

How to study teachers' working consciousness in a changing society and with a view on changing educational reform agendas?

– **Commentary on the study of Uli Bracher** (*Kritische Sozialforschung und ihr Adressat – Zwei Wege, Lehrerbewusstsein zu untersuchen*. Frankfurt am Main/New York 1978)

Introduction

This commentary note summarises the epistemological background thinking and the related methodological groundwork that has been documented in the dissertation of Uli Bracher in 1978. The study explored the relations between critical social research and its counterparts (in German: *Adressaten*) from the perspective of social epistemics and from the perspective of research methodology. The study sought to reconstruct the core structures of the working consciousness of German teachers in the context of changing society (in general) and in the context of emerging (and controversial) educational reform agendas.

In many respects it could be easy to ignore the study that never gained lot of publicity at its time. Since the late 1970s the epistemological, methodological and domain-specific debates have taken further steps. Yet, given the merits of later research work, it is worthwhile to consider the epistemological and methodological actuality of the key features of the study:

- a) The study raises the issue, how *'theory of society'* can be **related to empirical research** and to the social orientations of the counterparts of research (i.e. research subjects and users of knowledge). In this context the study doesn't postulate a primacy of research regarding knowledge enrichment but emphasises the importance of mutual awareness.
- b) The study raises the issue, how *social-scientific knowledge elements* can be **incorporated into** the counterparts' (i.e. teachers') *professional consciousness*. In this respect the study doesn't postulate the ownership of researchers regarding 'appropriate' use of such knowledge elements. Instead, the study emphasises the need to get mutual awareness of each others' actor positions and points of view.
- c) The study raises the issue, how the *educational actors' social orientations* (and also the related social-scientific knowledge elements) can **promote or restrict** the implementation of *educational reforms*. In this the study doesn't pre-define the role of researchers as 'observers', 'advisers' or 'change agents' (vis-à-vis the counterparts). Instead, the study emphasises the need to promote critical dialogue on the strategic options that are available for different parties involved and for dialogue-based critical knowledge development.

In the light of the above it appears to me that the later research has been characterised by compartmentalisation between schools of thought and areas of expertise. On the one hand the work with theory of society has been overshadowed by 'discourses' that distance themselves from empirical research and from the perspective of comprehensive frameworks. On the other hand the co-existence of different schools of thought (in social sciences) and respectively different methodological approaches (in social research) has become an accepted social fact. However, this has led to the disappearance of epistemological and methodological debates between diverse approaches (and related interests on knowledge enrichment). Parallel to this, the interest in critical reflection on the contribution of social research to social practice and to reform agendas has become more research-centred and the user-perspective has faded away.

1. The epistemological and methodological background

Before making detailed remarks on the study of Bracher or on the general approach of the TUP project it is worthwhile to characterise the background debates that were essential for the study and for the TUP project as an intellectual milieu. Below, a brief summary is given on the main options in the epistemological and methodological debates of that time. Then, an explanatory remark is given on the position of the TUP project in those debates.

1.1. Basic epistemological approaches and their strategic implications

The epistemological and methodological background of study of Bracher and of the TUP project can be characterised as a long-lasting debate between different schools of thought and respectively different strategic implications for social research. In a nutshell the leading ideas and the related implications can be summarised in the following way:

- **Positivistic ideas** (*'Naturwissenschaftliche Leitideen'*) on social research insisted on developing social sciences and research designs on the basis of epistemological and methodological models that were shaped for natural sciences. Thus, the task of research was to test hypotheses that were based on theoretical constructs. The outcomes of research were to be formulated as generalised findings (based on hypotheses) or as statements that falsify or relativise the prior hypotheses. Therefore, the collection of research information from the target groups served the purpose of producing controlled data to be processed with the help of standardised research instruments.
- **Hermeneutic ideas** (*'Kulturwissenschaftliche Leitideen'*) on social research were shaped with reference to studies on languages, literature and culturally specific meaning structures. Thus, the task of research was to reconstruct common patterns and meaning structures that characterise cultural entities, to clarify the terms of belonging to such entities and to explore the prospects for interpreting culturally specific meanings in the context of intercultural communication. Consequently, the outcomes of research were to be formulated as reconstructed meaning structures, as specific interpretations on particular cultural phenomena and as interpretative frameworks between selected cultures. Therefore, the collection of research information served the purpose of encoding cultural meanings within a given structure and decoding the specific meaning structures for other cultures (and their respectively different meaning structures).
- **Ideas based on critical theory of society** (*'Gesellschaftstheoretische Leitideen'*) were shaped with an idea to relate specific social phenomena to the core structures of societal reproduction and to related constellations of societal dependencies and interests. Thus, the task of research was to analyse the contradictions between objective dependency structures, subjective reflections on social phenomena and the ideological formats via which the social actors interpreted their possibilities to participate (and gain influence on their social condition). Consequently, the outcomes of research were to be formulated as critical analyses in which the theoretically supported analyses were to be contrasted with popular assumptions and empirical findings.

