RECASTING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS AND RESEARCH IN PLATO'S SHADOW: THE CONTRIBUTION OF HERBERT ALTRICHTER.

JOHN ELLIOTT, EMERITUS PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA UK.

Opening a new book on action research for German speaking teachers.

In 1993 Herbert Altrichter and Peter Gstettner published a paper entitled 'Action-Research: a closed chapter in the history of German science'. In it they develop a pathology of attempts to ground educational action research in a critical social science. They argue that although such a science set out to provide an alternative vision of the relationship between research and everyday life it could not resist contamination by positivistic elements. Action researchers in German speaking countries "were keen on theories, systematic thought, and wanted to get their objectives and ideas right before they were realized in practice." consequently they tended to consist of academics who were given the task of generating theories as a basis for action by teachers in schools and classrooms. Academics and teachers had distinct if complementary roles. Hence, Altrichter and Gstettner contend that German action researchers failed to escape swimming in a Platonic creek.

They contrast this attempt to ground action research in a critical social science with the recent development in Austria of a pragmatic approach to action research developed by Lawrence Stenhouse, myself, and other colleagues in the context of the school-based curriculum reforms underway in England. Such action research was situated in contexts where teachers investigated ways of realizing in their schools the educational aims and values that framed particular curriculum proposals. Altrichter and Gstettner note that "the knowledge action research starts from is personally constructed local knowledge underlying the practitioners' action instead of general knowledge constructed in some discourse of social science." They also note my own view that this image of the teacher as action researcher implies a philosophical pragmatism, which has him or her swimming in an Aristotelean creek.

Three years prior to the 1993 paper Herbert Altrichter and his former colleague Peter Posch had already been working at helping Austrian teachers to swim in this Aristotelean creek. The outcome was a *Practical Introduction to the*

Methods of Action Research, written for Austrian teachers with the title *Lehrer erforschen thren Unterricht*. It was packed with examples of teacher's researching their practice. Three years later a new English language edition (with Bridget Somekh as a third co-author) was published under the title of *Teachers Investigate their Work.* This edition was illustrated with more examples of work undertaken in British schools. These largely drew on action research projects which operated within the pragmatic Stenhousian tradition that stemmed from the Centre for Applied Research in Education at the University of East Anglia. In my view the book is one of the best practical guides to action research from within this tradition ever published.

In the Austrian context publication coincided with increased decentralization of schooling; a context in which schools and teachers were given greater power to initiate curriculum and pedagogical reform. Herbert Altrichter (2020 p.74) depicted this context in the following terms:

"--- the process of 'school modernization, started in the early 1990s with school autonomy policies which were characterized by concepts such as decentralization, deregulation and widening in-school room for maneuver (Marx and Van Ojen, 1993). The main idea was to expand the individual school's scope for action and its right to make decisions, to make it more responsive to the potentials and needs of its environment, which in turn was meant to increase the quality and efficiency of schoolwork."

However, In the UK the publication of the book was foreshadowed by the introduction of a highly prescriptive National Curriculum, following the Education Reform Act of 1987. High in-put control by the state was now increasingly "the name of the game." The pragmatic tradition of 'teachers as researchers' no longer appeared to be an option for school-based curriculum and pedagogical development.

In the Introduction to *Teachers Investigate their Work* Altrichter, Posch and Somekh state how they were strongly influenced by the work of the 'Teacher-Pupil Interaction and the Quality of Learning Project '(TIQL) (1981-83). The project was facilitated by Dave Ebbutt and me towards the end of the school-based curriculum reform movement in the UK and the beginning of stronger input controls. It was funded by the School Curriculum Development

Committee, which bridged the transition between the low input-controlling *Schools Council for Curriculum Reform and Examinations* and the higher input controlling *National Curriculum Council.* The action research was designed to focus on ways teachers could interact with their pupils to improve the quality of their learning. Such quality was seen to be captured by the phrase 'the development of understanding' as an expression of a pedagogical aim. It was here that the past met the future for curriculum reform in the UK.

