Epistemological Perspectives in an Approach to Teacher Research

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Abstract
There is a necessary connection between the epistemological base in teacher research and how this kind of research is conducted. Different epistemological perspectives on educational action research or teacher research will imply different conceptions of purpose, research principles and methods, and documentation. This article presents methodological principles in a pragmatic, critical approach to teacher research, inspired by the philosophies of Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Habermas. A main purpose of teacher research has been seen as developing and documenting practical professional teacher knowledge. It has been argued that professional teacher knowledge must necessarily be documented through examples showing professional practice, and that this implies certain demands concerning the character of the examples. It has further been argued that the ability to lead democratic learning – and development processes, in close collaboration with pupils and colleagues, is a fundamental aspect of professional teacher knowledge, and that this has implications for how examples can be developed and documented.

Introduction
The last decade has seen an increasing focus on the issue of relevant research based knowledge in the teaching profession in Norway (NKR, 2002 · NOKUT, 2006 · Elliott, 1991 · 1998). A need for strengthening so-called practice based research, related to teacher work, is now emphasized (The Ministry of Education, Report no. 11, 2008 – 2009). However, lack of relevant research seems to be related to unclear conceptions of the epistemological fundament of teacher knowledge, and of professional and vocational knowledge in general, as a kind of practical knowledge (Janik, 1996 · Molander, 1997). This is the background for the two main questions in this paper:

- How can professional teacher knowledge be further developed and documented through teachers conducting research in their professional practice?
- How can methodological aspects of research aimed at developing professional teacher knowledge be understood in light of pragmatic and critical epistemology?

The article will present methodological principles in a strategy for teacher research, developed at Akershus University College in collaboration with master students and colleagues. The base of the strategy was developed in a project that was carried through during a period from 1995 -2000 (Hiim & Hippe, 2000). Methodological principles were elaborated in a follow up project from 2003 -2008 (Hiim, 2009 · 2010). Some main principles in the strategy will be briefly outlined, and be related to different traditions of educational action research. On this background it will be discussed how respectively pragmatic and critical concepts of professional teacher knowledge may illuminate and deepen methodological principles in an approach to teacher research. The discussion on methodology will draw on pragmatic epistemological perspectives from Wittgenstein and Heidegger, and critical epistemological perspectives from Habermas.

An approach to teacher research
In Norway, the issue of relevance in teacher education gets a lot of attention. Many students express that subject matter and content in teacher education is one-sided theoretical, and does not really qualify students for professional practice (NOKUT 2006). There are no strong traditions for educational action research in Norway, especially not in the form of teacher research. Vocational teacher education is an exception, with strong traditions for practice based learning.
In the 1980es, an approach to practice based teacher education was developed at Akershus University College. The content of the education is mainly structured around student’s practical experiences, related to analyses of teacher work, teachers’ social mandate, and central professional tasks or functions. A core in teachers’ professional work is defined as “practical - theoretical planning, carrying through, evaluation and critical analysis of teaching and learning”, or as didactics (Hiim & Hippe, 1989). Didactics is a common concept in Norway, and is a key concept in the national curriculum framework for teacher education (The Ministry of Education, 2003-2006). But didactics has traditionally often been defined as a theoretical discipline, as “theory about teaching and theory as procedural principles for teaching” (Gundem, 1984-1998). In the first definition, which has gradually gained much acceptance, didactics regarded as a practical – theoretical process, where student teachers and teachers develop concepts of teaching and learning through systematically practicing and critically reflecting on educational work.

A didactic model, meant to help teachers analyse, improve and eventually do research on didactic relations in their practice, is essential:

![A model of didactic relations (Hiim & Hippe, 1989 based on Bjørndal & Lieberg, 1978)](image)

The model describes the relations between fundamental educational concepts: Pupils’ learning resources and needs, pedagogical framework conditions and scope, educational aims and goals, subject matter and content, teaching and learning methods, and forms of assessment. Two essential questions are: What are the didactic relations in the educational situation, seen by different participants, especially pupils? How may relations be improved?