1.2. Views on 'theory of society', research disciplines and growth of knowledge

The above presented main approaches play a role in the discussion on the status of 'theories of society' vis-à-vis particular theories of specialised research disciplines and vis-à-vis theoretical constructs that may have an interdisciplinary character. These tensions are related to different epistemological views on the structure of disciplines and on growth of knowledge

in social research. In this respect the different positions and key messages of the debates of that time can be summarised briefly in the following way:

- ***Positivistic approaches*** emphasised the role of theories as research instruments and direct confrontation of theoretical constructs with empirical evidence. In this respect the role of theories was primarily seen as explanatory frameworks for domain-specific phenomena. In this respect ‘theories of society’ were seen as aggregative constructs – theories of ‘social systems’ that could be related to empirical phenomena. Consequently, the theories were expected to be operationalised for empirical studies and for related processes of inquiry and investigation. Growth of knowledge was expected to happen via accumulation of domain-specific results and via contestation, critique and revision of domain-specific knowledge bases.
- ***Positions based on Critical theory*** (or academic Marxism) differed radically from the above by giving the overarching ‘theory of society’ a status of its own. The ‘theory of society’ was considered as a layer that presents and analyses the fundamental structures of societal reproduction, the underlying assumptions of the functioning social consciousness and the socially valid conventions that mediate societal processes in the given societies. Therefore, this layer of theoretical work was not subject to direct confrontation with empirical evidence. Instead, this layer of theoretical knowledge could be enriched the specialised disciplines by making them aware of the culturally and societally specific concepts and modes of thinking that they are using. However, representatives of such approaches tended to remain in the sphere of theoretical work by re-examining and reinterpreting classical sources and in critique of contemporary social research with the help of classical theoretical sources.
- ***Interdisciplinary research approaches*** tended to look for intermediate solutions – both regarding the architecture of knowledge structures and regarding the use of theoretical concepts as support for empirical research. Such approaches tended to see a role for general theories of society (that could not be adequately tested by confrontation with piecemeal evidence). Yet, such approaches argued for a legitimate interface between general theories of society and empirical social research. Some scholars introduced the concept ‘middle range theories’ but remained unspecific about the knowledge processes that were linked to such theories. Other scholars emphasised the networked character of ‘theories of society’ (on the one hand) and of the more specific theoretical constructs in social sciences and social research (on the other hand). Thus, the legitimate role for interdisciplinary work was to specify nodal points in which the more general background theories and the more specific theoretical constructs may nurture each other. However, such positions tended to remain unspecific on their views on growth of knowledge and on the renewal and revision of existing knowledge bases.

1.3. The emergence of the Frankfurt approach on epistemology, ‘theory of society’ and research methodologies

The above presented overviews on the main positions on epistemological and methodological debates on the foundations of social research in the 1970s are based on nutshell summaries and on ideal type characterisations. However, given these starting points, they provide a general background for assessing the specific merits of the work with epistemological, methodological and research strategic issues at the University of Frankfurt in the mid-1970s. In the light of the above it is appropriate to make some remarks on the epistemological, theoretical and methodological contributions that prepared the grounds for the research strategic and empirical work in the TUP project.

Below some exemplary contributions of Professor Jürgen Ritsert and his research groups are highlighted as preparatory steps towards the work in the TUP project. The purpose of these remarks is to make transparent different frontiers of comparative, connective, re-interpretative and re-conceptualising work that was taken into account in the TUP project:

- Comparative studies on different approaches in classical social theory and in modern social research (e.g. the anthology *“Wissenschaftsanalyse als Ideologiekritik”*, and the collectively produced textbook *“Denkweisen und Grundbegriffe der Soziologie”* (1978));
- Reconstruction of core structures and methodological implications of the work of Marx and his interpreters for proper academic re-examination (e.g. the monographs *“Probleme Polit-ökonomischer Theoriebildung”* (1974) and *“Denken und Gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit: Arbeitsbuch zum klassischen Ideologiebegriff”* (1977));
- Cross-cultural studies on the methodological foundation of social research in different schools of thought (e.g. the anthologies *“Gründe und Ursachen des gesellschaftlichen Handelns”* (1975) and *“Zur Wissenschaftslogik einer Kritischen Soziologie”* (1976));
- Empirical piloting with qualitative content analysis and subsequent methodological development work (e.g. the introductory work *“Inhaltsanalyse als Ideologiekritik”* (1971) and the methodological work *“Theorie, Interesse, Forschungsstrategien”* (1978).
- Didactic analyses on the development of curricula and teaching-learning processes related to social sciences (e.g. the jointly produced papers *“Zur Diskussion um “Praxisbezug” und “Berufsperspektive” in den Sozialwissenschaften”* and *“Kommunikationsprobleme in soziologischen Seminaren”* in the anthology *“Sozialwissenschaften: Studiensituation, Vermittlungsprobleme, Praxisbezug”* (1976)).

2. Discussion on strategic options for studying teachers’ working consciousness

In the light of the above it is possible to take a closer look how Bracher discussed the main options for studying teachers’ working consciousness. In the first phase he examined the methodological grounds of the hitherto predominant positivistic approaches to studying teachers’ attitudes. Then, he examined the grounds for developing alternative research approaches. Below, a brief summary is presented on these explorations and on the main options for studying teachers’ working consciousness.

