

*How Can I Improve My Contribution to
Practitioner Research in Teacher Education?
a Response to Jean Rudduck*

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Educational research by university academics has failed to provide a research base for professional practice. Practitioner research seems to be providing a more promising way forward. An influential group of academics which includes Jean Rudduck, Wilf Carr and Stephen Kemmis (1986) have argued powerfully that teachers should research their own practice. Taking Jean Rudduck's (1989) paper in this Journal on 'Practitioner research and programmes of initial teacher education' as an example, I want to argue that the logical form of their criticism is getting in the way of a creative response to the problems of practitioner research. Taking my own practice as Chair of Governors as an example I will try to show an alternative, dialectical form of presentation. I will then extend the form of the argument from the individual researcher into school and LEA contexts to make a case for the creation of a General Education Council to enhance research-based professionalism in education.

Jean Rudduck has made a major contribution to the development of teacher research in local, national and international contexts. Whilst I support many of her ideas I want to improve my own contribution to this form of research by focusing on what I see as limitations in the form and content of her arguments. I will then propose a way of overcoming the limitations. I will be suggesting that the central limitation in the article on practitioner research in initial teacher education is the omission of evidence which could show the students' reflections on their own practices and which could substantiate her claims to educational knowledge in relation to the programmes of initial teacher education in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield.

Here are the points of agreement. I agree with the crucial need for Higher Education to work with new and experienced teachers in ways that are intellectually challenging as well as relevant to practice. I agree that some form of reflective-based research, or, more ambitiously, critical action research, is an appropriate medium. I also agree with her point that there is a danger in the present climate of conflating the role of Higher Education in initial teacher training and that of the teacher recruitment crisis. I agree that we should recognise the strengths of current practice

in teacher education programmes and that we should think constructively about ways of dealing, in the short term and in the long term, with the problems that lie behind the crisis in recruitment.

In this article I will not only attempt to show a recognition of such strengths, but will also point to the locations in which adequate evidence for these strengths of current practice in teacher education are being produced. In thinking constructively about the crisis of teacher recruitment I will draw attention to a number of collaborative enquiries undertaken between teachers, schools, higher education and an LEA. I will be suggesting that such enquiries if supported through the creation of a General Education Council, would do much to embody the forms of professionalism which would help to convince new recruits to enter the profession.

It may be that Rudduck is correct that there is still a case to be made for approaches to teacher education which are based on ideas such as the reflective practitioner, action research, the teacher as researcher, critical action research, action enquiry etc. My own view is that the major paradigm shift towards this view took place in the early eighties. What I think we should now be looking for from practitioner researchers is the evidence to show that a more appropriate form of educational theory is emerging and being tested from the base of this research (McNiff, 1988).

In other words I think creative academics will be finding ways of exploring their own practitioner research and supporting other practitioner researchers in speaking for themselves as they show the ways in which they are trying to improve the quality of education with their pupils or students. Working from this perspective makes me critical of the writings of Pollard & Tann (1987) on *Reflective Teaching in the Primary School* on the grounds that their text contains no examples from the pupils of reflective primary teachers. Similarly when Wilf Carr (1989) writes about *Understanding Quality in Teaching* he does so without drawing on any examples from reflections from his own students which could show the meaning of quality in his own teaching. Clem Adelman (1989) talks of the practical ethic taking priority over methodology without showing what his practical ethic looks like in his own educational practice. The upsurge of interest in practitioner research has led to a large number of texts produced largely by academics who do not show themselves engaged in their own practitioner research. This is not to criticise the important contributions each of the above researchers has made to the development of the teacher researcher movement. It is to criticise the omission of research on this practice. I am criticising the work of these educational researchers in the same sense that Whitty (1986) has criticised the work of American and Australian sociologists on the politics and sociology of education.

Yet, if the prescriptions of these writers are not to remain purely rhetorical, there is an urgent need for them to engage in an active exploration of the implications of their work among the political constituencies in whose interests it is supposedly being carried out.

