

A Nexus Analysis of Tackling Disadvantages

Zsuzsa Major

Master's Thesis in Education
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Department of Education
Faculty of Education and Psychology
University of Jyväskylä

ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative study is twofold. Firstly, it is an attempt to understand the complex social phenomenon of disadvantages, especially in relation to education. Secondly, and most importantly, it is a tool to perpetuate change.

The chosen mode of inquiry is *nexus analysis*, which grounds both the theoretical and methodological choices of this research, complemented with a theoretical background of social inequalities. Guided by the holistic approach of such analysis, I generated data by doing insider ethnography in a marginalised Hungarian setting over the course of three years. The data consists of field work notes and photographs, learning plans and assessments, recorded and transcribed interviews, respectively other types of documentation. The scrutiny follows the steps of a nexus analysis: *engaging*, *navigating*, and *changing* the nexus of practice.

The results of this research are interpreted through the changes facilitated by the inductive and participatory mode of inquiry. Namely, by the changes which took place within the nexus of practice of tackling disadvantages as well as the changes within the researcher along the way. However, the aim of the study was to formulate new questions for catalysing further change in the form of social action and inquiry, both addressing the issue of social inequality. In addition, these questions are also formulated.

Keywords: nexus analysis, disadvantages, social inequalities, social action, tackling disadvantages, activist research

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(drop the mike)

1. INTRODUCTION

Are you sure about this? It sounds like you are about to bite off more than you can chew. You might want to narrow down your topic... – said almost everyone when I first pitched them my idea of what I want to study for my master’s thesis. And naturally, social inequalities, social disadvantages affecting education is a big conglomeration of social issues which need to be addressed urgently – as this highly diversified problem can be found usually as a top priority in governmental agendas. Consequently, there are “bigger” attempts to understand and address these issues than an activist research. Still, I wanted to make a difference.

My biggest concern was **how** to embark with dignity on this endeavour in a scholarly, participatory and most importantly, humane way (since my ethical dilemmas were the most pressuring ones). What types of inquiry can I use and how can I access such a site, in which “any” fieldwork would simply not do the topic justice? How can I “help” without harming the vulnerable, disadvantaged participants of the study? I received the answer for my questions in the form of a suggestion from my supervisor, who pointed out *nexus analysis* as a possible mode of inquiry (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

With nexus analysis I was able to engage in a “doing something about it” scholarly activity, acquiring an insider activist researcher positionality in an ethnographic study with highly expected reflexivity throughout the way. It is important to note, however, that nexus analysis is different than most of the modes of inquiry used in educational research, since it is conceptualised as a process, which has clear stages that progress from one to the next. These are *engaging in the nexus of practice*, *navigating the nexus of practice* and *changing the nexus of practice* (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). This process is more fully explicated along the way. Moreover, this paper

is also construed following the steps of a nexus analysis (as this is also reflected by the table of contents, and the structure of this thesis) in accordance with the field guide of the Scollons’.

Arriving to the concrete who, where, when, what and how questions, I believe that the possibility for the implementation of such a study was due to mere luck, albeit the saying is that everything happens for a reason. Sure, I wanted to make a difference, and I was searching for places and ways of doing so, but looking back, working for three years as an educator/social worker in a territorially excluded, socially marginalized environment, actively being present in such a disadvantaged site by doing concrete pedagogical work of compensating disadvantages, seems surreal.

The short story behind this opportunity is that I was eyeing for some time a Hungarian NGO that was born out of the idea that education, schooling is not enough for social integration. This NGO, just an art school before, decided to back up its disadvantage-compensating pedagogical methodology with the necessary social work of supporting the children coming from disadvantaged and highly disadvantaged families. Because I resonate with the belief that education is substantial, but it is simply not enough to tackle social inequalities, and I was amazed by the pedagogical work shown by this school/organisation, I contacted the NGO asking for a 6-month internship position. Then I was “sucked in” this nexus of practice of addressing disadvantages, and stayed for another 2,5 years.

The long story is presented through the narrative of this dissertation.

2.

3. Nexus Analysis

The multifaceted and wide topic of this thesis asked for a research method which is just as complex and heterogeneous in nature (Kuure et al., 2018). That is, in order to engage in a meaningful exploration of the subject matter within the tight boundaries of a Master's thesis, I had to take a holistic approach, and I did so by the means of a compound analytical and theoretical (I would even say epistemological) framework: nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). In this chapter I will elaborate on nexus analysis (giving the general theoretical and methodological background of my research), list other studies utilising this framework (with the intention of pointing out its highly adaptable nature, as well as portraying nexus analytical research tendencies), present the definitions of its key theoretical and methodological concepts (specifying the ones that are the pillars of this research), and give the rationale behind my choice of inquiry.

2.1. What is nexus analysis and how is it used

Nexus analysis was developed by sociolinguists Ron and Suzie Wong Scollon based on a wide range of action and research projects, workshops, educational trainings and development programs they were involved in, within a 20 year timeframe. These prior activities were the foundation of their book *Nexus analysis: discourse and the emerging internet* in 2004. All the aforementioned work of the Scollons' was driven by the same concern, directed toward the same social issue of systematic exclusion, of institutional discrimination against a clearly definable ethnic minority (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Thus the very same focal issue (i.e. problem of discrimination) constitutes the cohesion device of this longitudinal, wide-ranging research-narrative (i.e. nexus analysis), this issue composes cohesive linkages between the smaller research-narrative threads (i.e. the

projects, the macro and micro discourses presented, as well as the theoretical insights). From this narrative-perspective which I took upon, the 'book of nexus analysis' can be the interpretation of a chain of analytical action, in which the researchers are undertaking one project after another, each redefining the same research problem, but with each project new questions regarding that particular problem are arising, and new directions for further inquiry are urged to be taken. (Scollon & Scollon, 2004)