2.1. Examination of positivistic approaches for studying teachers’ consciousness

In the first chapter of his study Bracher made an effort to reconstruct the positivist approaches to studying social consciousness by using standardised methodologies for measuring social attitudes. The logic of research that is followed by such mainstream approaches and the related methodological contradictions can be summarised in the following way:

- a) The purpose of research is to explain teachers’ social consciousness with the help of generalised theories or theoretical constructs. Thus, the research design is to be based on theory-derived hypotheses that are operationalised for empirical inquiry. This preparatory phase is research-immanent and based on research-internal criteria. In this context the imperative of obtaining theory-based generalised knowledge overrules the possible advantages of analysing different modes of social orientation among the target groups.
- b) The collection of information follows the principle of obtaining controlled data that can be processed by standardised methods and presented as generalised results. Therefore, the empirical inquiry should use methods and instruments that are homogeneous (i.e. similar in all cases) and replicable (i.e. can be repeated in further cases). In this respect the research dialogue between researchers and target groups is to be restricted to controlled

questions and responses. In this context the possibilities to capture issues that are genuinely relevant for the ‘functioning consciousness’ of the teachers is dependent on the sophisticated guesses of researchers, not on the success of dialogue during the inquiry.

- c) The results of the study are expected to have scientific value as generalisations that refer to a large population and as confirmation, relativisation or falsification of the research hypotheses. Thus, the target groups (i.e. teachers) appear to the researchers merely as respondents that represent research populations, whose social consciousness is to be explained with the help of research artefacts. This information is to be handed over to the academic audiences (and to non-specified users). In this context researchers are not expected to contribute to the professional development of teachers (or to analyse related knowledge processes).

The above presented remarks summarise very briefly the lengthy critical examination that Bracher undertook in the first chapter of the study. In this context it is worthwhile that he examined the epistemological and methodological standard works as well as contemporary empirical studies and their findings on teachers’ consciousness – e.g. the critical reviews on the studies of Koch (from the year 1972) and Hopf (from the year 1974).

2.2. Alternative options: Theory-based explorative studies that use dialogical inquiries

The above summarised examination of the positivistic approaches led to the question, how alternative approaches can link theoretical analyses to more open and explorative research designs. From this perspective Bracher drew attention to the role of the concept ‘societal interests’ as an intermediate category. This intermediate function can be demonstrated with the following aspects of ‘societal interests’:

- a) ***Societal foundation of interests*** (“*Gesellschaftliche Interessenlagen*”): From the theoretical point of view this aspect challenges the researchers to consider the objective dependency structures of target groups and their possibilities to take an active role in society. From the perspective of empirical inquiry this aspect challenges the researchers to examine, in what kind of contexts the research subjects perceive themselves as social actors and how they define the potential scope for their social/societal involvement.
- b) ***Prioritisation of interests*** (“*Gesellschaftliche Interessenorientierung*”): From the theoretical point of view this aspect challenges the researchers to consider the possible range of individual and collective priorities that they can opt for when defining their interests. From the perspective of empirical inquiry this aspect challenges the researchers to develop the research dialogue in such a way that they get an adequate picture of the individual and collective priorities that are represented among the target group.
- c) ***Strategies for pursuing interests*** (“*Gesellschaftliche Durchsetzung von Interessen*”): From the theoretical point of view this aspect challenges the researchers to consider the possible impulses for social participation and related restrictive factors that may lead to resignation and retreat. From the perspective of empirical inquiry this aspect challenges the researchers to consider how they can get authentic information on the strategic reasoning of the individual respondents and on general positions among the target group.

The category of ‘societal interests’ paves that way for more complex research designs than the positivistic approaches. In the alternative approaches the role of underlying theories is to be adjusted to research strategies that seek to reconstruct the key features of the actual working orientations of teachers. Likewise, the role of research instruments is to enable a research dialogue that makes it possible to specify the societal orientation of the respondents.

3. Theory of society, contextual orientation and research strategy

The above presented analysis requires further interpretation on the possibility to link to each other *theory-based studies*, *dialogue-based inquiries* and *shared knowledge development*. In this respect there is a need to find answers to the following questions:

- 1) How can the theoretical work with ‘theory of society’ and particular domain-specific theories prepare the grounds for empirical research work? Or – in reverse terms: what is the value of the theoretical groundwork if it doesn’t lead to direct confrontation with empirical evidence?
- 2) How can the theoretical groundwork refrain from imposing pre-defined hypotheses and constructs to which the respondents can only react? Or – in reverse terms: what is the scientific value of inquiries that are not completely in the control of researchers?
- 3) How can a coherent research strategy be based on reflective theoretical groundwork and on relatively open approaches to empirical inquiry? Or – in reverse terms: what kind of logic of research can specify the links between the seemingly contradictory elements?

