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The role of an outside consultant in an action research group: Two viewpoints.

This presentation describes the role of an outside consultant in an action research group in an upper secondary school in Iceland. The consultant's role is viewed from two different viewpoints i.e. the outside consultant himself and one of the participants who did a research with the group investigating the use of action research and activity theory to promote teachers' professional development. Our action research is guided by the ideas of Jean McNiff. The conceptual framework of the activity theory by Yrjö Engeström is used to analyse the data. The data collection includes our research diaries, audio recordings from the action research group's meetings and a survey among the participants in the action research group. The multi-faceted role of the outside consultant is described with a special focus on his role in the discussions at the meetings of the action research group. In that role he plays an important role involving praising, supporting, pointing out links to theory and pedagogy, questioning, challenging and promoting interest in action research. By combining all these together in his multi-faceted role with overwhelming positive relations he builds up trust within the group that is a prerequisite for open and honest dialogue in the group and it creates an atmosphere of interest and wellbeing at the meetings. Perhaps the most important overall influence the outside consultant has is to be able to show the group members the way forward.