

On the necessity of intertwining ‘knowledge in practice’ in action research

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The aim of this article is to clarify the ontology of knowledge, and to point out methodological implications hereof for action research aimed at action researchers’ and practitioners’ co-creation of knowledge. The article is motivated by the observation that action research literature tends to either unwittingly subsume all forms of knowledge under propositional knowledge, or alternatively to differentiate knowledge forms to the point of non-relatedness. Knowledge is analysed as an action-oriented perspective: ‘knowledge in practice’, consisting of a holistic unity of personal experience, practical knowing, and propositional knowledge. The analysis points out a serious quality issue: Intertwining of practitioner and researcher ‘knowledge in practice’ is necessary to allow adequate development and evaluation of action research projects. Three paradigmatic forms of collaboration are considered: ‘division of labour’, ‘mutual apprenticeship’, and ‘co-operative inquiry’. ‘Mutual apprenticeship’ is argued to meet the quality issue best.

Key words: knowledge in practice, action research, co-inquiry, quality, tacit knowledge methodology, epistemology

Vignette

Here we sit again: My fellow action researcher and I together with the three primary participants from the company, i.e. the two IT experts teaching the course that our project focuses on, and a representative from the human resource department. The project is about developing and implementing an e-