Examination of these questions provides insights into the research strategy ‘twofold operationalisation’ (“*doppelte Operationalisierung*”) that was developed in the TUP project and to some extent implemented in the study of Bracher.

3.1. ‘Theory of society’, intermediate concepts and empirical research

Regarding the importance of the theoretical groundwork (in the development of the research design) the position of the TUP project can be summarised in the following way:

- i) ‘Theory of society’ can make transparent the **core structures** (“*Kernstrukturen*”) of the social reproduction in a given society. In this respect such an overview can be characterised as a conceptual **core image** (“*Kernvorstellung*”) on the said society.
- ii) ‘Theory of society’ can provide a **core shape** (“*Kerngestalt*”) for the systematisation of specific theoretical concepts that refer to the given society. In this context the epistemological function of the ‘theory of society’ can be characterised as that of a ‘central reference’ of a broader theoretical framework. Interdisciplinary concepts may contain specific **representations** of the core images and articulate them for domain-specific theories and studies. This articulation with the help of interdisciplinary concepts can be characterised as **concretisation of the central reference** (“*Konkretisierung des Zentralreferenz*”) of the underlying framework.
- iii) The reverse process of relating domain-specific concepts and theories to implicit or un-reflected core images and central references can be characterised as **construction of theoretical context for demonstrative interpretation** (“*Konstruktion einer theoretischen Verweisungszusammenhang*”). This requires the support of domain-specific research.
- iv) The relative importance of **interdisciplinary concepts** can be seen in their function as **nodal points in networked knowledge development** either from the perspective of *concretisation of the central reference* or from the perspective of *constructing a context for demonstrative interpretation*.
- v) Altogether the relative importance of theoretical groundwork lies in the epistemological and methodological preparation of the research design for alternative perspectives of inquiry and for mutually complementing steps of concretisation and operationalisation.

3.2. ‘Theory of society’, ‘theories of practice’ and research dialogue

Taking into account the task to analyse the working consciousness of teachers it is essential to consider, how ‘theory of society’ can provide heuristic support for a research approach that seeks to document and analyse authentic expressions of social consciousness. Regarding the conceptual interpretation of such encounter the epistemological position and the related methodological approach of the TUP project can be characterised in the following way:

- i) ‘Theory of society’ provides a conceptual **foundation for societal orientation** (“*Gesellschaftliche Grundorientierung*”) inasmuch as it makes transparent one’s societal boundary conditions, the scope for one’s participation and the prospects for influencing social changes. However, in the actual consciousness or real individual subject these aspects appear as context-specific and subject representations, as **contextual images** (“*Kontextvorstellungen*”) of the respective social actors.
- ii) ‘Theory of society’ is not a context-neutral construct inasmuch as it articulates the boundary conditions for social dependency structures and for social involvement. From this perspective the ‘theory of society’ is characterised by ‘paradigmatic actor positions’ and by **strategic implications of theories**. However, domain-specific research on the ‘functioning consciousness’ of teachers has to take into account the filtering and counter-steering factors that have an impact on the development of ‘paradigmatic orientations’.
- iii) Empirical research on the working consciousness of teachers can make use **theoretically reconstructed (hypothetical) contextual images**. However, in order to analyse the relative importance of diverse orientations it has to be based on the **construction of empirical and practical contexts for demonstrative interpretation** (“*empirisch-praktische Verweisungszusammenhänge*”). However, this kind of research has to be based on relatively open inquiries and on theoretical re-conceptualisation of the findings.
- iv) The role of **interdisciplinary concepts** and ‘**nodal points**’ in the study on teachers’ consciousness can be related to ‘**social participation**’ (and to the interpretation of the role of policy processes, of the contribution of professional communities and of social stakeholders’ involvement).
- v) Altogether the importance of theoretical groundwork lies in the possibility to keep the research design open for anticipated *and* unexpected findings and intervening factors.

3.3. ‘Twofold operationalisation’ as an integrative research strategy

In the light of the above it is understandable the TUP project tried to develop an integrative research strategy that was based on theoretical work (that supported empirical investigations) and dialogical inquiry (that nurtured theoretical re-processing of the material). In this respect the TUP project characterised its research strategy as ‘twofold operationalisation’ (“*doppelte Operationalisierung*”). Below a rough outline is presented on the mutually complementing stages of operationalisation:

The first phase of operationalisation refers preparatory distinctions that are made between the researchers’ pre-conceptual interpretations (*theoretische Vorverständnis*) and the strategy to conduct the research dialogue with the respondents. In particular this phase requires a distinction between two poles of the research strategy:

- a) **Researchers’ pre-conceptualised interpretations on the research context (and hypotheses on the contextual orientations of the respondents) provide the cornerstones for empirical inquiry** (*Erhebungsdimensionen*). The cornerstones guide the planning of the

interview instrument and related decisions on the kind of orientations to be traced in the dialogue.

