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# Teacher Research: From Theoretically-Conceptual Framework to the Landmarks for Practice

Teacher research is long-known concept in pedagogical literature and the phenomenon not new in the practice. However, there are different ways of conceptualising this kind of research and many dilemmas concerning its realization. This paper searches for the landmarks which could be useful if we want to encourage, research and realize this kind of research. Our search involves: 1. Clarification of the theoretical conceptual framework of teacher research; 2. Presentation and explanation of the general teacher research characteristics; 3. Discussion of the characteristics that the successful research of this kind have.

The paper gives the analysis, integration and interpretation of different sources: literature on the contemporary tendencies in pedagogical epistemology and methodology (particularly postmodern and critically oriented), literature on teachers' research and the experiences of teachers researching own practice. The most important landmarks are: 1. Teacher research should be based on the teacher's research attitude and issues which are relevant for him/her; 2. Inseparability of research, practice and professional development; 3. Critical nature and change as the part of research process.

Key words: teacher research, teacher's research stance, emancipation of teaching profession.

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*Teacher Research is not an add-on; it is a way of being!*  
(Gail Ritchie, Teacher Leader Network & Fairfax County's Teacher  
Researcher Network)

## Introduction

Teachers' research and a concept of teachers as researchers have long ago ceased to be novel pedagogical phenomena. There is already a large number of publications about teachers' research and a lot of descriptions of such research examples on the different education levels can be found in the literature. Student teachers' researches have become an integral part of a number of pre-service teacher education programs.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, research on teachers' research has been conducted and the teachers' researchers associations and networks have been established.<sup>2</sup> Promoting teachers' research has become a part of the official education policy in many developed countries, including some in the region. However, these phenomena are not conceptualised uniformly. Although it is clear that teacher research is a process by which classroom teachers investigate problems of practice, the different views appear in the concretization of this concept and in the attempts to translate it into the practice. This is a situation posing many dilemmas to anybody willing to investigate teacher research issues, to implement such research or to develop teacher education programs to support the development of teachers as researchers. This paper attempts to find some general reference points – underpinned by the essence of teachers' research – that may assist in solving these dilemmas. We shall try to do this by looking into the theoretical-conceptual framework and the key characteristics of the teachers' research, particularly of the successful ones. Using the available literature, integrating, interpreting and complementing different sources we shall try to provide an answer to the old question: what is the essence of teacher research. In a quest to this answer, we shall take into account the contemporary trends in social and humanistic sciences, the latest findings on the teacher research, my own personal experience as a teacher researching practice and a need to identify those crucial characteristic of the teacher research which may be relevant for encouraging and development of such research in practice.

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1 This primarily refers to the pre-service teacher education curricula in USA, the U.K., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands. However, more and more countries include research and inquiry in the future teachers' education.

2 For example, these are collaborative Action Research Network (CARN): (<http://www.did.stu.mmu.ac.uk/carnnew>), League of Teacher Researchers ( [lynx.csusm.edu/ltr/](http://lynx.csusm.edu/ltr/)), Fairfax County Public Schools Teacher Researcher Network ([www.fcps.edu/plt/tre-search.htm](http://www.fcps.edu/plt/tre-search.htm)), Teacher Inquiry Communities (TIC) Network.

## Conceptual-theoretical Framework

Teacher research conceptual-theoretical framework has been developed by following the developments in science and academic research in general, through the changes in understanding the teaching profession, teachers' work and the attempts to conceive the teacher education in the best possible way (Lytle & Cochran-Smith expressed the similar attitude even in 1994). Therefore, it is not surprising that there are different concepts on the teacher research which are related or equated, including teacher research, action research, action science, cooperative inquiry, self-study, narrative inquiry, emancipatory praxis, auto-ethnography, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the use of teaching as a context for research (Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Common to these theoretical concepts is exactly that what can be considered as the key theoretical starting point and the basis of the teacher research concept and which makes these researches different from other forms of research in education. Those are epistemological-methodological approaches which investigate and reconsider the relation between theoretical and practical knowledge and critique criticize methodological procedures, researcher's role and nature of knowledge in the positivistic (process-product, empirical-analytical) methodology, primarily in social and humanistic sciences (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Same as in other domains, this viewpoint in pedagogy rests on the dissatisfaction with the existing situation – this time due to the failure of the research on education based on positivism to contribute to the understanding and change of the education practice. Investigating research boundaries has led to their change and the development of new scientific paradigms. Regarding pedagogic research that brought an array of changes which are today taken as well known characteristics of the interpretative and critical paradigm. The most important are: recognition of necessity that the science goes beyond description and the attempt to control reality and the acceptance that the interpretation of the real phenomena meaning and/or their change should become the purpose of science; realization that it is necessary to re-consider the meaning of objectivity and the relation between objective and subjective in the exploration of education phenomena; respect for necessity to view education contextually. This has also created a distinction between research on teaching and research in education (and for education). Research on teaching is university based research. This kind of research is derived from theories related to teaching, learning, and schooling within academic disciplines and seeks to develop this kind of theories. Knowledge gaining procedures are based on the values of positivistic methodology (standard procedures for data gathering and their

