

Researcher's role – possibilities and challenges when giving voice to students' experiences

Educational research is increasingly taking place at schools, together with students, teachers, and school leaders. The prerequisite for such practice based research is relationships between participants and researchers. Significant for this kind of research in schools, is voicing different experiences, participation, and contributing to school improvement. If research is conducted in a participatory way, it has the potential of empowering those involved. When people feel heard and valued, they may be encouraged to improve their own efforts. Researchers, who truly listen to participants' experiences and invite them to actively participate in the research process, can contribute to linking participant voice to school improvement. This issue of voicing experiences has ethical dimensions, such as protecting participants from harm, offering opportunities to have a say in matters affecting them, as well as showing respect for their views and trusting their competency. Thus the nature of practice based research make new demands for how research is conducted, putting the researcher's role under pressure. This paper focuses on possibilities and challenges in the researcher's role when giving voice to students' experiences. We will explore and discuss different ways of acting as a researcher, guided by the following questions: What are different ways of dealing with relationships in research? How can a researcher handle different power relations? In what ways can a researcher give voice to participants' experiences? Finally, we argue that awareness about one's role as a researcher, combined with actively meeting participants with openness and respect, can be fruitful when voicing experiences.