The major part of Jean Rudduck's paper is spent arguing the need for something which my experience of teacher education courses (Bath University, Bristol Polytechnic, Bath College of Higher Education, Kingston Polytechnic, Sheffield Polytechnic and Bristol University), has convinced me that the principles and practice of practitioner research have been accepted for a number of years. Discussions with other external examiners from institutions of Higher Education around the country

have convinced me that there is no need to carry on arguing for something which is now widely accepted. However, I do believe that there is a need for those academics who have been arguing for this position for so long to show how they have translated their arguments into their own practice.

As I have said, whilst I have no difficulty in understanding or accepting the arguments put forward by Jean Rudduck I believe they are limited because she does not show herself examining her own practice as a practitioner researcher. This limitation becomes apparent in the last section of the paper on 'Introducing student teachers to reflection and enquiry/research'. It was at this point that I expected an academic who has over the past twenty years, made the case for practitioner research in teacher education to show what her own practitioner research looked like as she tried to improve the quality of programmes of initial teacher education.

Part of the reason for the omission may stem from Rudduck's use of 'we' rather than 'I' in relation to her practical concerns. When 'we' is used authentically it may be experienced as a celebration by two or more people of a feeling of solidarity and communion or it may be used falsely to imply a non-existent acceptance of a viewpoint by another individual. When used in the latter sense it can give a spurious feeling of collaboration. I have no reason to believe that the 'we' used by Rudduck is not accepted by her students and/or colleagues. Unfortunately I have no evidence from any source about the validity of her use of 'we', not least from her students. My reason for stressing the importance of including one's own 'I' in practitioner research is because I believe it changes the logic of the discourse at the point where the individual experiences her or his existence as a living contradiction. Critical discourse invariably follows the law of contradiction which eliminates contradictions from 'rational' theories. The inclusion of 'I', as a living contradiction in theoretical accounts does, I believe, help to establish a dialectic in which creative and critical episodes of thought and action can alternate and interact (Whitehead, 1985a).

In addition to these opportunities we are told that tutors will, according to their own confidence and commitment, model reflection-on-action in relation to their own everyday work with their students. We are also told that all tutors involved in the initial training of teachers are themselves engaged in school-based or school-focused research projects and that,

Our programme will continue to build its coherence around the idea of the reflective practitioner because we believe that a capacity for reflection offers teachers a means of sustaining the excitement of teaching and allows them to continue to learn in co-operative but self-critical company.

Given the plethora of references to the work of other academics when making her case for the need for practitioner research, the absence of any contribution from students or tutors about the programme 'we' have opted to introduce, is all the more striking. Is it that the students who are being introduced to practitioner research at Sheffield University don't have anything to say? I would have thought that the best evidence for the claims being made about any practitioner researcher programme would be presented by the practitioners themselves in their own voices, as adult members of our society about to enter our profession.

If Jean Rudduck's 'I' is embodied in a practitioner researcher programme does she have any evidence that anything she has done has contributed to the systematic, reflective educational development of any student teacher? It is this evidence I

would like to see reported in this Journal together with an explication of the criteria she uses to characterise the 'educational' development of her students.

Before asking for this evidence I did check that it was not provided in other articles. I looked at the paper on 'Encouraging the spirit of enquiry in initial teacher education' (Rudduck & Wellington, 1989) to see if the fuller account of the students' enquiries would produce some evidence from the students concerning their enquiries. It did not. I examined the papers by Lucas (1988a,b,c) for the detailed account of the ways in which one tutor sustains reflection-on-action as the core of his PGCE programme. I could find no evidence of any reflection-on-action being sustained by any student in the programme designed to sustain reflection-on-action.

I am not saying that what is being claimed is false. My point is that there is insufficient evidence being produced to convince a mildly critical reader of the validity of the claims being made. The lack of evidence produced by academics in Higher Education on their effectiveness in promoting practitioner research leads me to ask whether we should be looking to teacher researchers to produce the evidence on their effectiveness in supporting practitioner research with student teachers. For example, McIntyre (1988) has been promoting a design for a teacher education curriculum from research and theory on teacher knowledge which involves practising teachers as mentors. McIntyre tells us that,

... as interns' confidence and competence develops during the year, the emphasis should shift towards more wide-ranging and more individualised investigations of teaching, with interns beginning to articulate the kinds of teachers they want to be, to investigate ways of realising these aspirations, and to acquire the abilities needed to evaluate their own teaching.