The school-based curriculum reform movement in the UK was in many respects an attempt to redefine the relationship between the content of the curriculum, pupils as learners and the teacher. The traditional curriculum had consisted of bodies of inert factual knowledge organized around 'school subjects' that are transmitted by teachers to passive learners using established methods of instruction. Most of the curriculum reforms aspired to give pupils a more active and dynamic role as learners by engaging them in the processes of discovery and inquiry which had initially generated the knowledge and insights they were expected to acquire. The reforms also selected knowledge content that pupils could experience as relevant to their everyday lives, some of which transcended and crossed the traditional subject boundaries. Such reforms also cast teachers in a new role; as facilitators of an active learning process of inquiry-based discussion, which often rendered their traditional instructional role, and the tacit professional knowledge which underpinned it, problematic. The reforms can be understood as an attempt to redefine the process of education. As such they highlighted new learning tasks and goals for pupils – 'inquiry learning', 'discovery learning', 'learning with understanding'- that transcended the traditional tasks of 'recognition learning', 'short-term and long-term memory learning'. Whereas the latter pre-specified the kinds of learning outcomes intended in the form of behavioral objectives the former indicated qualities that are intrinsic aspects of the learning process. It was in this context that the pragmatic tradition of 'teachers as researchers 'developed. Between 1967 and 1983 I was associated with three funded action research projects in the UK. The first was Stenhouse's Humanities Curriculum Project (HCP) that focused on teaching controversial issues (see Stenhouse 1968); the second was The Ford Teaching Project (Ford T) that focused on Inquiry/Discovery Teaching (see Elliott 2007); the third was the TIQL Project (Ebbutt & Elliott 1985) that focused on

‘Teaching for Understanding’, and was signaled by Altrichter, Posch and Somekh as especially influential on their action research with teachers and the construction of *Teachers Investigate their Work.* The main features of this project that impressed them were also characteristic features of its predecessors.

“---teacher-researchers investigated what it means to understand a subject or a topic and how pupils' understanding can best be developed through classroom work ------ They investigated this question in their own classrooms, shared their experiences, tried to identify and explain common and contradictory findings, developed and experimented with new teaching strategies, and wrote case studies of their work.” (p. 1).

HCP and the curriculum problem it was designed to address, had provided a context in which Stenhouse with his project team created a scenario for curriculum change that went well beyond the bounds of the project itself. It was generalizable to other curriculum fields and stages of education. At the core of this change scenario were three major interconnected ideas that can be viewed as a general theory of educational change and the role of teachers within it (see Stenhouse 1975 esp. Chs. 7,10 & 2012). These were:
1)That the main aim of education is best conceived as the speculative development of human understanding.

Stenhouse contrasted this view with that of Joseph Ben-David, when Reviewing *Centre’s for Learning* for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. Ben David claimed that “knowledge that can be taught no longer requires investigation, while knowledge that still needs to be investigated cannot yet be taught,” and he proposed that “teaching requires a body of established authoritative knowledge.” For Ben-David only that which has the warrant of certainty can be taught. Such a claim justifies separating the activities of research and teaching.

Stenhouse’s counter claim that “only in the presence of doubt is teaching called for, ---” connects research and teaching in a dynamic relationship as a holistic process. (2012 p.123) Stenhouse’s position explains why he embraced ‘a process model ’of curriculum design and placed ‘discussion ’and ‘inquiry learning ’rather than ‘instruction ’at the core of pedagogical practice (Stenhouse 1975 pp 85-97).

2)That ‘the development of understanding ’is a process that has no fixed endpoints in the form of measurable objectives but has both inherent standards and criteria against which its quality as a learning process can be judged. These imply *principles of procedure* governing the role of the teacher as a facilitator of such learning. Stenhouse called a curriculum planned in this light *The Process Model*, in contrast to the rapidly emerging *Objectives Model*. He argued that the latter distorted the nature of knowledge-content as an object of speculative thinking.

3.That the judgements of teachers as facilitators of an educationally worthwhile process of learning should be disciplined by their own collaborative and iterative cycles of reflection and action, which became known as ‘action research’.

These three linked ideas render ‘teacher research’ a kind of *practical philosophy* in which both ends and means become joint objects of reflection. Aristotle called this type of reasoning *phronesis* and distinguished it from both instrumental reason (*techne*) and theoretical reason (*episteme*).

Teachers Investigate their Work consisted of a comprehensive and coherent practical guide to the conduct of *phronesis* as an iterative or cyclical pedagogical practice, from ‘clarifying starting points ’to ‘making teachers knowledge public’ via activities of ‘data collection’, ‘data analyses’, and ‘developing/jmplementing action strategies’. It pulls together a diversity of reflective activities deployed by educational action research projects that formed the pragmatic tradition of action research established by Stenhouse and his associates at the Centre for Applied Research in Education at the UEA. At the time of writing Altrichter, Posch and Somekh were not only able to draw on the TIQL project and other English examples, but also on more recent work in Austria stimulated by reciprocal visits and exchanges of personnel that included practitioners from schools as well as academic facilitators (see Posch 2003).