Examples of further questions are: What is the relation between pupils’ learning resources, interests and needs, and subject matter in the actual situation? What are the relations between pupils’ learning resources, educational goals, and teaching and learning methods?

A main issue in this approach to teacher education is that student teachers learn to analyse didactic relations in various contexts and situations, and to involve pupils and colleagues in the analysis, with an aim of continuous development and improvement. A research based evaluation showed that students found this kind of teacher education relevant, and felt well prepared for work (Hiim & Hippe, 1991). But our experiences pointed towards a need for practice based research, which could contribute with professional concepts rooted in professional practice. A
A project on research education for teachers was initiated, within the frames of a part-time, in-service master programme in vocational pedagogy. Participants in the project were practicing teachers who were also master students. A didactic approach to educational action research was developed (Hiim, 2009; Hiim & Hippe, 2001). Some main principles will be briefly outlined:

The purpose of educational action research conducted by teachers is to develop knowledge of importance to the teacher herself, participants in the project, and for the teaching profession (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Elliott, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). The research problem in our approach is not formulated as a proposition or a hypothesis, but is grounded in a question of how a professional task or challenge can be met. The source of the question is wishes and visions for change. For instance, teachers and pupils experience a lack of relevance and personal meaning in the vocational social- and health care programme, or in the social subjects programme, and wish to make changes. The purpose is not to develop final solutions or procedures. The essential purpose is to develop professional examples that show how the educational work may be carried out, and show didactic development processes. The idea is that relatively detailed, essential examples and descriptions, showing educational work, are necessary to develop relevant professional concepts and professional teacher knowledge. The “answer” to the question of “how” can be concrete didactic descriptions, based on experiences and data collection within a limited part of educational practice.

The research process is characterized by collective definitions of challenges and visions, made by teacher researchers, colleagues and pupils together. The process has a circular, sequential structure, where participants collaborate on creating a didactically structured general plan, followed up by short time plans and notes of observation and reflection. A didactic structure means that there is an explicit focus on the categories contained in the model above. The point is to ensure that attention is paid to basic relations in the educational situation, with a special emphasis on the resources and needs of pupils. Plans, actions and reflections are also explicitly related to interpretations and critique of existing national curriculum frameworks, to secure that teachers’ social and professional mandate is taken sufficiently into account. Data is qualitative information on participants’ various experiences and judgements, important incidents and pedagogic actions – what is said, done and agreed upon. A main principle is that participants in the actual educational context share their experiences, and that shared experience is the fundament for making democratic decisions on the educational work.

General principles and changes of systems may be developed, for instance concerning relevant education in social subjects, but these principles must be understood in relation to concrete experiences. The purpose of the research is to develop professional concepts, conceptual patterns and examples, rather than to develop theory in the meaning of general interpretational systems or general laws. An important focus in this kind of teacher research is on pupils’ or students’ opportunities for experience based learning in different fields, which means opportunities for relevant, involved primary experience. There is also a strong focus on democratic collaboration in the learning process, both to obtain relevance and to develop democratic competence.

In this approach, action research may be defined as: “Studies that include systematic cooperation on planning, carrying through, evaluation and critical analysis of educational-, teaching and learning processes. The purpose of the research is to develop the quality of education, teaching and learning and to document new knowledge on these processes” (Hiim, 2003). Teacher research is here based on professional tasks concerning educational processes. The intention is to develop the quality of essential educational- and teaching functions, through systematic cooperation between all involved. It is also to document this kind of development on different fields, related to educational frameworks and structures.
Inspiration from different traditions of pedagogical action research

This approach to educational action research has been strongly inspired by the British tradition for practice based teacher research, especially the East Anglia tradition (Stenhouse, 1975). A main issue is to see teaching and research as an integrated process, which contains all aspects of curriculum development, process- and product evaluation. It has, however, been pointed out that teachers’ professional knowledge may be distorted by a tendency to use conventional methods in teacher research, and that there is a need to elaborate fundamental methodological principles suitable to develop and express professional teacher knowledge (Elliott, 1991· 1998).