Some three years after the initiation of this programme I cannot find any evidence produced by the academics or interns at the Oxford University Department of Educational Studies, which demonstrates that these shifts are taking place.

Having criticised academics for not making public their practitioner research I believe that I should give examples of the kind of evidence I am seeking in relation to my own practice. As a University Academic I am encouraged, through the University Statutes, to play an active part in civic life. As part of my professional responsibility I have accepted nomination to the Governing Body of a secondary school in Bath and for the past eight years have been elected Chair of Governors. During that time I have encouraged the development of an action research approach to professional development in the school and in the county of Avon. When I think of my own practice in teacher education I am conscious of holding a view concerning the nature of an educative relationship which requires my own students and colleagues to speak on their own behalf when I am making a claim concerning my professional practice as a teacher educator. In other words I judge my own effectiveness in teacher education by the extent to which my students and colleagues voluntarily acknowledge that ideas from my research and teaching are integrated within the sense they make of their own practice. I also judge the quality of my educative relationships in terms of the extent to which the ideas of others are subjected to critical scrutiny within the discourse.

The kind of evidence I have in mind is that provided by the Acting Head of the school. The evidence below supports my enquiry as a governor into the question, 'how do I improve my contribution to the educational management of the school?.'

In judging my activities I will focus on the values and evidence related to rationality and democracy.

My research into the nature of rational responses to questions of the form, 'How do I improve the quality of my professional practice?' (Whitehead, 1985b) has convinced me that such responses can have the form of an action research cycle in which one states what it is that one wishes to improve, imagines ways of improving it, construct an action plan (which contains details of the evidence one needs to collect to evaluate the effectiveness of one's practice), evaluates and modifies one's questions, and plans, in the light of evaluation. I am thus committed to an action-research based approach to professional development (Whitehead, 1989a).

I thus relate my attempts to improve my contribution to the educational management of a school to activities which are designed to encourage this approach to professional development within the school. From a position where I was part of a management structure supporting forms of professional development which did not incorporate the above view of rationality, I have moved to a position which supported this view in the way described below.

I have been helped in this movement by Hamilton (1990) and by the publication in March 1990 of Avon LEA's INSET booklet on 'You and Your Professional Development'. This booklet shows the Authority's commitment to providing the majority of its INSET support through an action-research approach to professional development,

In future the majority of LEA provided INSET will be directly linked to what goes on in your school and classroom. On a typical in-service programme you will spend two or three days away from school accompanied whenever possible by a colleague from the same school. You will be given the opportunity to reflect on your teaching and to identify the areas you want to develop. You will receive support in working out a plan to try out your ideas back in your school and classroom. Time for you to work with your colleagues to carry out your plans and record the results will be provided in the school. After a period of time you will get together again with members of your initial group for another day away from school. On this day you will review your progress, exchange experiences and make further plans for development. This process forms part of an action-research approach to professional development

The following extracts from a paper from the Acting Head of Culverhay School to the Senior Management Team 5/3/90 show clearly the integration of an action-research approach into the School's policy for staff development for 1990-91.

We have for a long time at Culverhay been very concerned about an INSET Policy which requires teachers to LEAVE their classes with a supply teacher, often with no expertise in the subject area, and for understandable reasons without the same commitment to the progress of the pupils.

The advantage to the School of teachers engaged in this form of INSET is also questionable, although we have tried to reduce the problems of "cascading" by having a "reporting back" form, which is then circulated to the relevant members of staff.

From the LEA draft Staff Development Policy, it is clear that INSET should now be much more CLASSROOM based, and resources should be allocated to support teachers as they carry out their work. Several Culver-

hay Staff have been involved in such INSET/STAFF DEVELOPMENT over the last few years, and the most recent example was the STRICT initiative (Supporting Teacher Research Into Classroom Teaching).