Altrichter, Posch and Somekh’s practical guide to action research in education endorsed the use of the term ‘practical theorizing’ to depict the reflective process. In doing so they are consistent with the way in which the philosophical pragmatism of Dewey (1974) and Rorty (1982, 1991,1999) recontextualized the relationship between theoretical reasoning and practice (see Elliott 2007). The term ‘theory ’is used to denote the often-tacit professional knowledge

base that shapes teachers' actions. In this context 'theorizing' is the activity of reflectively reconstructing that knowledge base. Altrichter et al illustrate for teachers the ways in which the action research process connects the operative with the reflective aspects of practical theorizing. In doing so they are not only making an academic point but helping teachers to position themselves in the research process as developing educational theory by changing their practice. In the process they cite Kurt Lewin's view that the best way to understand the world is to try to change it.

Another strand in Altrichter, Posch and Somekh's guide is the centrality of 'good conversation' in the model of practical reasoning that underpins it. Hence *diary keeping method* is depicted as a 'conversation with oneself', *analytic discourse method* as a 'structured conversation between a teacher researcher and his or her peers about data from their classroom' and *triangulation* as a 'principle of data gathering from different points of view.'

From a pragmatist point of view Richard Rorty argued (1982, p. 165) that there are no methodological constraints on inquiry, "derived from the nature of objects, or of the mind, or of language". The only constraints are conversational ones, "those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow inquirers". He argues that those of us engaged in inquiry "have a duty to talk to each other, to converse about our views of the world, to use persuasion rather than force, to be tolerant of diversity, to be contritely 'fallibist '(1991, p. 67). Such are the democratic virtues, Rorty argued, which John Dewey associated with the scientific method.

Interestingly and unusually Altrichter, Posch and Somekh do not depict their work as a *methodology* of action research, but simply as an account of methods. The former term is only used once briefly, to refer to *reflections about methods*. It is clearly written with pragmatic intent for teachers rather than an academic audience, many of whom still persistently confuse discourses about research methods with the requirement to justify such methods as a means of securing access to essential truths that are free from mental bias.

The influential TIQL project, cited by Altrichter, Posch and Somekh as exemplary of teacher action research, had operated at a point in the UK where the past met the future. With our teachers Dave Ebbutt and I did indeed paddle up an Aristotelian creek but in the ever-darkening shadow of Plato. The shadow of Plato took the form of the increasing dominance of an 'objectives model 'of curriculum planning (*techne*), which Stenhouse anticipated, critiqued, and

offered an alternative to in the form of the ‘process model’. The general use of an ‘objectives model ’of curriculum planning presupposed that school subjects were the major source of established, authoritative knowledge from which objectives could be derived as fixed and measurable endpoints of the learning process, referred to in the current jargon as ‘performance standards‘. From a Stenhousian perspective such performance standards distort the nature of knowledge as an object of speculation and discussion. By implication they corrupt learning as an educational process when pupils are pedagogically manipulated to conform their thinking to the requirements of such epistemic standards; manipulation that is now referred to as ‘teaching to the test’.

In the context of the TIQL project the objectives model began to impact from the start in 1981. In an initial meeting of volunteer participating teachers the teachers presented their pre-understandings of the problems they experienced in *teaching for understanding* within their classrooms. Dave Ebbutt and I had invited a school’s adviser from one of the neighboring Local Education Authorities to observe. She expressed concern about the diversity of understandings of understanding as a concept which were manifested in the teachers' presentations. We were told that we should have defined the *nature of understanding* as a pedagogical aim in advance of the meeting as a context for eliciting teachers views about the problems of ‘teaching for understanding’. Dave Ebbutt and I wanted to set the expectation that the action research process would take the form of phronesis and acknowledge the ends and means of teaching as objects of joint reflection, whereas the schools advisor assumed that the development of pupils ’understanding would converge towards a fixed preconceived endpoint or objective.

<u>From teacher development to school development as a policy focus in Austria.</u>

The TIQL project paddled up an Aristotelean pragmatic creek at a time when the governance of schooling began to foreshadow the Education Reform Act and the National Curriculum over 6 years later. This situation resembled some aspects of what Altrichter (2020 p. 76) depicted as the second phase of the school governance reforms in Austria, which emerged in the mid-90’s. He reported the phase 2 reforms as “slowly moving away from the possible images of a teacher-led or community-led school to a school characterized by managerialism and enterprise.” Here the emphasis was placed on the development of the school as an organization led by school managers. He writes:

“ In this phase, school leaders seemed to emerge as central new actors. ---their role was accentuated according.to the-guiding image of initiative and entrepreneurial managers who can stimulate and control developments with the help of management tools such as development plans and quality evaluation. Thereby, the individual school which had emerged as a new actor in the previous phase was accentuated by the phase 2 reforms ---.”