statistic processing, quantification, objectivity). This kind of research are done by *expert researchers* working at the universities and institutes with a purpose to get universally valid knowledge. *Research in education* and *research for education* stem from the very professional practice, although they can be based on the academic postulates, more precisely relations between theoretical postulates and practice (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994). These research are, in principle, done by practitioners,<sup>3</sup> starting from the daily problems in the practice (Pešić, 1998, Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). They do this alone, with colleagues or with the researchers' participation, but always through their own long-term, intense, and direct professional involvement. Methodologically, teachers' researches usually belong to the interpretative or action research, even though they sometimes "resemble university-based studies in conventions, methods and forms" (Myers, 1985). Teachers research to better understand own experiences and, to be able to decide on the actions and solutions to problems. Hence, the main purpose of these researches is not to develop universal theories but to understand and develop their own practice. This is exactly why, according to Lytle & Cochran-Smith, these researches shift and blur the border between research and teachers' work in practice (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994). They also move the line between the research and teachers' professional development because research are the way of job-embedded professional learning.

Although the epistemological basis of teacher research presented in this paper is relatively broadly acknowledged, we should note that there are other kinds of research, based on different methodological paradigms, which are sometimes called teachers' research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Anderson, Herr and Nihlen, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; Zeichner and Noffke, 2001 – in Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Having in mind the current trends in social sciences (McLaren, 2012), contemporary understanding of teaching profession<sup>4</sup> and the fact that

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3 Literature uses terms teachers' research and practitioners' research for the same kind of research. In their recent papers, Cochran-Smith and Lytle argue that we should speak about the practitioners' research because teachers are just one of the groups doing these researches, but they can also be done by the school principles and other professionals involved in the education process (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

4 Here we mean those understandings of teachers underpinned by understanding of reflective practice, action research and curriculum development. They see teachers as a critical reflective group that develops emancipating practice, works on the school democratisation and the development of democratic society (Garman, 1995; Hartnett, Carr, 1995) while criticizing: reducing teachers' role to those that "apply rather than create" (Elliott, 1981: 1), limiting teachers' autonomy to report on how to work and the inside classroom context (Stenhouse, 1989), technocracy of teachers profession, disregard for teachers' practical knowledge, neglect for his/her activities in the



there is a worldwide movement of teachers researchers,<sup>5</sup> nowadays we can notice one more foothold for the development of teachers' research. It is directly and inseparably connected with the presented epistemology (can even be considered a part of epistemology, different angle of looking at it or its consequence). But, it can also be considered as a separate starting point because it is not underpinned by postmodern postulates, methodology and science but with something else. To understand this perspective one has to know the answer to questions who does this research and which issues are his/her starting point. As already pointed out in the explained teachers' research epistemology, researcher, participant and the user of research are in fact the same person. Teachers have a key role in knowledge about the practice and changing it. They are *users and generators of theory* (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994:28), *knowers, not only doers* (Check and Schutt, 2012), *decision makers and change agents* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009:6), they "change the practice and the conditions in which it happens" (Pešić, 1998:59). Teacher researcher is capable and "has a mandate" to identify problems, interpret occurrences in the school and classroom, uses research to understand the practice and introduces changes in his/her work based on that. Hence, the concept of teacher researcher assumes a change of his/her role and responsibility but also the position ensuing from that. These roles cannot be achieved without respecting teacher's autonomy and his/her power to decide on the practice.

