upon which development work can be based.

The questioned legitimacy of the academics

Facilitation as described in this article involves cooperation between people who represent two distinct fields of knowledge. The knowledge and experience of teaching and everyday life at school is allowed to encounter the theoretical knowledge and analytical skills that characterise learning in higher education. If a fruitful exchange of knowledge is to take place, confidence in each other’s competence is crucial. However, this study revealed quite a different picture.

The notion of ‘legitimacy’, as we perceive it, can have various meanings in the supervisory context. Primarily, the issue of legitimacy affects the facilitators. In the process of facilitation, the facilitator is regarded as a representative for university
education and all that academic education stands for. Furthermore, legitimacy concerns the facilitators’ personal and professional competence while additionally positioning the facilitator as a representative for the school managers and the ideas that underpin the project. Or as some of the teachers expressed it, the supervisor becomes the ‘school leader’s extended arm’.

School managers and practitioners have different expectations about legitimacy. School managers appreciate the fact that facilitators are academics with knowledge of theories of learning and experience from research. The university provides the facilitator with a formal legitimacy and a stamp of quality. Practitioners, however, are sceptical of academics who have no experience of teaching in schools and they are not especially impressed by the facilitators’ university status.

Researchers from university can help teachers with theoretical thinking. It’s their job. And that is what we need. (School manager)

Academics have a certain competence, yes, a very high competence. But what do they know about school? Have they any experience at all? Have they ever been in a classroom? If not, we don’t need them here. (Teacher)

But the problem of legitimacy is even more complex. Most academics working with facilitation in school development have their own experience from the same profession as the practitioners in the projects. As university lecturers they are often engaged in teacher education. However, this still does not seem to provide them with any greater legitimacy. The relevance of their experience is questioned. Experiences from the practitioner’s own teacher education may well create an obstacle to an unprejudiced meeting.

We don’t want teacher educators; they have been schoolteachers but don’t have any relevant experience. We know more about teaching than they do. We don’t like teacher educators who want to teach us. (Teacher)

Views on the subject of legitimacy that are held by the facilitators appear confusing. It goes without saying that opinions about the aim of facilitation have a substantial impact on the facilitator’s contribution. Should the facilitator teach the practitioners how to teach, or should he or she offer them theoretical tools that enable the teachers to improve their classroom practice themselves? This is an important question that needs to be addressed by the three parties before starting any new project.

Weaknesses in establishing mutual understanding in the project process

The notion of a ‘lack of communication’ has different meanings for different parties involved in the school development projects. Everyone in the interviews mentioned the importance of clarification. The importance of this process of legitimising the facilitation is something that is often pointed out, but, despite this broad awareness, it seems that it is rarely regarded as being successfully accomplished. When the project does not proceed in accordance with expectations, both school managers and teachers refer to all those involved as being not sufficiently familiar with the content.
of the project or, alternatively, as lacking sufficient drive to carry it through. In our empirical data, we have identified a number of areas that have substantial significance for the process of establishing the type of mutually constitutive dialogue that is a vital perquisite for a successful project.

One frequent statement from the teachers in the study was that ‘someone else’ had decided the content, as well as design of the project. The teachers had more or less been ordered to cooperate. Furthermore, little communication took place between the school managers and the academics. Both teachers and facilitators assume that the other party knows about the content and scope of the project and has committed themselves to the idea.

The facilitation was the school manager’s idea and some teachers had accepted the idea, although its legitimacy had not been particularly well established in the teachers’ group. The facilitator was supposed to do that, I think. What was the aim and what was our need? We didn’t know. (Teacher)

The teachers had no idea about the purpose of the project and no expectations about what it might yield. Perhaps the school manager wanted me to legitimise the ideas with the facilitation? I don’t know. (Academic)

One question that needs to be addressed is who is supposed to direct the process of school development? The teachers want to formulate the questions and feel that the project must be useful and important to them. If, however, the school managers themselves are responsible for formulating the purpose of the project, problems for the facilitator have the potential to arise in her meeting with the teachers. This presents a dilemma for the facilitator. She has to choose between competing top-down and bottom-up demands.