Australian action research puts special emphasis on illuminating and overcoming power relations in educational traditions and systems, through critique and democratic collaboration (Carr and Kemmis, 1986· Kemmis, 2002). This tradition has also influenced our form of action research. In connection with its strong inspiration from Habermas, it could be criticized for a rather one-sided focus on change through verbal discourse, grounded in a cognitive conception of knowledge.

In the tradition of action research in Bath, special emphasis is placed on developing science with experiential qualities (Reason & Bradbury, 2002· McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). This is also a main concern in our approach. In all the various versions of educational action research, it is a fundamental principle to document contextual, circular, democratic processes of collaboration, reflection and development, and examples of such processes. All the various traditions emphasize the importance of teachers themselves conducting research in their professional practice, through integrating educational work and research. The main reason is that this is necessary to develop relevant concepts rooted in occupational experience, and thus support the authority of the teaching profession. This is also a main issue in our approach. It may be seen as an especially important point in times when action research is gaining popularity, but also to a considerable extent seems to be taken over by teacher educators and university researchers.

All these approaches to educational action research have been concerned with questions of epistemology, and a need for further methodological development has been emphasized. Methodological principles in the didactic approach outlined above are based on interpretations of Wittgenstein’s late philosophy, Heidegger’s early philosophy and Habermas’ theory of communicative action (Flim, 2007· 2009· 2010). Some essential aspects are outlined below.

Methodological perspectives in light of Wittgenstein’s game metaphor

Purpose – to develop examples that show educational practice

Wittgenstein (2003) criticizes a conception of language and knowledge as pictures of given entities in the world, related to each other by laws. The source of relevance problems in teacher education and professional education in general, and partly also in other kinds of education, may be found here. An understanding of knowledge as pictures of given entities may imply a one-sided understanding of learning as verbal transference of given images and concepts. Wittgenstein’s game metaphor presents language and experience as a living, participating activity, or as “games”. The use of words and concepts are woven into a life form, in cultural, practical patterns and contexts. Concepts, for instance “a chess mate”, get their meaning through participating in a context that shows how the concept may be practiced. A concept like “relevant education in social subjects” gets meaning through participating in a context that shows how the educational work may be carried out. To learn a concept is to take part in a life form.

In the practical tradition of knowledge, there has been no distinction between concept and work (Molander, 1997). Concepts are “realized” through work – for instance, “relevant education in social subjects” is in the process of how. From a pragmatic perspective, research with the purpose of developing and documenting teacher knowledge should clarify essential tasks in teacher work, how the work is carried out, and how it is experienced.
In light of Wittgenstein’s game metaphor, research in practical teacher work may be seen as describing examples of different teacher “games” and how they may be played – for instance, “relevant education in social subjects”. The essence of the research is examples that show how central occupational challenges and tasks are handled and developed, rather than general explanations. The basis is a clear understanding of the purpose of the actual practice.

Wittgenstein’s holistic conception of language and experience points towards the necessity of learning through examples, and towards the situation as the entity of meaning (Janik, 1996). It points towards the necessity of showing, which is not grounded in a lack of general explanations. Generalization may lead to a lack of meaning. Students’ experience of lack of relevance in teacher education, and in the knowledge base of the profession, has a great deal to do with an experience of lack of meaning in general theories and concepts.

Wittgenstein sees concepts as something we do and create in our experience. The meaning of concepts – their regularity – appears in their use, in the context. The meaning of words and concepts - for instance “experience based education in social subjects”, is connected with judging a situation. From this point of view, teacher research should show professional teachers’ judgement in concrete situations. It should show how teachers in cooperation with their pupils and colleagues practice and develop educational concepts.