Besides its importance for the teacher as individual and group, this conception bears on the very teaching profession. Teaching profession is being developed on the new foundations: it is promoted as reflective, based on research, collaboration and autonomy. We can even say that it has been professionalised for the first time because without trust in the teachers' actions (which involves their accountability and autonomy) we can hardly speak about the profession in its full sense (Radulović, 2011). Regarding this, Cochran-Smith & Lytle point out that practitioner research offers hope for us to "take back accountability" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009:376). Thus, development of teachers as researchers is at the same time not only a way to find relevant knowledge and change the

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social-political area (Goodson, 1995), no comprehension of the importance of teachers for the development of democratic society (Hartnett, Carr, 1995); bureaucratic school governance (Garman, 1995) and bureaucratic reforms (Goodman, 1995).

5 Development of teachers' researchers movement is reflected in broadening of networks that bring together teachers who research (some are mentioned above), but it is also emphasized in the title of the paper: *The teacher research movement: A decade later*, written by M. Cochran-Smith and S. L. Lytle, whose work have a crucial importance for the conceptualisation and the development of teachers' research (Cochran-Smith, & Lytle, 1999).

way of education work, but also a way to emancipate teaching profession and teachers as a group. Hence, it is not surprising that teachers organize themselves to research together, support each other in research and share research experiences.

At this point, a teacher research concept can depart from those characteristic of the postmodern understanding in education which have the largest critique from the critical pedagogy and contribute to integration of those two contemporary ways of thinking. A change of teacher's position into researcher is not only a part of the postmodern change of the way in which the science is understood but also a way of emancipating teachers as individuals and groups, which is compatible with the critical pedagogy ideas. Cochran-Smith and Lytle support the similar idea when, juxtaposing the concept of teacher research and the standardization of the teaching practice, emphasize the importance of teacher's perspective and the role of their work for the democratic society:

“With practitioner inquiry, the larger project is... about enhancing educators' sense of social responsibility and social action in the service of a democratic society” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009: 58).

Besides emancipating teachers, critical pedagogy as a theoretical starting point for teachers' research is also clear on the choice of the issues to be researched. Critical pedagogy theoreticians stress the importance of identifying and researching issues related to the social structure, power distribution, justice, identity, language and social changes thereby coming back and re-iterating the relevance of the value and moral components of the teachers' work. This idea is present in the Cochran-Smith and Lytle recent works where they say that the teachers research “those problems in the best interests of the learning and life chances of students and their communities” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009: 123). Therefore, the teachers' researches are not only about how to do something but also about what needs to be changed. In the critical pedagogy perspective, teacher research is an opportunity to raise the awareness of the role of education in the reproduction of (unequal, unfair) social relations, but it also becomes a form of social action. According to this, teacher research can be defined as “personal, professional, and political journey” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009:294). For B. Fecho, this kind of research is a “critical inquiry” (Fecho, 2011), which corresponds to the Habermas's concept of “critical knowledge” as knowledge which teacher acquires through research and which is a basis for change (Habermas 1971, in: Moon, 2004: 13–14).

Although such understanding of teacher research exists since its very beginnings (Stenhouse argues that this is a way to emancipate practitioners and improve curriculum and calls it democratizing research – Sten-

house, 1985 in Cochran-Smith, 1999), this is not the only understanding of this research. As noted by Cochran-Smith and associates, practitioner inquiry is sometimes, (but not always) explicitly linked to larger social justice and social equity agendas (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Sometimes these inquiries are not oriented to social critique but are way to adjust the activities to make own practice more effective. However, teachers' emancipation and their actual change through the research process can be viewed as a part of social change, while teachers' knowledge, skills and power could be considered as a society transforming tool (Garman, 1995: 31).

## Key Characteristics of Teacher Research

The basis to define the concept of teacher research are answers to the questions: who does the research, what are the research questions and how are they identified, what research methods and data analysis procedures exist, what is the scope of such research and what is assumed teacher's position for such research. According to the already explained theoretical postulates, teacher research is the research done by the practitioner in their work context to resolve certain problems encountered/observed in the practice, compare theoretical findings and perception of practice, deliberate on and understand their work and their way of understanding. This leads to the changes in practice (in the classroom but also socially) and to the professional development which requires teachers' autonomy and contributes to the emancipation and professionalization of the teacher vocation.