The paper continues with a definition of action research which follows the pattern:

1. The teacher identifies or is presented with a problem, and chooses a colleague to work with to help find a solution. Ideally it would be nice if colleagues were able to choose the subject of the investigation. In reality, the identified needs of the pupils through the TVEE Project will need to be addressed, and this is one way in which it can be done. An example might be, 'How can I bring the "thrust" concerning Economic and Political Awareness into the teaching of this particular topic?', or, 'How can I approach this topic in a manner which more actively involves the pupils?'

Our commitment to the following TVEE "thrusts" in 1990-91 will necessitate some work in the following areas:

- (a) Teaching and Learning Styles
- (b) Progression 14-19
- (c) Equal Opportunities
- (d) Economic and Political Awareness
- (e) Information Technology
- (f) Careers Education

2. The teacher works with the colleague both inside and outside the classroom, with the aim of devising an approach which will improve the quality of education provided.

This may involve looking at the manner in which the lessons are taught, e.g. whether Audio Visual Aids or IT could be used effectively to enhance the learning, or if there is something to be gained by producing suitable resource materials.

3. The lesson is taught, and information collected as the class proceeds which will highlight whether or not the approach is a successful one.

A record of the class could be recorded on video by one of the teachers, and/or through other more traditional methods such as the use of questionnaires. The latter would be composed after discussion between the teacher and his support colleague.

4. Following the class, the lesson is assessed by the two teachers.

Questions asked will concern whether the approach was successful or not, and more importantly how could it be improved?

5. The next stage requires a new improved approach to the topic to be devised, building on the experience gained from the research.

Thus the cycle of events can be continued, with both colleagues benefitting professionally from the experience, and the quality of the classroom teaching hopefully improving as a result. (5/3/90).

The following extracts from a paper from the Acting Head of all members of staff on 20/4/90 clearly shows our shared commitment to the democratic principle of staff selecting their own staff development tutor.

"We have been asked by the LEA to appoint a Staff Development Tutor.

This position should be assessed annually. The role/qualities of this person are outlined below:

1. The Staff Development Tutor (SDT) will be required to help staff decide on which aspects of their classroom work they wish to develop through Action Research.
2. The SDT, to be effective, needs to be accepted by his or her colleagues as equal partners. He or she needs to be able to work alongside teachers in an open and supportive way... The Chair of Governors and I are both happy to see the Staff select and appoint a SDT for 1990-91.

Thus my claim to be improving my contribution to the educational management of Culverhay School can be checked against the evidence of the integration of an action research approach to professional development in the school's policy and practices. This claim is grounded in my view of the rationality of action research as an approach to improving the quality of education with teachers and pupils. My claim can also be checked against the support I am giving to the extension of democratic practices in the workplace as exemplified by the democratic process of staff selection of their own Staff Development Tutor.

I now want to extend my enquiry from the work of one practitioner researcher into the institutional contexts of schools and an LEA to argue the case for an national initiative to support such research-based professionalism in education (Lomax, 1986; Whitehead, 1989a,b). What I have in mind is the creation of a General Education Council which will embody the professional values and forms of INSET accreditation developed by Avon LEA and the two Wiltshire Schools, Greendown and Wootton Bassett, in collaboration with the School of Education of the University of Bath. Teachers in the two schools have developed their own school-based research groups for continuing teacher education with the support of Bath University School of Education and with registration fees from Wiltshire LEA and the schools' budgets. Local teachers from these and other schools have already had their action enquiries accredited for MEd, MPhil and PhD enquiries. An increasing number of teachers are registering for advanced Certificates and Diplomas by action enquiry.

Avon LEA has adopted a policy of supporting an action research approach to professional development. This policy is set out in their excellent booklet 'You and Your Professional Development' (Avon, 1990a). As a result of this policy some 80 advisory teachers and some 400 staff development tutors drawn from every primary and secondary school in the county have participated in action research INSET programmes in collaboration with staff from Bath University, Bath College or Higher Education, Cheltenham and Gloucestershire College of Higher Education and Bristol Polytechnic.

The action research cycle is embodied in the LEA's documentation for the Institutional Development Plans for all schools. The Avon publication,, 'Professional Development Opportunities' (Avon LEA, 1990b) offers a comprehensive set of INSET opportunities grounded in an action-research based view of teacher professionalism. Four members of the Avon Educational Management Board, Pauline Monaghan, Chris Saville, Graham Badman and Fred Ward, have been particularly influential in this development.