- b) Researchers' pre-conceptualised *interpretations on the wider theoretical significance of the contextual orientations* (that are being traced in the inquiry) provide the *cornerstones for reconstructive re-conceptualisation* (*rekonstruktive Auswertungsdimensionen*). These prior interpretations can give a tentative framework for mapping the conceptual characteristics of the actual orientations. However, the notion 'reconstructive' refers to the requirement that that orientations have to be presented firstly by the respondents with reference to their meaning-structures. Only on the basis of this processing can the orientations be re-conceptualised and articulated in terms of theoretical frameworks.

The second phase of operationalisation refers to a phase in which the research design is interpreted for a research dialogue that uses the language (and categories) of the target group. This general requirement has specific implications for the empirical inquiry and for the reconstructive re-conceptualisation:

- a) Regarding the *empirical inquiry*, the research dialogue has to make the prepared questions understandable and open for the authentic meanings and contextual meaning-structures of the respondents. This requires openness for following the impulses that lead to further topics as well as openness for orientations that do not match the pre-conceptualised interpretations of researchers. Yet, even in these cases the research dialogue has to be shaped in such a way that such orientations can be prepared for further re-processing.
- b) Regarding the *reconstructive re-conceptualisation* it is worthwhile to note that the cornerstones and the related categories should *not* be taken as pre-fixed 'operational definitions' under which the empirical information is to be subsumed. At this phase 'operationalisation' requires judgements whether the actual orientations match the pre-conceptualised categories, whether there is a need to introduce complementary *ad hoc* categories or whether the whole set of categories needs to be revised.

Although Bracher uses the metaphor of two 'phases' the relation between the above presented phases is not to be considered as a linear succession of two separate steps. Instead, the distinction is to be considered as analytical and the two variants of operationalisation are to be taken as mutually supporting components of a coherent research strategy.

Bracher illustrates this with **Kaplan's distinction** between empirically traced '**act meanings**' (*Aktsinn*) of respondents (that use their own reference structures) and to theoretically interpreted '**action meanings**' (*Aktionssinn*) that refer to generalised conceptual frameworks. In order to be able to capture the variety of the contextual orientations as 'act meanings' the research strategy has to be kept relatively open. In order to make reflective analyses on the relevance of the contextual orientations as societally influential 'action meanings' the reconstructive frameworks have to be able to re-conceptualise and re-contextualise the empirically traced orientations.

The above presented distinction of Kaplan is useful inasmuch as it draws attention to the aspect of '*scope*' of social orientations (particular vs. general) and to the aspect of '*ownership*' of one's interests (own meaning-structures and preferences vs. theoretically formulated frameworks and categorisations). Yet, from the perspective of studying teachers' *societal* orientations, the distinction doesn't highlight the aspect of '*(implicit) strategies*' in the respondents' social orientations.

4. Specific features of the research design for studying teachers' working consciousness

Below, some specific features of the research design of the study of Bracher is characterised with in order to illustrate the above presented characterisation of 'twofold operationalisation'. As has already been emphasised, the shaping of the research instruments and the related methodological choices are closely related to the strategy of 'twofold operationalisation' and to the related reciprocal relations between theoretical work and empirical inquiry.

4.1. The research questions and the cornerstones for empirical inquiry

The research questions of the study were formulated in the following way (see Bracher 1978, 158; (the italics mine – PK)):

- 1) What kind of connections can be traced between the *objective conditions* and the *subjective interpretations of the situations and contexts* by the teachers?
- 2) Via what kind of *strategic perspectives* can the teachers process their problems and master their (social - PK) condition?
- 3) To what extent are the *subjective interpretations of situations and contexts* and the *strategic perspectives* influenced by theories of society?
- 4) To what extent are the *subjective interpretations of situations and contexts* and the *strategic perspectives* characterised by individually gained social competences?
- 5) What kind of objective (social) problems are the teachers confronting when they introduce new texts in the teaching?

The cornerstones for the empirical inquiry were listed in the basic questionnaire (the basis for the qualitative interviews) as the following headings (see Bracher 1978, 159):

1. The professional situation: Insights into the material living conditions and into the objective situation as teacher
2. Interpretation of the situation and/or the basis for defining one's social interests: The respondent's own verbal characterisation of his/her situation
 - 2a) Educational career/Learning career
 - 2b) Position in the occupational hierarchy
 - 2c) Occupational constraints (material deficits)
 - 2d) Occupational constraints (social conditions for teaching/ learning activities)
 - 2e) Professional constraints (Problems with colleagues and peer groups)
 - 2f) Orientation towards professional development and upgrading
 - 2g) Normative constraints
 - 2h) The organisational context at school
 - 2i) The organised representation of the interests of employees.
3. Strategic orientations or perspectives for taking action
 - 3a) Action plans regarding one's individual problems
 - 3b) Judgements on the effectiveness of eventual strategies.

In this commentary note it is not possible to go into details of the questionnaire. However, it is worthwhile to note that the concretisation of the questions led to several clusters of questions (some of which could be quantified and some presented deliberately as open questions).