The key characteristics of teacher research mentioned in the literature are that they are:

- Systematic and intentional
- Reflective and self-critical
- Voluntary
- Ethical
- Contextual
- Cooperative
- Public.

*Systematicity and intentionality* are teacher research characteristics mentioned by many relevant authors from the beginning of this concept development till today (Stenhouse, 1975, in Pešić, 1998; Stenhouse, 1985; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Mohr et al., 2004). These characteristics can help to distinguish between what teacher research is and what it is not.

They can make the distinction between the knowledge gained through the teacher research and *lore* and craft knowledge which are teacher knowledge gained through the spontaneous observations and teachers' accounts on practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).<sup>6</sup> Teacher research is planned and uses intentional and systematic ways of gathering and recording information, documenting and analysing data about the practice.

*Reflectivity* is an essential part of teacher research because the teachers are those who identify problems in their practice, share and compare perspectives among themselves, reconsider their own opinions and activities, evaluate the practice and the research itself. We may say that the reflectivity is another name for this kind of reconsideration and evaluation. The techniques helping teachers to organize research are also the techniques for systematic gathering of information and reflecting on the practice, like for example: field notes, research journals, memos, collaborative logs, group critical reflection and discussion (Check and Schutt, 2012).<sup>7</sup>

*Self-criticism* is closely related to reflectivity because reflecting is not any kind of thinking but critical reconsideration. This characteristic is underlined by authors who have contributed the most to the origin and development of this concept – L. Stenhouse i M. Cochran-Smith (Stenhouse, 1975, in Pešić, 1998; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994). The necessity of the teachers' self-critical approach is obvious if we are aware that the research is undertaken out of need to identify and solve the problems in the practice, in order to change and develop the practice, and also if we keep in mind that one of the footholds for this research is critical pedagogy.

Open reconsideration of own assumptions and beliefs may cause discomfort and vulnerability. Therefore, the teacher alone must make a decision to do the research, which makes *voluntarism* an important characteristic of teacher research (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Mohr et al., 2004). Besides, it will be impossible to force anybody to identify the problems in their practice and to do the honest self-critical reconsideration. It should be kept in mind that such research will be done by those teachers who feel confident to do so and who work in a supportive environment. This is corroborated by the postulates regarding the emancipating role of such research for the teachers. The analyses of somehow obligatory or compul-

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6 Such kind of data gathering can lead to the insight into practice or become the source of prejudice. They can be relevant for research if a teacher decide to change *lore* into a research question and investigate it.

7 Some authors make the difference between reflective practice and teacher research (Zeuli, 1992; Zeuli & Tiezzi, 1993, in Vujisić-Živković, 2007 ). Here, the view of reflection is very narrow: as thinking about own practice and not as an attempt to reconsider, understand and develop own practice by viewing it in the regard to the entire (socio-political) context.

sory teacher research have shown that this can be disruptive factor. For instance, those kinds of researches were the ones given as tasks to student teachers during their initial teacher education. If the research is done with a feeling that it is an imposed requirement or that it is done because of external control or gaining short term interest, the chances that this will contribute to the teachers' development in a proper way are very slim (Cochran-Smith et al, 2009, Stančić, Radulović, Perišić, 2012). Cochran-Smith and associates believe that such situation distanced the researcher from the teacher research purpose and "encouraged a procedural understanding of inquiry", thus they compare such research with "studying for an exam" (Cochran Smith et al, 2009:23).

*Ethical* characteristic of this research ensues from the fact that the researched problems are always value loaded and that the education requires respect for the basic human values which must not be violated by such research. Teacher researchers must follow in principle the same ethical practices as other educational researchers, meaning that all participants in research must be treated with fairness and respect (Check and Schutt, 2012). The fact that the researchers themselves are the participants in the issue researched may facilitate respect for some ethical principles (for example, those related to attitudes to the teacher). However, this requires a particular attention concerning the confidentiality of information regarding the other participants in educational process (pupils, parents). Due to the specific power relations in the classroom and school, teacher has to be particularly careful not to abuse the data obtained during research when analysing them with the colleagues and the others and in introducing the changes in the practice (Mohr, et al. 2004).

