

**Title:**                   **Supporting Practitioner Research: some practical and philosophical problems**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

- Discuss and debate the concept of “evidence-base”
- Explore notions of evidence based practice in students’ school based research projects
- Explore the concept of Learning Outcomes and their specification

#### **Session Outline**

Students on MA Education Programmes are required to undertake a module in Research Methods, prior to Dissertation. Recent debates on methodology (for example, Carr, 2005, Bridges, 2006) suggest that this concept is epistemologically as well as practically problematic for both tutors and students. Agendas such as that of Coe, Fitz-Gibbon and Tymms, 2000) suggest that “the ‘gold-standard’ of evidence is taken to be multiple replications of small scale, randomised controlled trials (RCT) of feasible interventions in real-life settings.” (Coe, Fitz-Gibbon and Tymms, 2000:2)

The DfES CPD Strategy (2001) expects teachers to engage in high quality CPD, which is integrated with performance management and school improvement. School improvement is currently a centrally defined concept, and practitioner research as part of CPD activities should inform practice and contribute to policy decisions.

A dilemma arises here for tutors and students. Given that evidence-based practice arises from practitioner research (rather than research **on** practitioners and practice), teachers may feel compelled to produce work within the RCT framework and yet find this directly oppositional, practically and philosophically to the reflective practice promoted in Masters Programmes. If as Carr (2005) suggests, the notion of any appropriate methodology can be challenged, and action research is a form of praxis, or practical philosophy, then the fundamental function of such research is “to keep the conversation going” (Carr, 2005)

If ‘theory and practice’ are seen as ‘mutually constitutive and dialectically related.’ (Carr, 1986, p183), the problem in constructing research projects, is one constructing that dialectic. Hammersley (2001) suggests that the purpose of such practical philosophy is “not producing knowledge but rather with determining what is the right course of action in particular situations”. The problem for tutors and students in CPD research programmes, is how best to resolve the tensions between the competing standpoints of RCTs and Reflective practice.

#### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

Paper presentation: 15/20 minutes

Remainder of session guided discussion facilitated by a series of key questions posed

## References

- Bridges (2006) The disciplines and discipline of educational research, PESGB Seminar paper, 2006
- Carr, W (2005) The idea of methodology in action research School of Education, paper [presented at CARN Conference 2005]
- Carr, W. (1986) 'Theories of Theory and Practice', in *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1986
- Coe, R., Fitz-Gibbon, C and Tymms, P (2002) *Promoting Evidence-Based Education: The Role of Practitioners*, Round table discussion, BERA 2002
- Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research* London: Sage Publications
- Department for Education and Skills, (DfES) (2001) *Learning and teaching: A strategy for professional development* London DfES
- Pring, R. (2000) *Philosophy of Educational Research*, London, Continuum.