However, they also point (p.77) that at the policy level there were concerns about system governace that pointed in the direction of more radical change in the future.

“At the same time, there were initial and, at first, very'mild' approaches in various German-spealiing school systems to build up fairly new governance structures. By introducing comparative assessment tasks and proclaiming goals for school improvement the authorities established early elements of external co-ordination by specifying objectives and by output evaluation.“

Such elements – the use of an *objectives model* as an instrument of *external output control* of the suystem - were already evidenced in the UK in the early 1980’s as illustrated above in the account of the difficulties encountered in establishing the TIQL project.

It was in the Austrian context of phase 2 changes that Altrichter’s work understandably became increasingly focused on the conceptual and empirical issues surrounding the development of schools as organizations. How this phase impacted on the ‘teachers as researchers’ movement in Austrian classrooms is not entirely clear to me. What happened to Altrichter and Posch’s seminal work in producing an answer to the question ‘How Can Teachers Improve the Quality of Their Pupil’s Learning?’ What impact did it have, if any, from the mid-90’s on teaching and learning in Austrian classrooms? Posch (2003 pp. 240-245), however, reports on the extent to which the pragmatist account of action research influenced his work with Altrichter on Quality Evaluation in schools for the Austrian Ministry of Education. Quality Evaluation of school development had emerged as an important policy issue during the second phase of the governance reforms in Austria. Altrichter and Posch undertook an international survey of approaches to school evaluation and made recommendations to the ministry as follows:

1. Evaluation should not be separated from development. Just as at the level of the classroom action research involves cycles of reflection and action so at

the level of the school quality evaluation is a cyclical process that combines re

2. Quality development is dependent on professional development. I take this to mean that the development of the school as an organization is not an independent process to professional development of the teaching force.

3. There is no development without challenge. The very concept of an organizational development process, Posch argues, presupposes that there are reasons to change some aspect of the organization. Such reasons may refer to internal development perspectives or problems or external pressures. Such problems and pressures are challenges that call for a practical response.

4. Quality development depends on the participation of all involved in teaching and learning. Although the development of the school as an organization is led by a school leadership team the process must command the active participation and consent of all the stake holders, including students. Quality school development is viewed as a democratic process.

Altrichter and Posch recommended a model of Quality Evaluation that renders it a process of second-order action research aimed at developing organizational structures that enable teachers to collaboratively improve their teaching through action research. These recommendations, I would claim, are underpinned by a theory of the *interactive constitution of organizations*, originally outlined by Giddens (1984) and subsequently applied by myself to the question of the relationship between teaching as a form of action and organizational structures in schools (Elliott 1993). This *theory of structuration* provided Altrichter and Salzgeber (2003) with an original perspective on school development in Austria, which formed the basis of their critiques of both the *rational-contingent* and the *micro-political perspectives* on organizational development in schools. The former views schools as goal oriented, rationally planned, and stable organizations that are dependent on, but not determined by, local variables. As such it is assumed that they can be planned as a blueprint by an elite group of external change agents and easily implemented with a minimum of friction caused by members of the organization. Micro-political perspectives on the other hand suggest "that the notion of schools as rationally planned organizations glosses over very different perceptions by those who work within them" (p.101). Altrichter and Salzgeber (p.101) argue that they characterize organizations like schools in the following terms:

1. As containing diverse goals and unclear areas of influence.
2. A certain image of actions and actors as pursuing their own interests as they try to put their own values into practice.
3. Paying special attention to interactive processes in organizations, which are interpreted as strategic struggles over the definition and structure of the organization.

While acknowledging some aspects of the micro-political perspective, Altrichter and Salzgebber also criticize other aspects. For example, they argue that it:

a) "—is unsatisfactory to interpret any consensus as a form of domination, elimination, pre-emption or covering up of conflict."

b) "--- is right to criticize the taken for granted pre-supposition of stability of organizations---On the other hand, the question arises as to how the relative stability and durability of organizations ---might be conceptualized".

c) "---is right ---to draw attention to the inner life of organizations. In this, however, the external relationships of the organization are sometimes dissolved into the interactions between individual actors ---external contingencies are almost totally faded out";

d) "---is right to focus on political processes of negotiation in organizations. However, its understanding of politics is quite unsatisfactory ---Politics is often seen as the opposite to truth and reason --- The word 'democracy' does not exist."

Altrichter and Salzgeber draw on some case material gathered during a study of 'good schools' (see Altrichter et al 1994) to exemplify an alternative interpretation of the way in which organizational structures are interactively constituted in schools (pp. 202-206). The material was gathered from a junior school that employed a 'free method' of teaching first grade pupils to read and write. The headteacher and some of his staff considered that the use of this method was a major reason for the school's excellent reputation with parents. The staff room in the school was characterized by the intensity of the communication between the teachers and a high degree of coherence in their view of educational aims and methods.