Teachers research are always *contextual* because the teachers research are based on the assumption that those who work in particular contexts have knowledge about both what the problems are and how to solve those problems within that particular context. This kind of research enables to get detailed information from "inside" (because they are done by the participants) and enable teacher researcher to compare the information on actual practice with his/her own intentions, reactions, decisions, and interpretations (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Contextuality means that the researcher attempts to take into account the entire context in which s/he does research, to pay attention to it during the research, to develop and reconsider his/her assumptions within the context and to discover the relations within the context (Mohr et al., 2004). Contextuality also means that findings of teacher research are meant to be used within the context in which they were developed (Lytle and Cochran-Smith, 1994). It does not necessarily mean that these findings are not relevant for other context (quite the contrary) but underlines the fact that the purpose of this research is not generalisation.

*Social nature and cooperation* in teachers' research underlines the necessity of collaboration and the others' perspective to better understand findings and get self-insights. Group discussions and joint data analysis are the methods facilitating achievement of this goal. Therefore, teacher researchers often research together with other researchers, such as other teachers and practitioners, university-based researchers, teacher educators; their teacher colleagues or with their own students.

Teacher research is *public*. M. Cochran –Smith points out that the practitioner inquiry makes the work of teaching and learning public and open to the critique of a larger community (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009:5). M. Mohr highlights this characteristic of teacher research by saying that teachers, when they report on their research, participate in a public discourse (Mohr et al., 2004) and thus contribute to the creation and development of this discourse. This characteristic also indicates both need and opportunity for teachers to exchange their research experiences, present and publish their work at the professional conferences and in professional journals thus making their findings available to the others. Teacher research can “generates both *local knowledge* developed and used by teachers for themselves and their immediate communities as well as *public knowledge* useful to the larger school and university communities, making the teacher research knowledge public knowledge” (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994:30).

In addition to the characteristics of teacher research described above, there is one more element defining them which can be taken as both teacher research characteristic and the precondition for such research. This is the particular research attitude of teacher researcher. According to Cochran–Smith and Lytle, the special stance of teacher to the research and his/her practice is of crucial importance for this kind of research. They define teacher research as “inquiry as stance”, as opposed to “inquiry as project” (Cochran–Smith and Lytle, 2009). Teacher research is more than occasional, separated participation in the projects added to the regular work, which requires additional time and assumes that teacher undertakes some research at a certain limited period of time (Cochran–Smith and Lytle, 2009, Curwood, 2011). Contrary to this, teachers research stance assumes his/her continuous and consistent approach to the practice ensuing from the way in which s/he conceptualises practice, his/her role in it, the way of building knowledge on the practice and leading the practice. Teacher research cannot be separated from daily professional activities.<sup>8</sup> Teacher's entire professional work becomes both the field of his/her research through which s/he builds understanding of the practice (theory)

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8 Similar message is sent by many practitioners and theoreticians interested in teacher research. It is present in this paper motto and in the title of the publication of M.Cochran-Smith and S.L.Lytle from 2009.

and the field of his/her professional development. Such stance cannot be imposed on anybody. To develop research stance and educate teachers as researchers, without sending the message that research are individual isolated activities added to the other teachers' activities, is a serious challenge for the professional education and development of teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

## What are the Characteristics of the Quality Teacher Research

Besides accounts on the teacher research, there is also a literature on the research of the practitioners' research, their role and scope. One of such research has been done by M.Cochran-Smith and associates. They have tried to identify what distinguishes the successful research from the less quality ones.<sup>9</sup> From the perspective of this paper, besides identifying the characteristics of the quality research to understand the essence of teacher research and the guiding principles for translating this concept into the practice, it is also very important how the quality of teacher research is understood, that is, what are the criteria to assess researches as more or less quality. In this research, criterion was based on how much has the research helped the teachers' researchers (in this case future teachers) to understand the pupils' learning, get insight into their practice and ideas for change.