Worthman (2006) in his review of *Nexus analysis: discourse and the emerging internet* highlights that the book is also a combination of different literary genres. First of all, it can be considered a methodological guidebook, since it provides guidelines, step by step procedures for doing discourse analysis, action research and ethnography. It can also be called a reflexive empirical report, because it gives a detailed description of how the authors' used communication technologies for improving Native Alaskan students' access to higher education between 1978 and 1983. Besides the latter, a theoretical sketch is also presented on how computer mediated communication works, in what way was that different and also on how it changed "things" within the field of practice of higher education at that time. And last but not least, the book is a theoretical account on how social action and change is facilitated through the nexus of people, places, objects and discourses. Worthman (2006) points out that "the theory of social action undergirds the methodological suggestions, and the empirical material illustrates both the theory and the methodology" (paragraph 1). So instead of elaborating separately and in an isolative manner on the theoretical, methodological and empirical components of nexus analysis, the book explores these three in connection to each other, proving theoretically, methodologically and empirically that these are inarguably interconnected. I believe Worthman hit the mark of nexus analysis in his literary critical review - by examining the content and stylistic structure of the book (i.e. the *mediational means* of the

concept, to speak in nexus analytical terms), he sketched the general logic of this mode of inquiry. And just like Worthman, I also found that the hermeneutical key of understanding nexus analysis is the approach that everything is connected with everything, and that everything can be better understood by looking at its connections to everything else.

When it comes to the theoretical inspirations, nexus analysis again proves to be a web of concepts linked together, a correlation of theories, a nexus itself. It is an interdisciplinary research area, which draws on different linguistic and anthropological fields: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Ethnography of Communication, social, cultural and theoretical psychology, interactional sociolinguistics, literary criticism and linguistic anthropology, but which also relies on narrative approaches (Lane, 2014, 2010; Strömmer, 2017; Worthman, 2016). This polynomial derivation of nexus analysis is supported by R. Scollon (2001b) who explains that ideas from the abovementioned research fields are brought together and around the analytical and theoretical focal point of nexus analysis, which is: *mediated action* (Ruuska, 2020). First I will go around this focal point and sketch the similarities, correspondences between the listed research areas and nexus analysis (exploring the roots of my chosen mode of inquiry), then I will specify the differences between these as well - while pointing out the particularities of nexus analysis. This description serves the purpose of introducing the blended theoretical and methodological background of my research in the same way as the analytical framework of nexus analysis was designed by the Scollons: as a nexus of complementary methodological and theoretical elements. But then later on (in subchapter 2.2) I will cover each nexus analytical feature separately.

CDA and nexus analysis share the same concerns and theoretical underpinnings: both of them are discourse analytical approaches, working with concepts of power, history and ideology. CDA sees social processes in a dynamic way and examines discourses through a

historical lens, drawing equally on diachronic and synchronic aspects (Lane, 2014). In nexus analysis this historical perspective is also crucial, since all “objects” of analysis within a nexus analytical research (*discourses, social actors and mediational means* – the constituents of social action) are seen as having a history, and also projecting a future (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). The other crucial concept, next to and in close connection with *social action* (or to say the multitude of the same social action), is *social practice* – also strictly construed through this notion of time (Lane, 2014). The common ground of nexus analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, and, respectively, conversation analysis, lies in the close linguistic analysis of the social interaction taking place in the moment of the social action which is studied. Hence this “commonality” is a shared methodological tool. This type of analysis in sociolinguistics and conversation analysis happens along the lines of examining participation structure, positioning, alignments, interpersonal relationships and identities (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) – all of these analytical points can be found in nexus analysis as well. They are incorporated in the mapping of *historical bodies* and the *interaction order* of the social action/social practice under study. Participation and systematic observation are the foundation, the key theoretical and methodological aspects of ethnography – nexus analysis relies heavily on these ethnographic traditions in (linguistic) anthropology and sociology (ethnography of communication), since the goal of the researcher is to enter in the *nexus of practice*, and by her active participation, through observation and interaction with the participants (with the social actors), her aim is to identify the relevant social actions which will be later on studied throughout the research (Lane, 2014; Ruuska, 2020).

However, Scollon also formulates a general critique of these research traditions interested in the relationship between language and the social world, saying that they are overly reliant on written and oral texts (2001a, p. 144):

Many theories of language and of discourse start out with a focus on 'social action' such as speech act theory, pragmatics, interactional sociolinguistics, and CDA but then somehow in practice tend to become focused only on text. Other aspects of social action and other mediational means than language and discourse are backgrounded as 'context'.

Then again, the focus of nexus analysis is on social action and the use of semiotic and other material tools (i.e. *mediational means*) which mediate action, since action is inherently mediated (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). And this focal point (social action, or mediated action) is the quintessential difference between nexus analysis and all the disciplines it is rooted in.

Accordingly, CDA is mostly focusing on large macro-level discourses, while the starting point of *mediated discourse analysis* (MDA¹) is always on the micro level, on the social action. Nexus analysis basically encompasses a mediated discourse perspective on social action (Kuure et al., 2018). Thus nexus analysis shifts the focus from macro to micro while avoiding the macro-micro dichotomy (Lane, 2014) by incorporating the macro later on in the analysis through the nexus analytical task of *circumferencing*, that is "opening up the circumference of the analysis" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 9). Hult (2015, p.218) formulates this theoretical-methodological particularity of nexus analysis slightly differently, in his words: "rather than emphasizing either large or small scales alone, it (i.e. nexus analysis) guides researchers in attending to connections both within and across scales." When it comes to the analysis of interactions (the primary data-analysis method in interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis) the Scollons step out of the narrow linguistic frame, because they also subscribe to social practice theory, and thus to the premise that social structures are produced and reproduced through social actions. Hence the sociocultural embeddedness of the

¹ When clarifying the correlation between MDA and nexus analysis Scollon and Saint-Georges (2011) argue that nexus analysis is the historical, ethnographic and methodological arm of mediated discourse analysis. The term MDA is used especially in the Scollons' earlier work, while the term nexus analysis can be found in later publications (Ruuska, 2020).

mediational means present in the social action (objects, places present of the analysed interaction and the relationship of the participants with these objects and places), respectively the *historical bodies* of the social actors need to be taken into consideration as well when doing nexus analysis (Ruuska, 2020). Finally, the difference between ethnography and nexus analysis is simply the fact that the core analytical and theoretical interest of nexus analysis is social action and not an “a priori social group, class, tribe, or culture” (Scollon & Scollon 2004, p.13). Beside this switch of focus, it can be said that nexus analysis is a form of ethnography, because when unfolding and mapping social actions, ethnography is fully employed.