The case material included interviews with an experienced and tenured teacher who was newly appointed to teach at the school. Four days before the

new school year started, she met the headteacher and was given a choice between teaching a grade one and a grade three class. She expressed a preference for teaching grade one pupils, which she had taught many times before in previous schools. However, in opting to teach the grade one class the headteacher advised to teach the 'free method', which she had no experience of, because the parents expected it. She made it clear to the new teacher that she could reject this advice but would then have to teach the grade three class. In a subsequent interview the new teacher admitted to feelings of desperation and doubt regarding her ability to use the child-centered method with the class at such short notice. She was also worried about the workload involved in preparing to teach the child-centered method at such short notice. She would have to rely on studying information about the 'free method' contained in papers and books during the four days before the start of the school year. She talked to the head about the new method, who told her that as an experienced teacher with grade one pupils she thought she would manage it. She was also given teaching material by a teacher who had taught the method many times previously and had an opportunity to meet the other grade one teacher on a weekly basis. Hence, although she lacked experience, she found herself working in a supportive atmosphere. With the help of her grade one teaching colleague and others in the staffroom she soon learned how to use the new method and began to experience many of its benefits. This collaborative ethos helped her to overcome "initial feelings of desperation and doubt." It even came to the point where she refused the headteachers help with presenting the method to a meeting of parents. Altrichter and Salzgeber point out that whereas a micro-political theorist might interpret this refusal as a rejection of external control and "asserting the independent professional self" an alternative interpretation would be that "there is presently a consensus about the advantages of the method amongst the most parties involved (new teacher, head, parents, most staff).

Altrichter and Salzgeber cite offers the interviewer's made to the new teacher to interpret the situation depicted as a conflict of interest between herself and the headteacher, some of the staff and parents, which she was subtly coerced to resolve by adopting the child-centered method of teaching grade one pupils. Such a consensus might then be interpreted as evidence of the way in which organizational structures coercively dominate and constrain the actions of individual teachers in the classroom. The interviewee, however, declined the offer of such a micro-political account of her conduct. Collaboration with her

colleague and the exchange of teaching materials "were thought of very positively and considered to make the work much easier." She did not complain about the extra workload or obligation to adopt a new method of teaching at such short notice, even though its adoption was not initially a matter of inner conviction or based on any "professional right of teachers to use appropriate teaching methods of their own choice". Her refusal to accept the headteachers help at the presentation of the 'free method' to parents suggested that she was willing to take full professional responsibility for the use of the method with their children. Altrichter and Salzgebber depict a situation in which the teacher willingly complied with the headteacher's suggestion and willingly collaborated with fellow teachers in implementing the child-centered method. In doing so a consensual position was achieved within the organization and a conflict situation or power struggle avoided without any evidence of hierarchical control or power coercion becoming apparent.

Although Altrichter and Salzgebber do not use the phrase I would summarize the stance of the new teacher in the school as one of 'creative compliance'. I use the term 'creative' not simply to indicate an absence of power constraints on the new teacher's activity but as a *positive indicator* of her personal professional development and growth in the situation depicted. One might justifiably argue that her creative engagement with the new method of teaching shaped up as a piece of collaborative action research in her classroom. The case of this teacher is an excellent example of Altrichter and Posch's contention that "Quality development is dependent on professional development". Indeed, it exemplifies the duality of the relationship between 'structure' and 'agency' in a democratic process of educational change. For example, by holding the parents evening the new teacher demonstrates to her colleagues and the parents her professional competence and knowledge with respect to the child-centered teaching method but, as Altrichter and Salzgeber point out, at the same time her actions unintentionally reproduce and strengthen the teaching method as a stable characteristic of the school's organizational ethos. In so doing they provide the "building blocks for future actions." In this sense, their analysis of the case material suggests that the quality of professional development activity in the school is an integral part of the development of the school as an organization. This pinpoints the limitations of a *rational contingency model* of school development, in which the organization shapes the actions of its members, but is not in turn shaped by them.

Evidence-based governance as the model of educational change.

Altrichter (2020 pp.77-78) attributes a shift to a third phase of educational change to the political and media debate that greeted the publication of the results of the PISA international comparisons in 2001-2004. These measures of student attainment revealed the relatively poor performance of German and Austrian students in comparison with students from far eastern countries, such as China (Shanghai), Singapore, Japan, and Hong Kong. Governments felt compelled to "show leadership and initiate changes." According to Altrichter three challenges became the centre of attention:

*The need for system-wide equality.