Having analysed a number of the research in practice, the authors have identified three groups of characteristics that distinguishes the quality of research of teachers and future teachers:

- Type of the initial research question
- A way in which researcher conceptualises students' learning
- A way in which researcher understands nature of the inquiry process (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Research questions are different and can stem from different sources: direct communication with pupils, teachers' reflective notes, scientific research that were inspiring for the researcher. Although any of those sources may be the beginning of the quality research, according to Cochran-Smith and associates, the findings show that the stronger inquiry is embedded within larger theoretical frameworks related to teaching and learning. More precisely, these are the researches stemming from incongruence

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9 This is research on process and results of the teacher education program (involving researches done by student teachers) carried out by a group of higher education teachers from Boston College (Cochran-Smith & all, 2009).

between theory and practice or the ones that starts from the problem in practice but integrate experience, beliefs, and theories into a conceptual framework. The existence of such broader framework which some authors call “curricular vision” (Zumwalt, 1989, in Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) or theoretical vision (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) is the feature of quality research. Such framework links individual problem with understanding of pupils and school and classroom context. It means that the quality teacher research is not reduced to identifying individual techniques – recipes for the short term solution of a problem in a given situation – but also covers the response to the questions what are the sources of problem and why. Starting from such question, teacher researcher discovers elements for understanding and change of practice and clarification of links between his/her beliefs, observations, and theoretical perspective.

The way in which teacher conceptualized and assessed learning and what they counted as evidence of students’ learning determines his/her selection of information important for learning and teaching which s/he will gather. According to Cochran-Smith and associates’ findings, the quality teacher research is characterised by focusing on the pupils’ learning as the final result, thus to the flexible understanding of teaching paying attention to the different levels of learning. Such research will gather various data from different sources: survey, analysis of class questions and comments, student work samples, classroom observations, and journal entries.

The way in which researcher understands the nature of the inquiry process is another characteristic of research influencing how much the researcher will learn from research. Quality research are done by teachers who see the inquiry as constant searching and reconsideration, as “repeated, almost unending process of asking questions, looking carefully at the data of practice, altering practice based on new insights and ideas, asking new questions, and so on” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009:19). For them, reconsideration and research are “integral and ongoing part of decision making in teaching”, that is, integral part of teaching itself (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

## Instead of Conclusion: Orientation for Action

As already underlined, teacher research is not a rarity today. However, it still does not mean that they are widely accepted as a way of teacher’s work. Although teacher research is not equally present in all parts of the world and in all education systems, there is an overall opinion that they are insufficiently present in practice. Regarding Serbian education practice, such researches are an exemption. Having in mind that encouraging,



developing and implementing teacher research in practice assumes facing dilemmas, solving problems, avoiding and overcoming possible deviations, we shall try to present several key findings on the teacher research ensuing from the above discussion, which, in our opinion, may be a kind of landmark and assistance in this process:

Teacher research assumes that the teachers – practitioners are also researchers who in the research process represent both sources of knowledge, learners and researchers (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009). Understanding teaching process and activities in the school, getting insight into own practice, developing ideas for change and professional development are unavoidable consequences of such research. Practical work is lead by research through which teachers learn, that is develop professionally, therefore boundaries between practice, research and professional development are erased.

Teacher research assumes teacher research stance, that is, a particular attitude of teacher to the practice and to the research. This stance calls for the specific teacher's identity based on the understanding that research is inseparable part of the practical work and takes place in the continuity with the practice. This identity also means that the competent teacher identifies problems, looks for the solutions and learns from teaching. Such stance cannot be imposed externally and the lack of teacher's autonomy and bureaucratisation of his/her professional work are counterproductive.

Teacher research is a process whose integral parts are critical reconsideration, understanding and change of practice. The change can happen in different areas – change of practitioners' understandings, change on micro, mezzo or macro level of practice. Changes on different levels are inter-connected, even inseparable, thus the real professional development process in a way represents a process of institutional and social changes. Critique and change are inherent to this kind of research. Therefore, they do not deal only with the question "how" but also with "what" and "why" questions.

Teacher research may start from different research questions that may arise from the observations in daily practice or the perception of incongruence between practical and theoretical knowledge. Many authors insist on exploring the problems that lead to raising the awareness of and change of unjust social relations in education. However, the most important is that the research question is relevant for the researcher and perceived by him/her as such.

Teacher research can differ in the methods of data gathering and processing. Although there are many kinds of teacher research (from self-exploration to the action research), they are always systematic monitoring, analysis and social action.

Taking teacher researcher role and establishing the education system in which teacher research is not an exemption is not an easy endeavour. This requires engagement of all actors – from education policy makers, teacher educators at universities and those involved into teachers' continuous professional development, to school principles, professional associates and the teachers in schools. This calls for much more than introducing small changes based on the new findings or popular ideas – it assumes a new identity of teaching profession and a serious cultural change.

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