With this origin story of nexus analysis, by exploring the mosaic of its interdisciplinarity, we can conclude (agreeing with R. Scollon, 2001b) that nexus analysis does not represent an entirely new theory nor a new methodology. However, by bringing together all the above mentioned stands of research, nexus analysis offers a comprehensive theoretical and methodological framework, which builds on analytical complexity and ambiguity through the means of eclectic data collection methodology and analysis (Ruuska, 2020). In other words, nexus analysis is a broad meta-methodology calling for a multi-methodology, which results in a highly adaptable theoretical-methodological framework, therefore scholars have applied it in several ways (Stömmmer, 2006) for investigating a wide array of different research topics. I will continue this literature review by listing some concrete studies which utilise nexus analysis, by mapping out the research topics (as well as the thematic connections between them) and outlining the major research areas in which nexus analysis is usually employed. The goal is to get a better understanding of the *holistic view* principle and logic behind this mode of inquiry. Whilst some studies will only be mentioned, others, which are more in line with my research, having relevant aspects in common (may these be thematical, theoretical or methodological), will be presented in more detail.

Since the Scollons, who developed nexus analysis, are language anthropologists, and most of the premises of nexus analysis stem from research areas especially interested in language, it is not surprising that most of the studies utilising nexus analysis are also language related/oriented. Strömmer (2016a, 2016b, 2017) for example used nexus analysis to investigate second language learning in cleaning work (focusing mostly on *interaction order*, *historical bodies* and taking a critical stand toward discourses regarding low-paid, entry-level jobs for immigrants), while Ruuska (2020) studied the nexus of language identity in the light of becoming and being a proficient second language user. The latter's combination of analytical tools (thematic content analysis, narrative analysis, ethnographic discourse analysis) is an excellent example of a nexus analytical research drawing on "customised" multi-methodology, but this can also be said about most of nexus analytical researches. Other ethnographic-linguistic studies (focusing on multilingualism, minority languages), were conducted by Lane (2010) who carried out a nexus analysis of language shift in a Kven community, and Formsan (2015) who studied a Swedish-speaking community in Ukraine. Pietikäinen et al.'s research (2011) also needs to be mentioned where a wider nexus of contested and changing multilingualism particularly as regards to endangered indigenous Sámi languages and Kven and Meänkieli minority languages were studied by examining the linguistic landscape of six villages. This latter study builds on the nexus analytical hallmark of approaching a linguistic phenomenon within stratified and interconnected scales, thus being able to draw a detailed picture of the Arctic linguistic landscape, pinpointing past processes as well as current/future trends.

Hult (2016) refers to nexus analysis as an ethnographic sociolinguistic approach and advocates for its applicability within educational linguistics. Taking up this direction, Kuure et al. (2018) "scale up" and widen the nexus analytical research perspective. They are also proving (just like Pietikäinen et al., 2011) that nexus analysis

provides a research strategy suited to examine complex, evolving phenomena *in situ* (by its way of reaching into the past and projecting the future). In their research they frame the changing field of language learning, language pedagogy and language teacher education in parallel with a thorough literature review of the use of nexus analysis in the given context. Furthermore, nexus analytical research strategies were also used for policy analysis in regards to language learning (in an educational context) (Hult 2015, 2010, Ihalainen & Saarinen, 2018), or even to mobility and migration (Aarnikoivu et al., 2019). Each of the policy analysis categories, as typical for these type of researches, have their own critical edge, but with the nexus analytical framework this critical view is enhanced and more corroborated because of the holistic feature of nexus analysis. Additionally, information literacy as a skillset (Multas & Hirvonen, 2019; Ward, 2018) and online communities (Martinviita, 2017, 2018; Käsmä et al., 2020) are two more unbounded topics researched with the framework in question.

In light of the examples above, we can deduce that education is the “other” vast field (often combined with linguistics as certified by the examples above, as well as the ones below) where nexus analysis is chosen as a mode of inquiry or where its elements are combined with other theoretical and methodological concepts. The most relevant example of scrutinising education with the means of nexus analysis would be inarguably the first one, the Scollons’ book on nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). As mentioned before, a mosaic of studies is presented here thematising different aspects and dilemmas of education among other topics, creating a “whole” picture of discrimination. Pinpointing some of these: a “non-focused research” designed for a professional development seminar where the Scollons were interested in teaching strategies “for making higher education more culturally sensitive”. In addition to their pursuit of transforming traditional panopticon university classes (with their research of these panopticon classes in regards to intercultural

communication), they started to experiment with “telecommunications and distance-delivery university instruction”, showing the contrast between panopticon classes and technology-mediated classes. Furthermore, they examined communicative barriers to equal participation in university by Alaska Native students in gatekeeping situations. Moreover, through a series of studies of rhythm in face-to-face conversation and in other forms of spoken discourse, the Scollons, in collaboration with fellow researchers, collected data not just from university classes, but from rural and urban elementary school classrooms too - hence they were investigating education on lower institutional steps as well, not just on the level of higher education. (pp. 73-76).

Adding to these, I want to underline two sub-studies (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 93-101), both of them elaborating on concepts such as socialisation² and “upbringing” with the focus on narrativity. (I believe the corresponding nexus analytical terms would be *historical bodies* and *discourses*). These projects are reaching beyond the institutions of education whilst still remaining within the context (of education - but with a wider perspective/*nexus-circumference*), pointing out sociological-psychological correlations between early years and “normative”, institutionalized education. In one of the aforementioned projects, the Scollons were asked to help Alaska Native teachers in making elementary bilingual educational materials - a booklet on how to do beadwork. The other project encompassed studies of Tanacross Athabaskan narratives, of Alaska Native stories with the purpose of teaching morals, values and general attitudes, passing on “teachings” to the younger members of the community. Both projects showed the importance of asynchronous communication and thus pointed out accordingly a “different type” of (hermeneutical) understanding as well as creating of narratives. I wanted to highlight these two sub-studies in particular from ‘the book of nexus analysis’

² R. Scollon used nexus analysis previously for studying child interaction and socialisation in an earlier work, 2001b, which is also mentioned in ‘the book’ (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) separately.

