

# THESIS OF PH.D. DISSERTATION

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## Lifeworlds and education



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## ***The aims of the dissertation***

One goal of the study is to describe a sociological theory and adapt it so that it can be used for approaching problems in the field of education in a new way. Namely, by taking the schools and the school-system from a comprehensive aspect of the society in which the importance of pluralism and at the same time the necessity and possibility of consensus between decision-makers, users of schools and experts are accentuated. The aim is to describe a model which makes it possible to show the processes of education at both the macro (the level of the school-system) and the micro level (the level of the schools) and facilitating the changes between the levels. Furthermore it enables constructing models based on the sociological theory for getting conclusions at the system level from the local problems and vice versa.

The work is an analysis in the field of sociology in education using results and tools of different fields of sciences. In the dissertation we will not go into details of the lifeworld theory as it is considered a tool for the analyses to get answers to some questions in the field of educational policy. The lack of the consensus can be seen at the state level of educational policy in most of the European countries. The states are against the real pluralism of education. The justification of special needs – among them education according to the idea of the different communities – is debated both at moral and practical fields. The state level – according to the consensus ethics – can decide on the liberty of the local mechanisms of the decisional procedure. How can we balance between the unity of the system and the plural needs at the local level? The answer gained from the lifeworld theory and the consensus ethics is that balance can be produced by consensus at the cultural level, by schemes based on consensus. The dissertation tries to adapt these answers of sociology to the field of education.

By analyzing the connections between the schools and the families using the schools we are looking for their chances of formulating a common lifeworld this could be called lifeworld of the school. In order to find new tools for examining the efficiency of schools, the theory of communicative lifeworlds will be pointed out. The theory of communicative lifeworlds using the principles of the consensus ethics reflects on the importance of the common values and the “authentic” speech act. We have looked for a definition valid in educational fields for speech acts by connecting the theory of the reproduction of the lifeworlds and consensus ethics. We want to analyze the possibility of how to find the best way to reformulate the rules defined for the certified information in the theory of lifeworlds in

the language of educational sociology in order to reach cohesion based on consensus inside the plural school systems

The lifeworld theories have been adapted for the family communities as well as local or ethnical or school communities to explore the importance and effects of family upbringing. Reformulating the theory of reproduction of lifeworlds for the system of education makes it possible to analyze the schools both as parts of the school systems, and as an institute decided by the expectations of its surroundings. The adaptation can be used as a new tool connected in one model to educational sociological problems: the school meets the expectations of the community (1), and the school is part of the schools system (2). By combining the two aspects of schools new factors, which are often disregarded (for instance because of methodological problems) during the survey of schools, will be highlighted.

Problems arising from the lack of knowledge and possibility of formulating cohesion inside the lifeworld of schools by the common work of the teachers and users of the school can be shown by adapting the theory of lifeworlds to the school system. Both the positive effects of the cohesion inside schools and the disintegration and disorder caused by the lack of cohesion can be seen from the model based on the theory. The problems of upbringing and education can be seen from a new aspect by the help of this adaptation, and the importance of common aims, values and interest in getting harmony inside culture (in the sense of the definition used in the theory of lifeworlds) and society will be underlined. This stresses that the process of upbringing plays an important role in the reproduction of the lifeworlds. Why are we concerned with the lifeworlds of families? The need for early development is a challenge of the everyday life of teachers. Results in numerous fields of sciences have proved the importance of early development and the special knowledge involved while at the same time the families, the lifeworlds of the families have a determining role in the early childhood.

Teachers dealing with young children must face combined challenges from the changes in society, the expectations following from these changes and because of the complexity of the educational system. They must cope with expectations working against the inside cohesion instead of homogeneous groups with common values. The diagnosis of the role and importance of the lifeworlds of the families and the knowledge of the rules of the activities are very important for finding the right tools to solve the problems. The aim of the

study is not only the adaptation of the abstract theory but to use it by presenting practical pedagogical problems as case studies.