The study also revealed a lack of quality in consumer competence. The schools did not make explicit the type of competence they needed from the academics. Nor did the university make sufficient enquiries about what the school needed. Both schools and universities have to specifically address such issues in their initial negotiations if the outcomes of the final collaboration are to be successful. The following statements reveal that too much respect and too little reflected demands can create obstacles for effective dialogue between school and university.

I have taken for granted that the facilitator knew how to implement the purpose of the project. You do not prescribe what to do for people from the university, you know. (School manager)

I didn’t know what facilitation could be before the start of this cooperation. We have to discuss what kind of facilitation we need and why we need it. (School manager)

Discussion

This study has revealed unexpressed assumptions and expectations, and divergent preconceptions, all of which constitute obstacles to competence development and the improvement of classroom practice, which are the intended results of facilitation. But the study also revealed that, when concepts and expectations were identified and
elucidated, a productive meeting could be achieved where different perspectives were mutually enriching and created opportunities for mutual learning. One prerequisite was that all parties had a good insight into the types of problems that can arise, and a willingness to set aside time to deal with them. Those tensions, which we have identified and described here, are built into this type of pedagogical activity, and it is therefore important to deal with them in every new facilitating situation. They are dependent on and are the reasons for the conceptions that academics, on the one hand, and teachers and school managers on the other, have about one another and about the nature and purpose of facilitation. The parties must address the tensions in one way or another and, consequently, can be expected to have an interest in, and need for problematising them. Those tensions, which became evident in our interview material, we defined as differing or assumed expectations and notions (Lendahls Rosendahl & Rönnerman, 2000).

Expectations understandably depend on the different conceptions each party has of the others party’s knowledge and competence about, for example, research. Indeed, the relevance of research is of significance if teachers are to be involved in collaboration with university researchers. Somekh, for example, reported on a project with cooperation between researchers and practitioners where she could see that language has significance for how cooperation and research are understood by practitioners (Somekh, 1994). Even the word ‘research’ is problematic. The notion of research was off-putting and seemed to confirm for the teachers that the project involved something that was alien to their experience. The problem was the most severe for teachers of older students. For teachers working with younger students, the concept was less intimidating since it has become much more commonplace that students also do ‘research’. The word research is also uncomfortable to some English (humanities) teachers who are trained in scholarship, while others (e.g. science teachers) are much more comfortable with the idea. Such understandings structure the relationship between partners. They may cement old, inherited divisions between research and practice. Many concepts, such as ‘data’, ‘analysis’ and ‘problems’, are experienced by practitioners as alien since they play little part in their everyday practice.

That differences exist between the world of school and the world of university or, if preferred, between practitioners and researchers, has been well documented by, among others, Holmstrand and Härnsten (1995). They indicate that there are many explanations, one of which is a reciprocal lack of interest in one another’s domains of knowledge. Another is that there are few appropriate arenas in which meetings and dialogue can take place. For the researcher, the most qualified research is, to a high degree, abstract and largely academically orientated, while communication with practitioners enjoys a much lower status. Practitioners, on the other hand, are suspicious of research being carried out and have difficulties in seeing the relevance of such research to their own work. Furthermore, they are fully engaged in their daily work and feel they do not have time to scrutinise research results, even though these could in fact make contributions to the solution of some of the problems encountered in day-to-day classroom practice.
Yet, as Nias (1991) has pointed out, teachers working with researchers can adopt another voice, just as researchers working with practitioners can accept becoming listeners and be influenced by their discussions. Nias suggests that when teachers’ voices are strengthened, they increase their self-confidence; they become conscious of the complexity of their work and they increase their intellectual capacity. Moreover, teachers develop the ability to apply their experiences to new situations, something that Walker described in terms of a shift from spontaneous problem-solving to seeing the complexity of pedagogic processes where, for instance, practical solutions may generate unwanted side-effects (Walker, 1997). Nias (1991) is, however, optimistic that cooperation between researchers and practitioners can lead to the development of new knowledge. Indeed, she believes that cooperation is important and that problems may arise if teachers are left unsupervised.