(2004), because both of them are focalising narrativity (as data in form of narratives, but also as *discourse*) in strong connection with the concept of socialisation (the constant formation, build-up of the *historical body* with life experiences, socialisation practices) and my research relies heavily on both notion and method. At this point I also have to mention the research of Al Zidaji (2006), who focused on anticipatory discourses in narratives, and again Strömmer (2017), who used positioning analysis in small stories (in regards to second language learning), since both researchers apply a narrative approach within nexus analysis, as does the current paper – but I will elaborate on the more concrete methodology of this research when discussing data analysis, in chapter 4 (under “Research design”), in the stage of *engaging in the nexus of practice*.

Conjointly, and in conclusion, the Scollons aligned all the above research-insights of education (and many more linked together) in their ‘book of nexus analysis’ (2004), incorporating all the different levels of education, and examining different aspects of education to create their nexus analytical matrix which problematizes and addresses the institutional discrimination of Native Alaskans.

Other scholars investigating education through nexus analytical lens are: Aarnikoivu, whose research *A nexus analysis of doctoral education* (2020) is designed for mapping the shortcomings of academia regarding the ones who want to enter its field of practice through doctoral education. Hirvonen and Palmgren-Neuvonen (2019), who employed nexus analysis for their qualitative study discussing the concept of cognitive authority in health education, a mandatory subject in Finnish secondary schools (grades 7-9). They draw on the Scollons’ (and not just) criticism of the foucauldian panopticon type of education-structure. And two more examples of studies examining language learning and teaching, thematising methods but also underlying principles: Koivistoinen (2016) and Reikki (2016), the latter being especially interested in foreign language education.

With this review of the theoretical-methodological framework used in this study, I already touched upon several aspects of the Scollons' work (2004) which drew me to use the 'book of nexus analysis' as a manual for conducting my own research. The first one is the underlying motive of engaging in a nexus analytical research endeavour in the first place. This is also pointed out by Ruuska (2020) who describes nexus analysis as a "critical approach that is driven by a deep concern with social inequality" (p. 60). The second appealing aspect of nexus analysis, which allows me to explore my topic of disadvantages in the context of education with a clear focus but without "narrowing it down" (since I believe that the only relevant picture is the bigger picture, especially in this research-case), lies in its ability to examine an evolving, wide-ranging phenomenon *in situ* (Kuure et al., 2018), by looking at it through a historical lens and conceptualising the research problem as a nexus of many "things" (people, objects, places, concepts) all linked together. My third reason for using nexus analysis is rooted in its flexibility and thus its adaptability when it comes to data collection and analysis (i.e. multi-methodology) - unexpectedly, during the stage of *navigating the nexus of practice*, I found myself handling more and more, very rich quality data - more as in quantity, but also as in variety. I would lie if I wouldn't admit that the endless methodological possibilities offered by nexus analysis weren't overwhelming at one point, especially as a first time researcher. But on the other hand, because of this flexible framework, I also had the chance to make this research "my own" by choosing the exact types of data which I felt was the most descriptive, and analysing it in the way "the bigger picture" made the most sense to me. The fourth aspect, which for me is very much a preponderant argument for choosing this mode of inquiry, is what Aarnikoivu (2020) calls the *meta-level* of nexus analysis and what I mean by looking at nexus analysis as an amalgamation of narrative threads. The Scollons mention this nexus analytical feature between the lines of "nothing happens in a social and political vacuum"

(Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. viii), or in other words, nothing happens without a reason – nexus analysis posits that not only the studied *social actions* and *social actors* have a history (and a projecting future in the moment of inquiry), but the researcher as well, who is taking an active role in the “story” of her research, by becoming a facilitator of change within (Aarnikoivu, 2020). With recognising and using this meta-level aspect of nexus analysis (which also contains the underlying principles and logic of nexus analysis according to Aarnikoivu), I take up the opportunity, following the Scollons’ example (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), on writing this thesis in the form of a multi-layered narrative, making this research as personal as it gets. And last but not least, hand in hand with the previous motive, I chose nexus analysis as the theoretical-methodological framework of my study because it allows me to take on an activist approach by combining academic research with social engagement for perpetuating social change (Lane, 2014).

2.2. An activist research approach - my only option

When applying to this particular MA programme in Educational Sciences with specialisation in Current issues in education and psychology, I had to submit a short writing regarding what my research interests were. Here is an excerpt from my application (2017):

Based on my own experiences and readings I am aware that children from socially marginalized groups cannot enjoy universal educational opportunities and most of the time they drop out of the school system untimely (not even finishing mandatory comprehensive education) because of several reasons, such as poverty, social exclusion, bullying, cultural ‘motives’ and so on. These reasons are what I want to study, these social issues are my research interests. I believe that by studying the reasons behind social issues, these can be tackled.

Therefore, from the very beginning of my studies I thought of academic research as a possible form of activism, prior to even getting familiar with the general practices and principles of scholarly inquiry within the field of educational/social sciences. I took upon an activist approach way before having an outline of a research plan or a concrete topic for a thesis – but the latter also seems to resonate with my original idea, since social disadvantages (in the wider context of education) is the research problem of the current study.

Because this “activist attitude” was the starting point of my trajectory in academia, and more importantly the starting point of this particular inquiry, I must justify why nexus analysis can be referred to as an activist type of research and also touch upon why am I using nexus analysis in particular and not another form of research with embedded activism.

Lisa Hunter, Elke Emerald and Gregory Martin deliver an elaborate piece of literature on Activist Research methodology and theory with their book titled *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World* (2013). They are locating and contextualising the history, theories and methodologies of Critical Theory and Action Research (AR). They use AR as an umbrella term under which they go into details, touching upon various activist research “types” such as: critical action research, participatory research, critical participatory action research, new critical collaborative ethnography, classroom action research, action learning, collaborative inquiry and community-based participatory research, among others. CT, or critical *social* theory, would be the theoretical orientation forming the historical base of AR, thus CT stands for not only observing, understanding and explaining, but also critiquing and changing society. Accordingly, Activist Research, as the trio puts it, is criticising the construction of the social world using theories embedded in CT and acted upon through the complementary methodologies such as Participatory Activist Research – PActivistR, just like nexus analysis in the Scollons

book (2004), is the particularised and suggested methodology of the trio's guidebook (Iisahunter et al., 2013).