*The question of quality criteria.

*The question of teaching quality.

Altrichter summarizes the policy response to these challenges as follows:

1. Replacing broad learning goals of the system with standardized performance criteria in the form of objectives that can be externally measured.
2. Focusing on teaching methods and student learning outcomes to complement and even replace teachers' perspectives on teaching and learning.
3. Increasing standardization and externalization of school evaluation methods to complement the use of a school's own methods of self-evaluation and provide comparable performance data to feedback to major stakeholders.
4. Comparable results and inspection reports were meant to stimulate stakeholders to attend to important aspects of a school's work and to influence professional decisions towards it.

For Altrichter the overall aim of these reforms is "to tie the co-ordination of actions both at the overall systemic as well as at the individual school level more strongly to the student achievement results prescribed by the central level." As such they embrace a *rational contingency model* of externally driven change, which is based on the belief that system change can be perfected by exercising *strong control over ouputs.*

Although Altrichter asks the question “What Next?“ he cannot find any sign of a movement beyond this evidence-based phase within the school system in Austria and Germany. Does this signify a historical final recasting of the relationship between teachers and research? The rational contingency model of educational change totally externalises this relationship. Performance data is fed back into the system to influence and shape teaching but its collection and anaysis is a form of external research, and by virtue of this is deemed ‘scientific.‘ Such a recasting of the relationship between teaching and research differs significantly from the what is proposed in Altrichter et al’s *Teachers Investigate Their Work*.

In the UK a similar educational change scenario emerged in the wake of a National Curriculum that combined strong external control over curriculum inputs and learning outputs. Over time, in the face of public criticism about the prescriptive nature of the school curriculum as a source of students‘ disaffection from learning, curriculum content was increasingly shaped by policies directed at controlling the arrangements in schools for measuring and testing learning outcomes. Such policies tied students‘ motivation as learners to improving their chances of getting good grades in tests and exams. However, more recently the UK Chief Inspector of Schools, Amanda Spellman, announced that school inspections will focus less on exam results and more on “how children learn“ (see Daily Mail October 12, 2018). She argued that too much pressure to produce top grades has led to some schools simply ‘teaching to the test‘ rather than offering a “broad, rich and deep curriculum.“ The new focus it was claimed would bring the inspectorate’s conversation with schools back to the substance of students‘ learning and treating teachers as experts in their field, not just ‘data managers.‘ What appeared to be on offer was a new organizational scenario for educational change, in the form of a conversation between the major stakeholders in education and the teaching profession about the nature of learning and the curriculum. Such a scenario would create a new oraganizational space for a Stenhousian Process Model of Curriculum Developmen and the professional development of ‘Teachers as Researchers‘ in classrooms conceived as laboratories. For Stenhouse (1975) the *process model* renders the nature of learning a topic of conversation in society and a focus for teacher research that contributes to the quality of that conversation.

In the UK the corona virus pandemic has prevented any new highly defined change scenario emerging in the UK. It's influence in Austria and Germany may also have prevented early signs of another phase of educational change clearly emerging. However, I would argue that the final section of Altichter's 2020 report, on the impact of the evidence-based approach, does actually signal a need to radically recast the relationship between teachers and research in German speaking countries in ways he and Posch envisaged in *Teachers Investigate Their Work.*

<u>The limitations of evidence-based governance in the school system and the need to further recast the relationship between teachers and research in Austrian schools.</u>

According to Altrichter the performance standard policy in Austria was aimed at supporting the development of five logical processes in the educational system (2020 pp.84-87). These were:

1. Improving student competencies and contributing to greater equity and justice in the educational system.

2. Setting expectations by formulating professional standards in the language of measurable competencies.

3.Stimulating improvements in the system through data feedback to major stake-holders.

4. Aligning actions with performance standards by supplying support structures in the form of diagnostic tests, information, webpages, inservice training etc.

5. Coordinating teachers in-school activity; their lesson planning, teaching and assessment activities and in the alignment of different processes in the subject groups and the whole school.

A three-year longitudinal research project, using qualitative interview data, documentary analysis and comparative analysis of six cases studied how teachers in primary and secondary schools coped with the performance standards policy. Altrichter reported the major findings as follows (pp.87-90):

*With a few exceptions the policy stimulated largely superficial changes in the teaching of the subjects tested. These were largely dependent on

teachers existing levels of professional knowledge and aimed at ‘teaching for the test‘.

* Changes in teaching were mainly initiated by individual subject teachers or though informal conversations between them. The influence of ‘coordinating structures and initiatives‘ appears to have been largely absent.

* The idea that performance standards might contribute to greater justice and equity in education was not influential in shaping practice.