4.2. The cornerstones for reconstructive re-conceptualisation

The cornerstones for reconstructive re-conceptualisation have the task to bridge the specific responses to connective themes and to construct the theoretical support structure for the research design (*“forschungsanleitende Theorie”*). In the preparatory analyses the study drew attention to the **contextual images** (*“Kontextvorstellungen”*) as the specific manifestations of social consciousness and as bridging links between assumptions, priorities and strategies. Therefore, the reconstructive re-conceptualisation was based on a framework that provided a transparent overview on different contextual images (see Bracher 1978, 161-164).

Regarding the reconstruction of the contextual images of teachers it is essential to note that the teachers' social and societal orientations link to each other the interpretation of oneself (ego), one's educational counterparts and peers (alter) and the educational system (structure). Also, concerning the teachers social and societal orientations the contextual images can highlight the teachers' social competences and/or social-scientific competences in a different way. Finally, the contextual images can be overshadowed by theoretical or policy-based conceptual motives or they can reflect the pragmatic reasoning of everyday life.

Firstly the framework distinguished a (theoretically) problematic layer of **‘concretistic orientations’** (*“Konkretistische Vorstellungen”*) that relate the teacher only to isolated situations and to simple social systems. The argumentation within such orientations focuses on the isolated actor-subject without linking him/her to the social or societal environment. The lack of bridging concepts makes it questionable whether such orientations can be called *contextual images*.

Secondly the framework distinguished between **different variants of contextual images** that made reference to social systems and processes and/or to the societal environment. Regarding the mode of conceptualisation the framework distinguished between

- 1) **contextual images in a narrower sense** (also called as *‘traditionalist orientations’*) that refer to everyday life experiences and observations when characterising the social context and the societal environment;
- 2) **paradigmatic orientations** that refer to theoretical sources or codified knowledge elements for interpreting the social context and the societal environment *and*
- 3) **totality-related orientations** that refer to comprehensive frameworks or modes of interpretation that relate context-specific views to a wider societal reference structure.

Thirdly the framework distinguishes between different totality-related orientations regarding the mode of conceptualisation and introduces a sub-division between

3a) **paradigmatic and totality-related orientations** that are based on reflective use of comprehensive theoretical concepts as a basis for linking one's context-specific views to a wider societal reference structure *and*

3b) **non-paradigmatic and totality-related orientations** that link context-specific views to some kind of societal frameworks, but in a non-conceptualised way (which may reduce the possibility to use these as a support for analysing context-specific problems).

Fourthly the framework draws attention to the role that is given to

- i) **social competences** that have been acquired via experience and via non-formal learning *as a contrast to*
- ii) **social-scientific competences** that have been acquired via teacher education and via continuing professional development and that refer to utilisation of conceptual knowledge.

4.3. The processing of interview data for reconstructive re-conceptualisation

As has been indicated already, the main part of the empirical material was designed to be collected via controlled-explorative interviews and the interview materials were to be processed via qualitative content analysis.

In this context it is essential to pay attention to the methodological reasoning that was related to the planning of the **communication strategy during the interviews**. For the strategy of 'twofold operationalisation' it was crucial that the empirical enquiry produces authentic expressions of the respondents orientations and that the respondents are encouraged to follow the threads that they themselves find essential for presenting their context-specific views. Equally, it was important that the interviewers did not give tentative views or categories to which the respondents would react (although these may not be representative for their own context-specific reference structures).

In the light of the above some basic methodological rules were formulated for the interviewers regarding

- a) request to interpret slogans (i.e. expressions that have not been clearly related to the context of discussion),
- b) request to clarify the relative importance of certain facts and phenomena (within the contextual orientation of the respondent),
- c) request to clarify the relation between perceived problems and expressed strategies,
- d) possibility to clarify the meaning of the question (without pushing the respondent to any specific direction in formulating his/her answer),
- e) possibility to introduce a new concept into the discussion (by questioning whether the concept could play a role in the respective issue that is difficult to analyse and by questioning the way that the respondent would use it),
- f) advice to elaborate on such motives and issues that appear to be essential for the respondent in the context of different issues,
- g) advice to return to questions and themes that have been covered only partly or have not led to explicit statements,
- h) advice to raise questions on overarching motives or ideas that seem to be central for interpreting a set of issues or problems.

In this context it is essential to note that the TUP project was developing methods for **processing the interview protocols** in order to get a quantified data on *contextual pointers*, *subjective preferences* and *strategic settings* within the interviews. Altogether the project tried to produce the following successive databases that represented different phases of knowledge processing on the basis of the interviews:

Database 1: The written interview protocols (without further processing),

Database 2: The coded interviews that indicate the appearance key features for reconstructive re-conceptualisation,

Database 3: Aggregation of Database 2 with reference to cornerstones for empirical inquiry,

Database 4: Re-conceptualisation of the interview protocol with reference to cornerstones for reconstructive analysis,

Database 5: Monographic reconstruction of some representative interviews.

4.4. Typology for analysing the *localisation, addressing and evaluation of the problems*

In order to process the interview material there is a need for instruments that support the coding the raw data and re-conceptualisation of the knowledge elements. In this respect the TUP project developed a typology for analysing the following aspects of the contextual orientations of teachers:

- 1) Localisation of problems to wider or narrower problem zones,
- 2) Addressing the problems to specific social mechanisms or processes,
- 3) Tendency of the evaluative judgement of the respondent regarding possible societal influence on the problems.