"Making a space for resistance, the philosophical ambition of activist scholars goes beyond social theory as a way of 'knowing about' and therefore emphasizes action. Activist scholars look to action." (Iisahunter et al., 2013, p. 34) AR, especially when it comes to research related to education, has a focus on empowering individuals and communities, improving practices, even systems in the context of education (Creswell, 2012). Thus the change propagated here is one that solves a problem, therefore the research is designed in a way to have a positive outcome. In line with this train of thought, nexus analysis always departs from the point of identifying a social issue, targeting it with the question why? and by engaging and navigating in its field of practice, change occurs.

Hence researchers who are using nexus analysis are engaged in the social issue they examine, they "actively use their research to address inequality, power and ideology in the social world and to investigate how such issues are reproduced through discourse." (Lane, 2014, p. 3) On this account, nexus analysis can be regarded as an activist form of research. The Scollons describe nexus analysis in one word: intervention, but one that does not claim to have a positivist solution (2004). This would be the first difference I point out between AR types of research and nexus analysis. I am more drawn to nexus analysis' "down to earth" way of conceptualising change: first of all, change here is occurring as the result of involvement and not as the result of an action plan, and, secondly, change is not thought of as something universally positive (it doesn't matter if it is the result of a research or a switch in political discourse, or power relations). Furthermore, the Scollons argue that inquiry in itself is social activism, that practice and social change are driven by inquiry, by asking questions (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 149). They even underline that the determined attempt to generate a positivist

knowledge as the outcome of inquiry is incompatible with social activism.

The analytical model is not to begin with inquiry to arrive at the declarative transitive sentence but, on the contrary, to begin with the simple declaratives and to move toward the interrogative, in particular the interrogative of motive: Why? (p. 150)

Creswell (2012, p. 579) distinguishes two types of action research designs typically used in educational research: practical action research and participatory action research. While Practical AR (action research) is studying local practices, and is focused more on teacher development and student learning, visualising a practicing teacher-researcher conducting the inquiry (for changing her own practice of teaching or other practices within the classroom), Participatory AR studies social issues, focuses on “life-enhancing” changes and emphasises equal participation in the research – meaning the researcher conducts the research together with the researched community, so to say, producing knowledge together and enabling advocacies, activism.

Stephen Kemmis (2006), whose work has become influential especially in the field of educational AR, argues that with the appearance and the growing number of research done with the practical design “AR has lost its critical edge especially in the bigger sense of social or educational critique aimed at transformation of the way things are” (p. 459) and that AR might have become the opposite of what it was meant to be by “domesticating students and teachers to conventional forms of schooling” (p. 459) . It seems to me that this criticism is aimed at the already mentioned macro-micro dichotomy, which in nexus analysis (by design), becomes irrelevant thanks to its holistic view.

The Scollons’ “local” experimentation with communication technologies, within their own graduate course in Education at the University of Alaska was only the starting point of improving Native

Alaskans' access to higher education and the understanding of the institutional discrimination against Alaska Natives. With nexus analysis as the framework of my research I am subscribing to this idea, that by getting involved "locally" in practices where social issues can be found, one might also make a far-reaching difference.

When it comes to Participatory Action Research, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) summarise six central features. While listing these I will also compare nexus analysis to PAR:

1. PAR is seen as a social process, where the researcher explores relationships with the objective of understanding how social interactions form and re-form individuals. The same can be said of nexus analysis, it is a process with three stages (*engaging, navigating, changing*) and by observing social interactions the researcher is *mapping semiotic cycles of historical bodies, interactional orders and discourses*.
2. PAR is a participatory form of inquiry, meaning that the researcher is also conducting the study "on herself". It is the same with nexus analysis, the researcher's *critical perspective* is directed both inwards and outwards.
3. PAR is practical and collaborative, it is an inquiry completed with others and typically it is interested in acts of communication, production of knowledge and structure of social organizations. Nexus analysis is also focusing on *social actions* (in which all the above are embedded and thus can be "traced down") but it is mostly a solitary journey (although it doesn't have to be one, since nexus analysis encourages the researcher to engage with social actors for achieving more democratic outcomes of change, just like AR in general). This possibility of conducting a "loner" but also activist inquiry was a compelling argument to me in choosing nexus analysis at the time.

4. "PAR is emancipatory in that it helps unshackle people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination" (Creswell, 2012, p. 583). In short, the intention of PAR is to take targeted action. "The outcome of a good nexus analysis is not a clear statement upon which further action may be taken. The outcome of a good nexus analysis is the process of questioning which is carried on throughout the project" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.143), nexus analysis is about a constant flow of inquiry.
5. PAR is critical especially in terms of power structures (within language, modes of work, social relationships). Nexus analysis also examines the way *cycles of power* circulate in the *nexus of practice* under study, thus subscribing to the premise that social structures are produced and reproduced through social actions
6. PAR is reflexive and focuses on bringing about change. Nexus analysis is *reflexive* and *focuses on bringing about change*. In the last stage (*changing the field of practice*), the researcher evaluates and reflects not only on the changes she made with her presence and involvement within the *field of practice*, but also on the internal changes coming about within her own *historical body* (which, in turn, might also influence the curve of the nexus analytical research, since the nexus of practice might also impact her choice of research questions, methods and theoretical insights) (Lane, 2014). Nexus analysis' reflexivity is like a loop of motive(s) and change(s).

2.3. Defining the scholarly terminology of nexus analysis

Building on the original meaning of the word 'nexus', which is a connection, or a series of connections linking two or more "things" together in a network, the Scollons give the following definition: "in

the simplest meaning a ‘nexus analysis’ is the study of the ways in which ideas or objects are linked together” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. viii). Another meaning of ‘nexus’ would be a focal point or centre, and in nexus analysis this point is the mediated social action. Every analytical task of nexus analysis is interested in this focal point and its embeddedness within the nexus-network. Or, as Aarnikoivu (2020) puts it, the core idea of nexus analysis is that all social actions are intersections (*nexuses*) of their key elements, of people, places, objects and discourses, and the undertaking of nexus analysis is the “mapping of semiotic cycles of people, discourses, places, and mediational means involved in the social actions” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. viii).