In order for the required development and learning to take place in the meetings between school and university, some form of understanding of each others’ discourse is, as we have suggested earlier, a necessary prerequisite. The understanding in this context is a capacity to see things from other perspectives. This demands respect and acceptance of others’ experiences and viewpoints. However, this does not have to take the form of an uncritical acceptance of others’ knowledge and conceptions. On the contrary, the value of the meeting between the different domains of knowledge lies in the fact that there are possibilities to challenge and enrich one another in a climate of mutual understanding and respect for one another’s knowledge and skills (Lendahls Rosendahl & Rönnerman, 2002). The collaboration between the researcher and practitioner is founded on the idea that the development of knowledge can, and should, be stimulated by both parties (Askling, 1997). Not in the sense that one party communicates something to the other, but rather that each party learns something more about their own field of knowledge in their meeting with the others. Indeed, it is in this way that a new, jointly constructed body of knowledge is created during the encounter.

In recent decades wide-ranging efforts to educate teachers on a scientific basis have taken place in Sweden. Among other things, teacher education students have to carry out a degree project that involves the collection and analysis of data obtained from a school environment. These future teachers are, in this way, more confident in handling research and also better equipped to work with the process of school development during their careers. In the latest reform of teacher education, which took place in 2001, a greater emphasis was placed on both the linking of undergraduate studies to research and on field studies. These elements of the new teacher education programmes require considerable cooperation between universities and partner schools. Consequently, teachers will probably be more confident with the area of research and academic demands, while researchers and academics will be better informed about current school practice. Perhaps the interest in each others’ areas of knowledge and the willingness to consider things from the others’ perspective, will contribute to enhancing cooperative school development in the future. However, in the final analysis, if serious dialogues about expectations and notions about the meetings do not take place, then tensions between the parties will still exist. Indeed,
a new type of problem could arise and create an obstacle for cooperation: the notion of already knowing.

Concluding remarks

Different projects are currently in progress in an attempt to find ways of improving the collaboration between teachers and researchers, with the purpose of improving practice by making better use of experiential and theoretical knowledge. One field involved in this area is that of action research. In the handbook about research on teaching, Zeichner and Noffke (2001) examine various traditions of practitioner research and their varied purposes developed in the twentieth century. The outcome from many similar projects is very positive, as practitioner research is a way of questioning one’s own practices and changing them as a result of ongoing studies (Stevenson & Noffke, 1995). Within the process of changing practice, the understanding of it develops contemporaneously as teachers become producers, as well as consumers, of knowledge (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). A key point in these projects is the relationship between researchers and teachers. The researcher helps a group of teachers with the mutual aim of improving the school. As we have shown in our study, these meetings are full of contradictions. Even though much international research emphasises the value of collaboration between researchers and practitioners in providing increased professional working knowledge, it cannot be taken for granted that such developments will be achieved in every cultural and educational context (Hollingsworth, 1997; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). To conclude, we therefore wish to raise a question that points both to the fact that the areas we consider need further elucidation and to the need for the systematic study of facilitation, so that professionally active pedagogues can be enabled to negotiate their own forms of collaboration and achieve their own specific aims. The question is thus how can facilitation be developed into a discursive meeting between teachers, school managers and facilitators that can result in the desired outcomes of reciprocal learning and educational improvement?

Note

1. The Swedish Agency for Education funded the empirical study. The study was presented at the EERA Conference, Lille, France, 5–8 September 2001 and is reported in Lendahls Rosendahl and Rönnerman (2000).

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