This question is approached by showing the importance of upbringing in early childhood from different points of view. The practicability of using the expression of “lifeworld of families” instead of “families” in the sociology of education has to be underlined. The chances to connect the theory of lifeworlds and theory of cultural capital by analyzing the upbringing process are considered in the dissertation. It can be stressed – surveying the schools by the help of any of the school-ideas – that none of the strategies of investment into education is joined to any other strategy of upbringing or reproductions. The paradox – the theoretic experts of the human capital condemn themselves to disregard the most hidden and at the same time most effective investment into upbringing that is the transmission of the cultural capital in the families – comes from the lack of joining the different strategies. The experts investigating the connection between the competences and the investment disclose that they have not taken care of the fact that competences and abilities come from the cultural and time investment based on upbringing inside the lifeworlds of the families. Four assumptions are evaluated by the research. Summarizing the results the evaluation will be connected to the assumptions.

### ***The attitudes and methods of the research***

To define and evaluate the thesis it was important to find the special literature based on history, history of sciences, history of education, science of education and sociology suitable to analyze the aims of upbringing and education viewed according to the expectations of the larger society. The starting statements were defined both by local and state-wide educational problems. The material of the case studies was structured and sorted according to the special educational problems. The analysis of case studies had two aims. On one hand, by presenting problems the starting statements are either proved or not, on the other hand the possibility of adaptability of the theory of communicative lifeworlds to education is analyzed.

The features of the process planned by the parents to select kindergartens and schools for their children – as a common surface of the lifeworlds of the families and kindergartens and schools – is detailed by empirical research and statistical data. Using the results of the consecutive analyzes of the questionnaires it can be deduced, that the questionnaires are suitable for a larger scientific investigation. The proportion of the denominational schools in

the sample filling in the questionnaires has been higher than the proportion of the denominational schools in the Hungarian school system; this way the results can not be generalized. The investigation had better results between the users of kindergartens. The proportion of the public kindergartens filling in the questionnaires is suitable to use the answers as opinion of a control group

### ***The assumptions and their evaluation***

Four assumptions are evaluated in the dissertation. Summarizing the results the evaluation will be connected to the assumptions.

*1. Adaptation of the theory of communicative lifeworlds for school systems reflects that critical elements causing effectiveness or fruitlessness of the process both on the level of the schools and on the level of the system.*

The assumption presents the basic fields of the implementation, this way it is evaluated by the whole dissertation. Pedagogical paradigms reflecting the problems of education from different sides can be linked to the lifeworld theory. There are some fields of sociology (theory of fields, theory of cultural capital) used in sociology of education for a long time which give the same answers for the questions of educational policy like the theory of lifeworlds. The similar answers which can be gained from the different views prove the possible usages of lifeworld theory in the fields of sociology of education and policy of education.

The case studies analyzed on the bases of the lifeworld theory give practical foundation of the assumption. The case studies surveyed using the tools of the lifeworld theory show the same results on special fields which has been universally defined in the theory. The problems of equality of gipsy pupils and of authistic children are analyzed in case studies stressing the role of common aims in organizing communities, in the efficiency of teaching and in the influence of accepting common goals. The confusions and disorders in the educational system, follow the lack of consensus are described in the dissertation. We present some problems of finding consensus as a result of the very different expectations of the communities. We also analyze a special process of finding consensus on the state level.

The idea of the lifeworlds of schools is introduced based on the theory of communicative lifeworlds. It highlights that the differences between the subjective lifeworlds of the pupils and the lifeworld of the teachers hinder the acceptance of the messages sent by the teachers. The dissertation shows the fact, that the analyses of the efficiency of schools as school lifeworlds according to the lifeworld theory give the same results which are presented in different pedagogical paradigms as well as in the paradigm of pedagogy on the efficiency of

learning (Zsolnai 1996) or as in the theory on cognitive motives (Nagy J. 2000). The pedagogical theories connected to the theory of speech acts can describe the effects of the decisions made on the level of the policy of education.

Adapting the model of communicative lifeworld theory to the school system the educational decision making process is aided by the possibility of forecasting the advantages and dangers of the decision in the field of the sociology.