In the following I will give some definitions of the core nexus analytical concepts used throughout this research. Even though, as Worthman (2006) points out, dividing these concepts to clear, separate categories is difficult by design (since they determine each other and, semantically speaking, they often overlap), it is important to look at them separately. By underpinning the key theoretical and methodological concepts of nexus analysis, I am outlining the structure of this thesis as well as laying down the foundation of my research. This section is written following the categorisation examples of Aarnikoivu (2020), Ruuska (2020), Multas & Hirvonen (2019) and of course Scollon & Scollon (2004). I am especially relying on their field guide and their theoretical vocabulary.

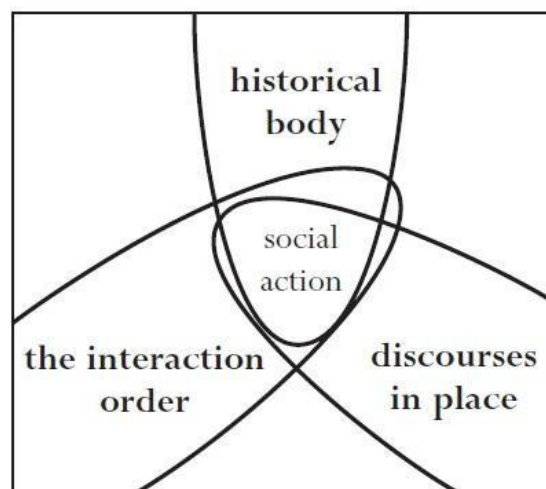
2.3.1. Theoretical concepts

The first category of basic concepts and terms used intuitively in a nexus analysis are regarded as theoretical concepts. As suggested in the title of this thesis, some of the terms presented here will be further expanded throughout the different stages of this nexus analysis.

Social (mediated) action, social practice

Social action is “any action taken by an individual (in nexus analytical terms: a *social actor*) with reference to a social network, also called a mediated action” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 11). The Scollons take their perspective from socio-cultural psychology and emphasize that action is inherently social (“it is only action to the extent it is perceived by others as action”) and mediated (since any action is carried out through material and symbolic mediational means, may these be cultural or psychological) (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 12). Hence the general term *mediational means* covers all the resources and all semiotic tools by which the particular action is accomplished. Also, when a social action is repeated several times, it can be considered a *social practice* (in the broad sense of e.g. the practice of medicine, or in the narrow sense of e.g. handing an object) (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 12-13).

Rather than giving a simplified definition of social action, the Scollons explore its complexity through the focused analysis (nexus analysis) of the three elements at whose intersection they understand social action to take place (Ruuska, 2020, p. 65). The figure below illustrates social action as the nexus of historical bodies, the interaction order and discourses in place.



1 Figure Social action as a nexus (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 20)

Historical body

The Scollons borrowed this term from the Japanese philosopher Kitarō Nishida, who developed an ontology which entails that an individual's history of personal experiences is inscribed in her/his body (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 13). This, translated to the "language" of nexus analysis, means that discourses become internalised through practices and habit, they produce a recognisable and reasonably steady identity. In other words, *historical body* refers to the idea that all social actors "bring in" to the social action their understandings, learned practices, habits, motives and ambitions (Aarnikoivu, 2020). The Scollons also mention a couple of times Bourdieu's notion of habitus, since it bears some similarity to Nishida's historical body, yet the preferred term remains the latter, because "it situates bodily memories more precisely in the individual body" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 13). Put simply, the Scollons believe that different people act differently in the same situation.

Interaction order

This concept was originally developed by Erving Goffman (1983), who says that there is a tacit agreement between participants regarding the "rules" of interaction (of its order, of the way it is supposed to happen). Similarly, in nexus analysis interaction order refers to all social arrangements by which social relationships are formed in social interactions (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 13). This "way of doing" (i.e. interaction order) covers the relationships, mutual histories, power relations among those involved in the social action (Multas & Hirvonen, 2019).

Discourses in place

The final element of the social action is the complex aggregate (nexus) of the many discourses which circulate through the material

place where the particular social action is accomplished (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 14). Usually a pre-empirical study needs to be made to determine which are the relevant or foregrounded discourses of the studied social action.

Discourses

Building on Blommaert's and Gee's work (1999), Scollon and Scollon (2004) distinguish between two different types of discourses and, accordingly, they engage in discourse analysis on two different levels. According to Gee (1999) discourse with a lowercase 'd' is the concrete language in use (speech, texts), while Discourse with an uppercase 'D' looks at language in a bigger context (through the lens of semiotics) and refers to all socially accepted human activity which integrates language with "non-language stuff", such as ways of thinking, feeling, believing, acting, valuing as well as the ways of using objects, tools, symbols.

Nexus of practice

The Scollons situate social action (e.g. paying in a restaurant) in a unique historical moment and a specific material space when and where separate practices (e.g. sitting at a table, handing a piece of paper, opening a wallet) take place. This would be the *site of engagement*. When a site of engagement is repeated regularly, it becomes a *nexus of practice* (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 12).

2.3.2. Methodological concepts

As pointed out before, nexus analysis is a flexible mode of inquiry when it comes to concrete data generation and analysis, however there are three main tasks or activities which constitute the (ethnographic) methodological strategy of any nexus analytical research, these are: *1. Engaging the nexus of practice*, *2. Navigating the nexus of practice* and *3. Changing the nexus of practice* (Aarnikoivu, 2020; Scollon & Scollon, 2004). The Scollons (2004)

elaborate on these three stages in their field guide, giving step by step instructions on what questions might need to be asked within each nexus analytical research phase. The structure of this thesis, as the titles of the chapters also suggest, was modelled accordingly, trying to keep the order of the methodological steps, although the three stages do not necessarily “happen ” in this order, most often they overlap.