What kind of examples – to express contextual, holistic experience processes
Wittgenstein draws attention to the variety of functions in human language, related to the expression of different dimensions and diversity in our experience. This diversity can not be reduced to propositional form, as seen in narrow conceptions of knowledge. Different forms of expression are suitable for different experiences. To Wittgenstein, experience shows itself through its expression. A word may be seen as a direct expression of feeling – of engagement, sorrow or joy – rather than as a kind of proposition about something. Seen from this angle, teacher research should make use of a variety of forms of language. The description of the action research process concerns essential professional actions and incidents. Teachers’ and pupils’ experiences may be expressed through the description of small examples and episodes, actions, dialogues and collective reflections. To give a valid description of the educational process, it is important that participants’ engagements, understandings, feelings, values, priorities, and decisions through the process come out as directly and clearly as possible.

Documented results – examples that show the interpretation of professional concepts
The main purpose of teacher research is not primarily to develop general, abstract concepts, but to show how professional work concepts are expressed in concrete contexts. But documentation will nevertheless also focus on patterns in the development process, and on systemic changes, related to more general perspectives. Based on inspiration from Wittgenstein, teacher research could be seen as a kind of anthropological research process documented as examples and stories from practice. It may be seen as a descriptive kind of research where the intention is to express contextual and concrete knowledge, but also general patterns. Giving valid descriptions of educational practice will not primarily demand pictures based on propositional facts, but rather that different actions, incidents, experiences and attitudes are expressed in their experiential diversity. The results may be seen as examples showing the interpretation of essential concepts and tasks in the teaching profession.

Methodological principles in light of Heidegger’s workshop metaphor
Purpose – to make interpretations of teacher practice explicit
Like Wittgenstein, Heidegger (1978) rejects the idea of mental representation, connected with a concept of knowledge as a mirror picture of the world. His workshop metaphor for experience and learning clarifies how concepts are basically developed in our involved interaction with things having a function in an intentional context. In a workshop, tools are used for something – their meaning is related to the context as a whole – for instance a context of building houses to protect
people. The meaning of things - of a tool - gets explicit when the practical activity is disturbed, as
when the tool does not function properly. Concepts like “relevant education in social subjects”
or “vocationally relevant education” may be seen as practical concepts which have meaning in
practical, professional contexts. Their meaning becomes explicit when the contextual coherence
is disturbed by problems, as when pupils fail or drop out. Lacks of coherence in a situation
enlightens things, concepts and relations, and make them stand out for consideration and
reflection.

The workshop metaphor makes it possible to see professional learning and research as based on
daily practical activity, concerning fundamental tasks and functions. In light of this metaphor, the
purpose of teacher research may be seen as making the interpretation of essential practical
professional concepts explicit. Action and concepts have meaning through contexts that we are
involved in. We experience and learn through doing and using, through interaction characterized
by involvement, for instance in the teaching situation, including senses and feelings. We never
reflect on all sides of our work, but on problems demanding consideration (Dreyfus, 1991).
Research and development of new professional knowledge in the teaching profession starts with
practical challenges related to something that can be improved. The research is conducted as a
kind of experiment process, where new ways of meeting challenges are considered, tried out and
documented. In the teaching profession experiments must be carried out in democratic
collaboration between teachers and pupils, since education is a subjective and social activity. The
challenges or phenomena in question may be clarified through a circular structure, where for
instance the concept “relevant education in social subjects”, is made gradually more explicit
through experiments of improvement, related to daily challenges over a certain period of time.

Heidegger sees the world as contexts of involvement, use and meaning, or as practice. Things are
primarily useful, secondarily objectively given. Practical work, for instance teacher work, is not
regulated by rules in a traditional, theoretical sense. Theory in a conventional sense is a reduction
of meaning, of the contextual. It cannot in itself give the meaning back (Dreyfus, 1991). From a
pragmatic point of view, the purpose of teacher research is not to produce a kind of knowledge
ruling action, but to describe and show examples of action and reflection. The issue is to describe
shared involvement in challenging educational situations, seen from different participants’ point
of view. The research must necessarily be conducted as development and improvement of
existing practice. It expresses the practitioner’s, that is the teacher’s, practical understanding,
related to developments and experiments for which the professional teacher is responsible, on
cooperation with participants.

How can interpretations of teacher practice be expressed?