Teachers in the Wootton Bassett Action Research Group have produced their own booklet on Professional Development and Collaborative Action Research (Eames, 1989). They show how the approach to their own professional development

is related to the quality of their professional development and the quality of pupils' learning. PGCE students on teaching practice have written their own accounts of the influence of practitioner research on their thinking and practice. Kevin Eames is coordinating this group and has produced his own justification for an action research approach to professional development (Eames, 1989). The Head of Wootton Bassett School has supported the integration of practitioner research within each faculty of this comprehensive school and the school's policy document on curriculum development shows how an action research approach to staff and curriculum development can become an integral part of a school's development (DES, 1989).

The Action Research Group at Greendown School, Swindon, was the first school-based research group in the country to explore the potential of accredited action research programmes for staff development. The Head is a member of the group and one of the teacher researchers is conducting his PhD enquiry into the process of forming and sustaining a school-based research group for improvement in the quality of pupils' learning. A report on this work will be presented at the 1990 Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association and reported in *Research Intelligence*.

I believe that we should be building research-based professionalism in education on such LEA and school initiatives. Yet, with the exception of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, we have no national, autonomous, professional organisation which could support such initiatives and help to raise the professional status of teaching with a national system of accreditation for initial and continuing teacher education. Doesn't our profession need such an autonomous body not only to accredit teacher education but also to regulate the content of the curriculum and the examination and assessment procedures in our schools?

Whilst I believe the intellectual case for research-based professionalism has been won, the political case has still to be fought. The establishment of a General Education Council for accrediting a research-based approach to teacher education and for regulating the content of the curriculum, examinations and assessment procedures in the country's schools and colleges needs to be given a high priority in the Political Parties' Manifestos.

The establishment of a General Education Council with the powers to determine teacher accreditation, curricula and examinations would do much to restore the lost sense of pride, social status and professional well being in teaching. What is needed is a clear set of policy guidelines to be included in the election manifestos of the next government. The Labour Party is already committed to establishing a General Teaching Council when in Government. The purposes, constitution, operation and funding of such a Council needs to be defined as a matter of urgency. I have argued, from existing cases of research-based professional development at individual, school and LEA level for the creation of a General Education Council to enhance the national standing of such initiatives so that teachers, advisers and lecturers can feel that we belong to the profession of education.

It may be that readers of this *Educational Journal* do not see the necessity of engaging in such direct political activities as part of their professional development. I believe it to be part of our professional responsibility. (Whitehead, 1990).

I will finish with some questions and assumptions about our shared existence as living contradictions in the hope that they will help to take our enquiries forward. I believe that you, like me, are experiencing tension at work because you are not fully

living your educational values in your practice. I believe that the profession needs your case study as you show how you are trying to resolve this tension. If you are not already doing so why don't you write up and publicly share your own practitioner research as you try to resolve this tension by exploring what it means to you as you try to live these values more fully in your own educational practice? I am moved to ask this question by the following conversation between Giles Deleuze and Michel Foucault and by the responses below of a school leaver to a teacher/researcher gathering data for the Scottish Educational Data Archive. Giles Deleuze summarises my own conviction that academics who have so successfully made the case for practitioner research through the power of their criticism, should now make a creative response in their own research and show what they are doing in their educative relationships to promote the capacities of their students to speak on their own behalf.

You were the first to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others. We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this 'theoretical' conversion — to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf. (Foucault, 1980)

The following quote from a Scottish school leaver hits at the heart of the matter, I do think that practitioner researchers should now be showing, in the voices of their students, how they are helping to meet their educational needs.

I think you should try more to help us . . . instead of just talking a lot of rubbish all the time to us. Saying you's will help but you's don't. And I think you's have got a cheek asking me to fill this in after all you's should have come and told us what to do for the best instead of asking kids lots of things to help other people. (Gow & Macpherson, 1980)

In the spirit of dialectics I will finish with a question which may help to take practitioner research forward. Can you (and I) present the evidence, in forms such as Westminster Studies or the British Educational Research Association, which shows that your practitioner research is meeting your own educational needs and/or those of your pupils and students?

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