The second figure shows the main activities of a nexus analysis (from Scollon & Scollon 2004, p. 153):



2 Figure Activities of a nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 153)

Engaging the nexus of practice

“The first as well as the final problem of a nexus analysis is to discover the social actions and social actors which are crucial in the production of a social issue and bringing about social change.” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 153) Finding the particular social action (which is placed as the central unit of a nexus analysis, see the figure above) in many cases is a matter of recognition and selection. But at this stage, the most important task is to enter in the *zone of identification*, which basically means that the researcher needs to be *recognised* as a participant in the nexus of practice which she studies,

she needs to be *identified* as a legitimate member of the community by the other participants (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

Navigating the nexus of practice

In the second stage the researcher has to “navigate amongst the previously identified (*mapped*) social actors and their trajectories, as well as different places, events, and objects” all linked to the social action under her study (Aarnikoivu, 2020, p. 30). As the figure suggests, the key tasks here are *mapping*, *circumferencing* and doing *discourse analysis*. *Mapping* would mean to continue the sketch of everything relevant that builds up the nexus of practice, that circulates through the particular social action, the semiotic and discourse cycles (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

“*Circumferencing* is the analytical act of opening up the angle of observation to take into consideration these broader discourses in which the action operates” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 11), but the analytical perspective needs to be widened both in terms of time and space. I visualise this analytical task as the filmmaking technique of zooming in (*discourse analysis*) and out (*Discourse analysis*) with the same clear focus on the social action, to see in what way is the social issue embedded in the nexus of social practice and most importantly what are the possibilities for its resemiotization (i.e. *change*). With their empirical study the Scollons show how a nexus of practice can be modified: by altering sites of engagement or mediational means (*resemiotization*). Retrospectively, as well as prospectively, changes in the field of practice can be tracked down by examining past and present discourses, the connections between these as well as linkages to anticipated future discourses – this would be the another way to formulate what *circumferencing* is (Aarnikoivu, 2020, p. 29), pointing out *change*.

Changing the nexus of practice

Finally, in the third stage of a nexus analysis, the researcher is actively seeking the *change* within the nexus of practice, aiming to alter discourses, motives and actions. But we need to take note that the Scollons (2004) underline how “from the (very) beginning a nexus analysis undertakes a close analysis of not only what is said (ethnographic content) but how (discourse analysis) and why (motive analysis)” (p. 10), thus changes might occur anytime throughout the research. The question here is not how social change occurs in general (this is one of the main driving queries in the previous, navigation stage of a nexus analysis, see above), but how nexus analysis through the means of discourse analysis could be relevant as a whole in bringing about change (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 139). Ergo, the last stage is important because at this point sufficient materials have been collected and research insights have been gained to enable a broad and holistic perspective on the project, on the studied social issue (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

3.SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE(S) - DISCOURSE(S)

By applying the interrogative analytical model of nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 148), this chapter is designed to present the declaratives of this study as well as my initial attitudes and motives before truly engaging in this nexus analytical endeavour (grammatically speaking, these were just as rigidly “indicative” as the deterministic declarative ideas which initiated this research). On the one hand, I will give a concise theoretical background and literature review to introduce the social issue of this nexus analysis, or in other words to outline the research problem (of social disadvantages in relation to education). On the other hand, I will introduce my nexus of practice (the NGO, which offers “mediational means” to tackle disadvantages) by mapping the relevant **D**iscourses circulating through the social action(s) (of childrearing and childcare, learning amidst disadvantages, tackling disadvantages) which is the central unit of this analysis. I would say that I am starting this inquiry with the widest circumference, mapping the biggest semiotic and discourse cycles to contextualise the study and to present my initial research questions.

3.1. The social issue: social disadvantages and inequalities

Collins Dictionary defines disadvantage in the following way: “a factor which makes someone or something less useful, acceptable, or successful than other people or things.” Also here (Collins Dictionary, n.d.) the definition of disadvantage in British English primarily uses the describing word unfavorable: “an unfavorable circumstance, state of affairs, thing, person, etc.”, whereas the American English

definition is “an unfavorable situation or circumstance; drawback; handicap”. Other online dictionaries’ definitions of disadvantage are similarly vague. I was unable to find a concise and intelligible definition of this notion and the literature on the subject proves that the concept of social disadvantage is truly complex and can be approached from far too many angles.

In *Social advantage and disadvantage* (2016), edited by Hartley Dean and Lucinda Platt, disadvantage is understood as a socially constructed concept, in direct relation to its opposite, advantage. It is even stated that the two terms have no established definition, but are examined in relation to one another within contexts of family, education, work, income and old age. The main idea of the book, is that the imbalance of advantages and disadvantages is what causes and exacerbates social injustices and divisions.

The notion of disadvantage is mostly approached through critically discussed conceptual frameworks and ideas relating to poverty, rights violation, social immobility, social exclusion, social capital deficiency and capability deprivation. The social construction and maintenance of the materialised and normalised advantage-disadvantage dichotomy includes divisions premised on gender, race, ethnicity, the so-called neighbourhood and of crime, among others (Dean & Platt, 2016). Thus, to truly understand the concept of disadvantage we need to look across the suggested horizontal spectrum of advantage-disadvantage (these being the two end points of the explicatory, and I would add, *evaluating* social scale). Instead of simply analysing the distribution of advantages and disadvantages, we also need to see the multidimensional determinative differences in the so called life chances of individuals, social groups, societies, even social locations based on the above mentioned parameters (race, gender, ethnicity, etc.).

Graham and Power’s understanding of disadvantage is similarly a social-constructivist one, but it is also incorporating the idea that inequalities are transmitted from generation to generation through

economic, development and social processes. They propose that these inequalities are worsening over time through reinforcement in adult life (2004).

Burke (2007) sees disadvantage as a strong factor of vulnerability and stigma and believes that discrimination and deprivation lead to disadvantage, therefore he presents disadvantage as a dynamically (and socially) construed phenomenon. He notes the following (Burke 2007, p. 13): “The issue of persistent disadvantage that equates with deprivation and problems of adjustment suggests that disadvantage and lack of opportunity are not necessarily problems for the individual to resolve but reflect on societal values and situational opportunities.”