Heideggers’ ontology can constitute a basis for an extended, holistic concept of knowledge,
learning and research in education. Through the workshop metaphor, he clarifies being and
experience as a diverse whole of ontological structures constituted by understanding, emotions
and action. In light of these structures, the research process will concern education as a process
where pupils and teachers are “there” in absorbed action, understanding and feelings, in a
context of mutual and individual involvement. Data and documentation should describe these
processes – describe actions, events and experiences in concrete situations.

Seen from Heideggers’ perspective, understanding is not primarily a cognitive phenomenon – it
concerns knowing how. Teachers’ professional knowledge is basically expressed in how their
work is performed. It is this understanding that teacher research should express. Much of our
practical performance, for instance of teacher work, cannot primarily be conceived as consciously
planned actions - we do what the situation needs, which is expressed through showing, rather
than explaining (Dreyfus, 1991). A fundamental methodological principle in teacher research is
therefore to show through living descriptions of actions, events and experiences.

When something does not work, the “as” of our concepts appears. For instance, in a teacher
research project, “relevant education in social subjects” appeared as experience based content and
methods. It was connected with the use of films, poems, stories, real experiences from pupils’
lives, all systematically related to central concepts in subjects of sociology and social anthropology. Various forms of democratic pupil participation turned out to be essential (Melby, 2003a, 2003b). From a pragmatic perspective, teacher research should take place as a collaborative process where the meaning of essential phenomena is created – for instance the meaning of “relevant education in social subjects”. Through collaborative processes it is gradually made clear what this may mean. A methodological main concern in teacher research is to show the development of practical concepts and practical understanding through the development of teacher work. Documentation shows actions, patterns and structures in development processes, in a kind of pragmatic examples dealing with essential professional challenges and tasks.

Challenges in teacher practice must be understood in a greater social and historical context. Abilities for judging social, cultural and organizational conditions in the educational situation, and finding resources in collaboration with pupils, colleagues and other participants, are essential qualifications in teacher research. A contextual perspective does not mean a limited class room focus. Rather, primary experience with professional tasks may be seen as necessary to be able to develop and document a practical understanding of the social, historical and organizational context.

Documented results – interpretations of educational work
In light of Heidegger, teacher research concerns clarifying essential phenomena and structures in teachers’ professional, daily “how” – for instance how relevant education in social subject may be developed and carried out. Results of written documentation will be descriptions of a possible practice which has actually existed, in examples that make interpretations of teacher practice explicit. Examples contain descriptions with an existential perspective, where understanding, feelings and action constitute a whole, and where different perspectives on a shared situation are expressed. Documentation describes how teachers and pupils identify and handle concrete practical challenges, and describes events, experiences and reflections with involved engagement. The examples have a circular, hermeneutic structure, where concepts are made gradually more explicit in meetings with essential challenges over a period of time. The point is to show what essential professional concepts may actually mean.

Fundamentally seen, concepts are learned through primary experience and practice, for instance, teacher practice. Professional concepts may be further developed through practitioner research, which concerns developing practical experience and making it explicit.

Methodological principles in light of Habermas’ theory of communicative action

Purpose – to show critical educational practice and reflection
Hermeneutic philosophy has been criticized for the lack of a critical fundament which makes it possible to distinguish between false interpretations induced by habit and power, and valid interpretations, for instance of educational processes (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Habermas, 1981). A main issue in the theory of communicative action is to create a critical base for the development of critical social understanding and self – understanding, that may lead to change and improvement of our social world and daily life situations. To make it possible for the society to function democratically, it is of crucial importance for its members to develop critical communicative rationality and competence. This means ability to judge what is said and done by principles of validity concerning truth, effectiveness, sincerity and justness (Habermas, 1999).