The dimension ‘**Localisation of problems**’ (“*Problemlokalisierung*”) makes transparent to what extent the teachers refer to wider societal environment, to their own institutional context or to their immediate context of work . The distinction between ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ is related to expressions that refer either to general societal/institutional developments or to specific societal/educational actors with specific agendas. The distinction between internal factors refers to experienced situations at work and to the characteristics of professional interaction with peers, parents/stakeholders and pupils.

The dimension ‘**Addressing the problems**’ (“*Problemzurechnung*”) refers to views of respondents on the reasons or causes of the problems. On the one hand this dimension refers to ‘objective’ factors (causalities or situative factors). On the other hand this dimension gives a possibility to relate the problems to specific social processes and related actors (e.g. to the role of pressure groups, (lacking) collegial support and to one’s own personality as possible reason for problems).

The two above mentioned dimensions can be used rather easily as a support for the processing of the interview material. The following matrix demonstrates how the findings can be related to each other via cross-fertilisation and thus provide a basis for contextual mapping.

Table 1: Localisation of problems and addressing the problems (See Bracher 1978, 196-197)

Localisation of problems		External societal environments		Institutional context		Internal factors	
		A. abstract	B. concrete	C. abstract	D. concrete	E. Internal working conditions	F. Internal interaction at work
Res- tric- tions	1. Structural causalities						
	2. Situative disturbances						
Per- sons and groups	3. Social pressures						
	4. Lack of support or lack of competences						
	5. Own personality as reason for problems						

(In the original text Bracher had inserted characteristic elements from the interview material to the respective cells.)

The third dimension “**Tendency of the evaluative judgement**” (“*Tendenz*”) makes transparent to in what ways the respondents expect that eventual societal interventions can have an influence to the problems they have mentioned. In addition this dimension seeks to make transparent the positioning of the teachers vis-à-vis different optional approaches. The categories that were introduced under this dimension were:

- 1) Reform orientation (polarisation between positions *pro reform* vs. *contra reform*),
- 2) Norm orientation (polarisation between positions *pro status quo* vs. *contra status quo*),
- 3) Evaluation of conceptual influences and tendencies (polarisation between *conservative* and *progressive* positions).

It is obvious that the third dimension is not suitable for similar coding and mapping steps as the two first ones. Yet, it completes the methodological concretisation of the bridging concept ‘societal interests’. Altogether, the work with the research instruments in the TUP project and in the study of Bracher demonstrates how an intermediate approach can link the underlying theoretical groundwork to instruments that can be used in an empirical study.

5. The actuality of the study for research on *vocational education and training* (VET)

5.1. What makes the study of Bracher relevant for current VET research?

At this point it is time to end the reflective commentary on the study of Bracher and on the issues that it raised in the mid-1970s. As the introductory statements in the study indicate, the problems with the funding arrangement and practical problems led to the result that project had to be closed before the major part of results were reported. In this situation the study of Bracher is a valuable report on the shaping of the research approach. Yet, in the subsequent intellectual rupture phase (that characterised the development social sciences from the early 1980s onwards) the bridging approach between classical theories and empirical research became less fashionable. Furthermore, the idea to create dialogue between ‘theory of society’ and ‘theories of practice’ appeared less attractive to the ‘post-modern’ sociologists that positioned themselves as external observers and analysts.

Yet, after a considerable time, the study of Bracher and the theoretical groundwork on which it was based can gain new actuality in a specific field of research. Paradoxically, current *research in vocational education and training* (in German “*Berufsbildungsforschung*”, in the following referred to as ‘VET research’) is confronted with similar issues as the study on teachers’ working consciousness tried to deal with in the mid-1970s. Below, some points are made to draw attention to the epistemological, theoretical and methodological actuality of the study of Bracher and of the related groundwork. In particular the following aspects will be highlighted as factors that give the reasoning in the study of Bracher a specific actuality for current German *and* European VET research:

- a) The current German debate on the sustainability of the traditional concept ‘vocational professionalism’ as guiding principle for the development of VET (“*Nachhaltigkeit des Berufsprinzips als Leitidee für Berufsbildungsentwicklung*”);
- b) The current redistribution of policy powers between national, European and organisational levels of policy making,
- c) The current efforts of European cooperation projects and networks to develop trans-cultural knowledge enrichment and promote transfer of innovative concepts across systemic and cultural boundaries.
- d) The current efforts of European research communities to develop core structures for trans-culturally grounded and internationally oriented VET research.

5.2. The idea of vocational professionalism (*Beruflichkeit*) and future scenarios for VET

Firstly, it is worthwhile to note that in Germany there has been a long debate on the sustainability of the traditional principle of vocational professionalism (“Beruflichkeit”) and on the related conventions. Regarding the future scenarios of VET, work-related learning and continuing professional development it is worthwhile to consider how the problems, interests and innovative prospects can be linked to each other as societally embedded core images (*Kernvorstellungen*), as alternative implications (*strategische Implikationen*) and as contexts for empirical & practical demonstration (*empirisch-praktische Verweisungszusammenhänge*). It is worthwhile to note that the German discussion is focusing on a systemic interface area between education and the world of work and that scenarios for modernisation of VET and related learning culture have multiple systemic implications. In this respect it is also essential to note that the future scenarios are related to the professional future of different educational actors (e.g. vocational teachers, in-company trainers, trainers in external training centres).