Most of the schools do not have enough knowledge, nor possibility to build a strong cohesion inside the school lifeworlds by having consensus with the users of the schools. The adaptation shows that new methods are needed to improve the efficiency of their work. The investigation called: research of the school-milieu, deal with the inside life of schools, offer new opportunities. The results of the researches in the fields of school-milieu and hidden curriculum can be connected to the investigation of the lifeworld of the schools.

The role of the structures of society in the process of reproduction inequality is shown by the adaptation of the reproduction of lifeworlds in the field of vocational trainings. The consequences of the anomy of the larger society – that is lack of values on the level of everyday work – correspond to the problems measured on the level of vocational schools and the positive results of the consensus can also be seen in this field.

The dissertation tries to investigate the possibility of formulating a new type of pedagogical work based on values and to survey the pedagogical work on the basis of values.

*2. The second assumption was that the public and well defined aims of schools help the families who have not cumulated inside enough cultural capital, but who are looking forward to improving the future of their children. The integrative schools can get help by declaring unambiguous expectations of the schools only if the groups will became societal communities.*

The assumption has not been proved in the dissertation, but most of the case studies in the dissertation enforce the hypotheses stronger. The assumption could be proved by time-series and consecutive investigations. The results based on a theoretical basis and on the practical examples present that it could be worthwhile to investigate the connections of the lifeworlds of the schools and of the families on larger samples too. The chance of consensus which can be seen from concrete case-studies shows new aspects for the educational policy. The disorders and anomy as a consequences of the lack of cohesion can be taken indirect proof of the assumption.

*3. The third assumption has been that it is possible to define expectations and values which are shared by most of the parents looking for kindergartens and schools.*

To evaluate the assumption an empirical research based on questionnaires has been added to the theoretical and statistical bases. The expectations concerning the upbringing of children in the lifeworlds of families are in the centre of the empirical research. The questionnaires have been filled in public and denominational kindergartens and schools. Both the questionnaires and the sample have been theoretically investigated.

According to the results of this research – similarly to the results of researches published in the middle of the twentieth century –, the safety of children in kindergarten and at school, and the affectionate milieu there can be assumed to be common expectation of the parents. These expectations are the most important motivations in the process of choosing denominational kindergartens and primary schools. According to the theoretical basis, the cooperation of the lifeworlds of the families and of the schools (kindergartens) is very important for the cohesion of lifeworlds of (kindergartens) schools and this is stressed by the empirical research. The importance of the cooperation has got the highest point in all the institutes. It received the maximum value in the denominational institutes and only one less in the public ones. The standard deviation in the public institutes was higher.

The results that came from this research meet the results of similar former research. According to the theoretical investigation of the sample and the questionnaires the results are suitable for becoming basis of further investigation. To find possibilities of consensus on all the levels of the plural school system, further research on the motivation of parents who want to find suitable schools for their children is needed.

*4. The fourth assumption has been that unambiguous aims and values based on these values accepted by the lifeworlds joining to the school are needed to have cohesion inside the lifeworlds of a school.*

The dissertation reflects, that having common aims accepted by the communities of schools is a necessary and sufficient condition of the cohesion of lifeworlds of schools. The disorders written in the pedagogical scientific literature and which can be seen in practice can be described by adaptation of the model too. It strengthens, that the reliability of the speech act depends not only on the communicator (that is, the teacher) but on the subjective lifeworld of the listener (that is, the pupil) which can neglect the message. The adaptation supports theoretically, that **if the lifeworlds of the families linking to the school could not accept the aims of the school, if the aims of the school mean no value for them, the effectiveness of the school will decrease independently from the knowledge of the teachers and pedagogical methods they use.** According to the adaptation **the unsuccessfulness of schools can not be**

**shifted to the lifeworlds of families, this however can not be proved without the collaboration of the families.**

There is another very important result arising from the empirical research; that is: the process of selecting schools depend not on the education of the parents, but on the values of the family lifeworlds. This result must be controlled on a larger and representative sample.

Summarizing it can be stressed, that the upbringing of children in the lifeworlds (families, communities, schools) according to values based on consensus of lifeworlds means great advantage for the society even in the field of education. The expenditure of helping consensus of lifeworlds seems less than the expenditure of disadvantage which comes from the lack of consensus.