From a perspective inspired by Habermas, education, teaching and learning may be seen as critical processes, to be judged by critical communicative principles of validity. The teacher has a special responsibility for taking care of these principles. This means that there is a special need for teachers to have democratic skills, so that they are able to stimulate the growth of this kind of competence in their pupils. A main purpose in teacher work and research may be seen as organizing and showing examples of education as a critical process. In the approach to action research presented above, all participants, especially the pupils or students, are continuously involved in evaluating the educational – development – and research process, by communicative
standards. Pupils are systematically involved in didactic decisions concerning educational aims, subject matter and content, teaching and learning methods, forms of assessment and educational frame factors. The circular, sequential cooperative structure of the development – and research process helps meet the validity claims. The out spring of the process is a shared educational problem, and wishes for change. Problems and wishes are seen in relation to a utopia of democratic and just education. An important aim in itself is to develop communicative infrastructures that can support critical communication – for instance various arenas and principles for dialogue and cooperation. A main issue is to document examples showing the development of democratic structures and arenas of communication, and the content in such structures. A main purpose in this kind of teacher research is also that all participants develop their critical communicative competence.

Communicative rationality is related to a focus on the limits of instrumental understanding, on systems as structures of power, and on the authoritative power of traditional interpretations. The fundamentally normative character of education, and the need to develop systems rooted in the life world of pupils and teachers, is thrown into relief. Critique of curriculum and curriculum frameworks stands out as important. Shared power through mutual responsibility for pupils and teachers in the educational process is a main concern.

The purpose of teacher research may, also form a critical angle, be seen as developing examples that show the interpretation of educational challenges and cooperative development processes. Based on the validity claims, there is a stronger focus on social, normative and democratic aspects. However, action research inspired by Habermas has been criticized for a relatively one sided focus on verbal argumentation, and a rather one sided cognitive and rationalistic approach (Molander, 1997). This is an interesting critique, closely related to epistemological interpretations of practical teacher knowledge. From a pragmatic point of view, questions of “how” point towards showing and describing, as least as much as towards discussions of principles and judgements of arguments.

To show possibilities for democratic liberation from traditions and systems
Habermas’ concepts of system and life world throw an interesting light on change and development processes in teacher research (Kemmis, 2002). He criticizes traditional systems’ theory for an one sided objectivistic, instrumentalist concept of knowledge and action. For Habermas, the relation between life world and system is multi – dimensional, including social and subjective aspects. From this point of view, it is important that the development of educational systems at different levels – classroom level, school level, community level - is grounded in participants’ life world. This is only possible through communicatively based institutionalization of systems. Critique of systems concerning their educational work, and the institutionalization of change, is a central aspect of teacher researchers’ and pupils’ competence for social change and development. An important principle in teacher research is to show how educational development can be based on cooperative decisions in the educational process.

The concept of colonization of life world clarifies how understanding, values and norms based on ideas of an effectively working system, forms peoples’ individual and collective self understanding, relations and practices. In education as a system, the coordinating function of language is partly replaced by formal directives, such as controllable learning objectives, national tests, numbered marks, numbered demands for production of students, etc. This is followed by a tendency for teachers and pupils to understand themselves in system terms, and will also influence communicative processes and structures. For instance, a good pupil or teacher is conceived as one who gets high ranking. From a critical perspective, teacher research should reveal lack of critique in concrete educational contexts, and show how communicative power may be strengthened.

Critique of given conditions in educational work can be seen as an essential starting point in teacher research. Examples of such conditions are established organizational structures, concepts of knowledge, formal curricula, established subject matter and traditional practice. A rationalized
life world is in itself a fundamental condition. Therefore it is especially important that the use of formal directives related to power – for instance formal curriculum frameworks, methods of assessment, and organizational structures – are criticized and developed through democratic cooperation, by teacher researchers, teachers and pupils working in concrete contexts. In our approach, this critique is related to sequentially organized reflection on the educational process, focused on the didactic categories and relations mentioned above. An important aspect of critique is to stimulate mutual definitions of room for action and change, and sharing of power.