The conceptual tools of the study of Bracher provide starting points for critical analyses that examine the following questions:

- a) In what ways can the traditional dual system of VET link the relative strengths of school-based and workplace-based learning cultures?
- b) How can dually organised VET provisions be developed as modern dual-collaborative learning environments that broaden the basis of cooperation and incorporate new features into the learning culture?
- c) On what grounds can different stakeholders commit themselves to modernisation of VET on the basis of dual-collaborative teaching-learning environments?
- d) On what grounds can the educational actors (i.e. teachers and trainers consider the modernisation agendas compatible with their interests)?
- e) On what grounds can modernisation agendas of dual-collaborative VET provisions serve as a basis for trans-cultural cooperation and for linking new features to German VET culture?

5.3. The interfaces between organisational, national and European policies

Secondly, it is worthwhile to note that the current debates on the renewal of VET are no longer isolated national phenomena. In the recent years such debates have been overshadowed by changes in industrial policies and by the internationalisation of the labour markets. Therefore, the debates on the future scenarios of VET have been related to a policy climate that is characterised by a redistribution of power structures between national, European and organisational policies. In this respect it is worthwhile to examine whether the leading ideas concerning the development of VET can be related to national VET systems and institutions or whether they can be derived from European meta-frameworks or from globally oriented organisational development concepts. From this perspective the conceptual arsenal that was developed to study teachers’ working consciousness in the midst of the German socio-educational reform era can be re-contextualised for comparative and trans-cultural studies in the context of European integration processes.

The conceptual tools of the study of Bracher provide starting points for critical analyses that examine the following questions:

- a) To what extent are the European policy processes drawing upon the richness of European VET cultures and to what extent are the given policy frameworks narrowing down the options for future VET development?

- b) To what extent are the national/sectoral policies orienting towards broadening the basis of European developmental activities and to what extent are they adjusting themselves to given European frameworks?
- c) To what extent are the European cooperation activities orienting towards broadening and deepening the cooperation between diverse cultures and to what extent are they orienting towards 'Europeanisation' in terms of mutual harmonisation?

5.4. The actuality of the study of Bracher for the European cooperation project TTplus

Thirdly, it is worthwhile to consider the relevance of the above presented study (with a focus on the working consciousness of *teachers*) for a European cooperation project that studies the professional development of *trainers*. With this shift of target group (and taken into account the above presented background debates) it is possible to mention the following factors that make the approach of the Frankfurt study worth revisiting:

- At the level of national VET systems the position of trainers is characterised by systemic and institutional diversity. Therefore, the contextual images may differ considerably.
- At the level of European policy development there is no obvious way to articulate trainers' professional scenarios or competence profiles in terms of European Qualification Framework. In a similar way it is difficult to see a common interest basis for professional community-building throughout Europe.
- At the level of corporate training policies there are different tendencies (e.g. outsourcing, privatisation or dual-collaborative professionalisation) that are linked to diverse contextual factors (e.g. the possibilities to link up with innovation policies, regional development, employment promotion etc.).
- The actual training activities and the professional development prospects of trainers are overshadowed by continuing changes. Therefore, it is uncertain what kind of practical implications different schemes to support the professional development of the trainers can have for their development as trainers or for their alternative career prospects.

Regarding the specific research tasks of the TTplus it is possible to formulate the following points concerning the relevance of the study of Bracher (and the related conceptual tools):

- a) The project TTplus has a specific focus and cannot cover comprehensive debates on the modernisation of VET. Yet, it has to create trans-national transparency on the role that trainers' professional development plays in the modernisation of VET systems and institutions. In particular, there is a need to be specific on debates and tendencies that may lead to major systemic or institutional rearrangements.
- b) The methodology of the project TTplus includes work with educational scenarios and use cases. This requires analyses on the possible concentration or redistribution of training functions in workplace-based training and in dual-collaborative learning environments.
- c) The work with educational scenarios and use cases includes analyses on the readiness to contribute to the renewal of the learning environments. This requires focused analyses on the readiness to work with networked and integrative learning arenas, to use new forms of pedagogic coaching and to provide support for decentralised and self-organised learning.
- d) The work with educational scenarios and use cases requires analyses on the role of trainers as users/developers of ICT- and web-based facilities that promote work-related and vocational learning. This requires focused analyses on the readiness to use/develop overarching learning designs, local applications and to link up with general web services.
- e) Altogether the analyses are expected to contribute to European knowledge on trainers' career models, on the role of curricula (or schemes) for trainers (in their professional development) and on the links of training activities to broader societal innovation agendas. Thus, the work of the TTplus project leads to reconstruction of specific contextual images.

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