*Align by support appears to have had some impact particularly with respect to the provision of teaching materials and dignostic tests.

*There was no evidence that coordinated efforts of school and teaching improvement were “stimulated by data feedback and put into practice.“

*The teachers scepticism towards external testing decreased, perhaps when the teachers realised that the publication of test rests was not accompanied by punitive actions towards them.

Altrichter claims that the impact of the performance standards policy in Austrian schools appears to have been weak and uneven while meeting with little resistance from teachers and even school leaders (pp.87-90). His implementation study suggests it has simply been viewed in the school system as one innovation on a par with other adopted school-based reforms. In the light of such tolerance Altrichter suggests that the advocates of the performance standards policy might be reassured that staff did not complain about the performance standards policy interferring with the implementation of other reforms in their school. His research makes it clear that this is because the performance standards policy is being implemented in a form that leaves the prevailing culture of individualism in schools largely undisturbed. In this respect the policy has clearly failed to generate structures of coordination at the systemic and school levels that are capable of systematically recasting in schools the relationship between teaching and scientific evidence in the form intended.

Interestingly Altrichter offers explanations for the failure of performance standards policies (pp.80-84). They are, he claims, based on unclear and simplistic concepts of their application and use. It is assumed that teachers and schools will find the policies attractive if they build on rationality and scientific evidence and will want to improve if they become aware of a gap between their performance and results. However, the ‘evidence-based

improvement‘ strategy implies a contradictory attitude towards the educational professionalism of teachers. On the one hand the performance standards approach seeks to replace teachers previous ways of making judgements and decisions. Evidence-based development, Altrichter argues, can be understood as “a normatively charged promise.“ It does not elevate all educational decisions beyond matters of opinion and political inclination (discourses of value) “into a sphere of evidence-saturated rationality that no longer allows for reasonable contradiction while garanteeing predictable results.“ He contends that“the 'use' of data and research knowledge for practical decisions and actions is a cognitively and socially challenging process“. Such a process “must be based on the close observation and assessment of specific local conditions which itself cannot be rendered obsolete by the production of better general knowledge. In explaining the failure of the evidence-based governance model of school improvement Altrichter is offering his readers an alternative concepton of rationality and evidence-based development in the field of educaton. It is one in which practical reasoning in education is a disciplined and collaborative social practice shaped by democratic principles and informed by evidence gathered by practitioners in the process of developing their practice in the light of their educational aims and values. Altrichtrichter, Posch and Somekh‘s earlier practical guide to teachers‘ research embodies and embraces such a concept of practical reason.

In spite of the increasingly apparent weaknesses of the Performance Standards policies they, as Altrichter points out, persist in Austria and also I would add in the UK. He, as suggested earlier, also claims that “no well-developed alternative paradigm has succeeded in attracting equal attention within educational politics“.

What next?

Altrichter refers to the PISA shock that stimulated the evidence-based approach in Austria and Germany. The phenomenon also extended to the UK and USA with a similar political response. However, the shock waves emitted fron international comparison data came even earlier with the 1997 TIMMS testing programme. It led to TIMMS sponsored classroom research by Stigler and Hiebert (1999), which sought to explain differences in measured educational attainment between students in Japan and the US and Germany. In the process they discovered a form of cordinated evidence-

based practice at systemic and primary school levels called *Lesson Study;* a school-based research process for securing consistency between learning goals and teaching methods. It is recognizable as sharing many features of the pragmatic tradition of educational action research associated with the work of Stenhouse and myself in the UK and Alrtichter and Posch in Austria. One of the main differences is the way Lesson Study in Japan is embedded in strong iterative structures of coordinated action within and between schools and between schools and external agencies like text book publishers. Strong indicators of such structures are the joint planning of iterative cycles of lessons in professional communities of teachers, peer observation of lessons, and an analytic evidence-based discourse involving the teacher and peer observers following each lesson, and the reporting of research findings within and across schools and to major stake-holders.

Interestingly Stigler and Hiebert discerned six pedagogical principles to underpin the Lesson Study process (1999 pp.132-137). These are:

1.Expect improvement to be a continual, gradual and incremental process.

Improvements cannot be expected overnight. They involve overcoming problems as they unfold in the complex situations teachers face in their classrooms and schools.

2.Maintain a focus of student learning goals.