A main purpose in teacher research may be seen as improving the balance between pupils’ life world and the educational system. The system may be influenced from within through concrete didactic development processes or “experiments” conducted by teacher colleagues and pupils together. The experiments should contain patterns and ordering structures which may constitute a kind of theory. The base of concepts and theories in teacher research is practical problems in pupils’ and teachers’ life world that are made explicit. Practical problems are the basis of reflection, change and generalization. However, the claims of validity point towards non-dogmatic educational theory, and towards systems that are continually developed through communicative coordination of action and mutual understanding of practice. But the relation between the general and the particular and concrete is a bit problematic for Habermas. On one hand, he is concerned with the knowledge value of general concepts, and talks about “transferring knowledge into action” (Habermas, 1999: 187). On the other, he emphasizes that generalizations and systems developed in one context, for instance an educational context, cannot simply be transferred to another one.

The normative aspect of professional knowledge is essential. What is conceived as objective, given facts may turn out to be factual, but socially changeable norms. A rise of normative awareness can first and foremost be obtained when teachers and pupils, in democratic cooperation, make judgements of, acknowledge or reject norms that regulate their daily educational work. The ethical main principle of discourse – that only norms of which all concerned can accept the consequences, are valid, can be conceived as a main principle for argumentation, and for consensus based regulation of action. Mutual actions presuppose mutual decisions. In our approach, a main principle in documentation of teacher research is that discussions and mutual decisions are made explicit as the basis of mutual action.

From a perspective inspired by Habermas, the form of argumentation should be aimed at supporting and developing participants’ autonomous will. Normative rules of argumentation may to some extent neutralize power relations, and secure each individual’s possibilities for influence. A normative rule may be that everyone shall have the opportunity to speak, that what is said must be comprehensible for all, etc. In our approach to action research, emphasis is put on teacher researchers’ ability to lead practical – moral discourses as part of the educational – and research process. A main issue for discourses and dialogues between teachers and pupils is didactic relations in the educational process.

**Documented results – examples showing critical democratic development of educational work**

A main purpose in educational research as action research is a good life for all concerned. Research processes and documentation should help clarify and overcome loss of meaning and lack of justice. Principles of democracy, liberty, responsibility and equal possibilities for all, as well as the welfare of communities, are fundamental. These are also fundamental principles in teachers’ social mandate. However, critical questions and reflections, addressed at educational traditions, are important to avoid dogmatic transference in daily educational work. Critical questions should be addressed at educational goals, subject matter and content, methods of teaching and learning, forms of assessment, and pedagogic framework conditions. From a critical perspective, teacher research concerns critique and change of traditional patterns in educational practice, through discourses and development processes that are suitably documented.
According to Habermas, it is problematic to transfer internalized general moral principles to moral action. It can be seen as a question of transferring knowledge to action. This implies a kind of split between theory and practice that creates problems in education and educational research. A perspective more inspired by Wittgenstein is that the principle, rule of concept primarily exists in its use. It can only be understood through the experience of various examples in different situations, eventually through documented examples, for instance of “relevant education in social subjects”. Concepts, rules or norms can basically only be understood through examples showing their meaning. Wise use of rules is at least as dependent on practical experience as on analytical capacity. Teacher research may contribute to the documentation of practical experience concerning essential educational norms, and show examples of possible critical interpretations, for instance of relevance. It can also show examples of how communicative arrangements are developed and function.

However, Habermas also emphasizes that normative principles cannot simply be transferred between contexts, because they must be developed by participants in the actual context. Results of teacher research may be seen as examples showing possible interpretations and development of important educational norms, which are at the same time considered as contributions in a continuous, principally always unfinished educational discourse.

**Action research projects based on this approach**

The approach to action research presented in this article has been used in many interesting teacher research projects. Examples showing professional teacher work in situations of challenge and development have been documented in master theses, articles and books. Books written by teachers, based on practitioner research, are used in teacher education, and are reported to strengthen relevance (Ekelund, 2005–2007; Melby, 2003a–2003b; Møller, 2000; Møller & Vagle, 2003; Støten, 2005–2008). The approach is used in an extensive project on curriculum development in vocational education, involving 40 teachers attending an in-service master programme in education and action research (Hiim, 2010).

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