



Individual essays in cooperation between universities and schools at Uppsala University

Context

All Swedish teacher training contains at least one individual, scientific essay, with the purpose of teaching the student to design and conduct a small, scientific study within the field of education. The courses of 15 ECTS are normally taking place in the final semester, and often preceded by a separate course dealing with scientific theory and methodology.

Students have traditionally had a large degree of freedom in choosing their subject and the writing are often done in pairs. Typical studies are based on written sources (curricula, textbooks, local policies) or on interviews with a limited number of classroom teachers, generally conducted on campus with limited contact with schools. However, for a long time there has been a wish from the cooperating school districts that these essays should be written in closer contact with the schools, preferably as part of development projects within the schools.

As a response to this, a collaborative project between a small number of schools in the municipalities and Uppsala University, with the aim of finding ways of achieving a connection to practical teaching in the essays, was established in 2020.

Implementation

The cooperation is led by a coordinator at the university department that is involved, this could be the director of studies or the course leader. The coordinator's counterpart in the municipalities are teachers with a specific responsibility of organizing the field placements for student teachers at the local school during the Practicum. Every semester, the schools sends suggestions of topics that would be of particular interest to investigate to the coordinator at the university, and then sent out to the students when they are choosing topics for their scientific essay.

It is not required to choose a topic from the list, and the topics are not "researchable" in the sense that they can be copied into a scientific context. However, the topics are grounded in the current practices of schools and their need for further knowledge on specific issues.

Benefits and challenges from a teacher educator's perspective

Initially, the cooperating municipalities swiftly established internal routines of collecting topics that, from their perspective, seemed relevant for students to examine. Although a generous offer and openness for collaboration, this poses a first problem, namely the process of framing research questions. One of the intended learning outcomes in the essay course is that the student should demonstrate the ability to define and formulate a research question. If the local teachers at a school would define and formulate the research question, then the student would not have had the opportunity to master this skill. Thus, clear instructions that schools only identified topics and offered channels into schools are of vital importance.