'Learning goals' refer not to intended learning outcomes or *behavioural objectives* as these are benchmarked by standardised tests, but to standards of students' reasoning as these are evidenced in *the process of learning.* Such a principle implies a *critical* rather than a *marking model* of student assessment (see Stenhouse 1975 pp.94-97). Hence, there is a great deal of consitency between their concept of *learning goals* and Stenhouse's *Process Model* of curriculum planning as a foundation for teachers' research. This implies that a lack of focus on learning processes may well explain the gap between teaching strategies and the measureable attainments of students, but does not imply that this is best overcome by focusing on improving attainment levels rather than the quality of the learning processes students are engaged with. Teaching should aim to improve the quality of learning rather than to directly improve students performance on tests.

3.Focus on teaching, not teachers.

Improving teaching is not a matter of changing individuals but gradually changing the shared *cultural scripts* that underpin the work of teachers.

4. Make improvements in context.

   This principle acknowledges the complex factors operating in the organizational and policy contexts of school that enable or constrain teaching and learning. They all need to be considered and form the basis for the development of action coordinating structures structures that shape the work of teachers. The lack of such an operational principle signifies an important aspect of the pathology of 'teacher research' in decentralized educational systems.

5. Make impovements in the work of teachers.

   This principle implies that teachers working in collaboration with other educational stake-holders-such as school leaders, students, parents and employers -are major agents in changing the curriculum structures and pedagigical arrangements that shape their work.

6. Build a system that can learn from its own experience.

Educators should be able to harvest what good teachers are learning in their efforts to improve their practice. Japanese teachers share what they have learned through their lesson studies with their fellow professionals at school, district and even national level and may even influence the construction of curriculum texts.

In many countries policy makers at national and district level are now engaged, with support from the World Association of Lesson and Learning Studies (WALS), in developing coordinating structures that enable a classroom action research process to evolve in accordance with these principles. The Research and Development work of Herbert Altrichter and his Associates has created the 'building blocks' for such a process to evolve in Austria and beyond. Their key question for *Teachers Investigate their Work* is *How Can Teachers Improve The Quality Of Their Pupils' Learning?* Their book goes a long way to answering this question, and portrays an action reseach process that is highly consistent with the six principles that underpin Japanese Lesson Study. However, Herbert Altrichter and his colleagues subsequent analytical critiques of educational reforms in Austria and Germany provide major stake-holders other than teachers with further insights that they would be foolish to ignore. Such insights may well help the pragmatic tradition of action research to form an

integral part of an educational development scenario that enables it to sail in an Aristotelian seascape.

References.

Altrichter, Herbert & Gstettner, Peter (1993) Action Research: a closed chapter in the history of German social science? *Educational Action Research,* 1(3}.

Altrichter, Herbert & Salzgeber, Stefan (2000) Some elements of a micro-political theory of school development in Altrichter, H & Elliott, J (Eds.) *Images of Educational Change,* Bockingham & Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Altrichter, Herbert. Posch, Peter & Somekh, Bridget (1993) *Teachers Investigate Their Work,* London & New York: Routledge.

Altrichter, Herbert. (2020). The Emergence of Evidence-based Governance Models in the State-Based Education Systems of Austria and Germany. In J. Allan, V. Harwood & C. Rübner Jørgensen (eds.), *World Yearbook in Education 2020: Schooling, Governance and Inequalities* (pp. 72-95). London: Routledge.

Dewey, John (1974) Science as subject-matter and as method in R.D. Archambault (Ed.) *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, Chicago & London:University of Chicago Press.

Ebbutt, David & Elliott, John (Eds.) *Issues in teaching for understanding.* London:Longman.

Giddens, Anthony (1984) *The Constitution of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press'

Elliott, John (1993) What Have We Learned from Action Research in School-based Evaluation, *Educational Action Research* 1(1).

Elliott, John (2007), *Reflecting Where the Action Is*, Ch 2. London & New York: Routledge.

Elliott, John (2009) Building Educational Theory Through Action Research in Noffke,S & Somekh, B (Eds.) The Sage Handbook of Educational Action Research. London & Los Angeles: Sage.

Posch, Peter (2003) Action Research in Austria:a review. *Educational Action Research* 11(2).

Rorty, Richard (1982) *Consequences of Pragmatism,* Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press.

Rorty, Richard (1991) Pragmatism Without Method in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rorty, Richard (1999) *Philosophy and Social Hope,* London: Penguin Books.
Stenhouse, Lawrence (1968) The Humanities Curriculum Project, *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 1, 26-33.
Stenhouse, Lawrence (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development,* London: Heinemann.

Stenhouse, Lawrence (2012) Research as a basis for teaching in Elliott, J and Norris, N (Eds). *Curriculum, Pedagogy and Educational Research,* London & New York: Routledge.

Stigler,J & Hiebert, J (1999) The teaching gap: Best ideas from the world's teachers for improving education in the classroom, New York: Free Press/Simon & Schuster (updated 2009).