Dean (2016) points out that ‘social disadvantage’ is most commonly associated with the ancient social concept of poverty. Here disadvantage is conceptualised as the absence, lack or denial of material advantage. And thus next to and deductively form the more abstract advantage-disadvantage scale, wealth will be the simple, axiomatic antonym of poverty. With embedded criticism of neoliberal ideology and capitalism, Dean highlights that by the abovementioned evaluating scale, poverty becomes the consequence of failure (2016), but then he elaborates, how “poverty is a process of ‘immiseration’: if it is a consequence of failure, this is not a failure to create or distribute wealth, but a fundamental failure to meet human needs” (Dean, 2016, p. 3).

Burchardt and Hick (2016) suggest defining disadvantage along Amartya Sen’s capability approach. Namely, to consider evaluating advantage and disadvantage in three alternative ways. The first and most dominant one examines people’s resources and establishes income poverty lines. The second evaluation could be on the basis of subjective and individual well-being, concepts of happiness or the idea of self-utility. Finally, the third way of understanding the dichotomy of advantage-disadvantage could be interpreted through the ways of how people are functioning in their day to day lives and

what are their capabilities, according to their functionings. A person's functionings are all the activities they are doing on a daily basis, as well as their state of just simply being (e.g. studying, poor mental health), while a person's capabilities are what they are *able* to be and what they are *able* to do in their lives/with their lives. "Thus, while a person's functionings represent the outcomes they achieve, their capabilities reflect their real opportunity or freedom to achieve a variety of functionings." (Burchardt & Hick, 2016, pp. 26-27)

Therefore, social inequalities happen when advantages and disadvantages create imbalances and social divides within society, meaning that some people, groups of people are having more and better chances, opportunities than others. These social disparities might not be as visible, tangible and easily comprehensible from either side (advantaged and disadvantaged), because of the multidimensional discourses shaping and fuelling society, which also create the inequalities in question. To better understand social inequalities and the social disadvantages embedded in them, and the primordial (somewhat mathematical) connection between the two, here is another approach: the classification of inequalities.

These inequalities intersect, and the ones with a greater impact create and deepen another inequality. The bigger the inequality, the bigger the gap, and greater the exponential growth of the gap between the two sides (advantaged and disadvantaged). Just an example of extreme inequality: Winnie Byanyima (2016) raises concerns over how 1 percent of the world's richest population own as much as the rest of the world in terms of material goods, resources, wealth. Here the chasm between the advantaged and the disadvantaged (on the wealth-poverty scale) seems surreally enormous³.

One of the World Social Science Report's (ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016) objectives was to expand the definition of inequality, which is mostly understood in terms of income and wealth. Therefore, seven

³ (Mind the gap? Close the gap!)

different inequality dimensions are listed in the report and it is also emphasised that these inequalities interact with each other.

These seven interconnected, intersecting inequality dimensions are the following: 1. Economic – the differences between levels of incomes, number of assets, individual and group differences between wealth and capital, living standards, but inequalities of employment are listed here as well. 2. Political – the different capacities of individuals and groups to represent themselves on the political scene, as in being capable to impact political decision-making processes for their benefit. 3. Social – the disparities between the social statuses of different groups like classes, castes, or even age groups. This inequality also refers to systemic imbalances within the functioning of social institutions, like in education or health. 4. Cultural – the status differences between the population groups in terms of their identity. 5. Environmental – the differences in the quality of the environment accessible to different individuals and groups. 6. Spatial – “disparities in economic activity and income across spaces, typically between centres and peripheries” (p. 23). And finally, 7. Knowledge-based – all factors which might influence access to different sources and types of knowledge. This category includes the question of whose knowledge counts and which type of knowledge is considered important.

3.1.1. Disadvantages, or Bourdieu's theorization of distinct forms of capital and reproduction

There is this general idea that education is the key to success, the key to “getting out” (from poverty, from the periphery), the key to erase social inequalities⁴. It is universally believed that education ensures opportunities, a “better life” for the individual (offering social mobility), whilst its main purpose is to educate people within society (integrating them), *for* society by teaching them the values and

⁴ “[...] [E]ducation is the key that will allow many other Sustainable Development Goals [...] to be achieved. 1 When people are able to get quality education they can break from the cycle of poverty. Education therefore helps to reduce inequalities and to reach gender equality.” (UN, 2018, p.1)

morals *of* society, but through education there is also the potential to *change* society. I also believed unquestionably that education is the key to achieve greater social justice.

In the beginning of my 20s, as a literature major, I was very interested in the literary genre of slam poetry, I was especially keen on its critical edge and of the way it is expected from the slam performer to be reflexive and to react to recent political and contemporary social issues. In parallel with my studies I was also doing a teacher training program, so when I had my “practice”, I was experimenting with this literary genre in the classroom, using it as a pedagogical tool for improving high schoolers’ critical thinking.

I was also hanging out a lot with activists and getting more and more involved in events, extracurricular projects, which were focusing mostly on housing problems, but other social disadvantages as well, of Roma living in the outskirts of the city, in the Pata Rât slum, next to the city’s garbage dump. The children of the poorest and most isolated groups from this area didn’t even attend school until the workers of the Pata-Cluj project started taking them to Cojocna and Cluj-Napoca, enrolling them to the schools which agreed to their acceptance (Jakab, 2018). At that time Paulo Freire’s magnum opus, the foundational text of critical pedagogy, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, supported my very positive attitude towards education. I was convinced that education is the key to ending poverty. Retrospectively, I would say that I was missing something, I couldn’t contextualise, couldn’t explain to myself the whys behind all the social issues I wanted so eagerly to get involved in, all the social inequalities that I believed could be resolved by means of education. I think this was one of the reasons why I decided to study education in Finland. Another reason was to learn how education is the “key”.

During my MA studies the discovery of Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory and especially his sociology of education was a Eureka! moment for me. It made me rethink and re-evaluate the optimism and blind belief I had in education, at least in the “systems” of

education. Thus I thought I “understood” the whys and I wanted to trace them down in the form of an ethnographic-like research (as participatory as it can be), although I didn’t see at all the possible new outcomes, the potential new knowledge which could be generated by such a research. Accordingly, Bourdieu’s ideas are the declaratives of this nexus analysis and my rigid anticipations from the very beginning of this research, these were my epistemological assumptions from the very beginning.

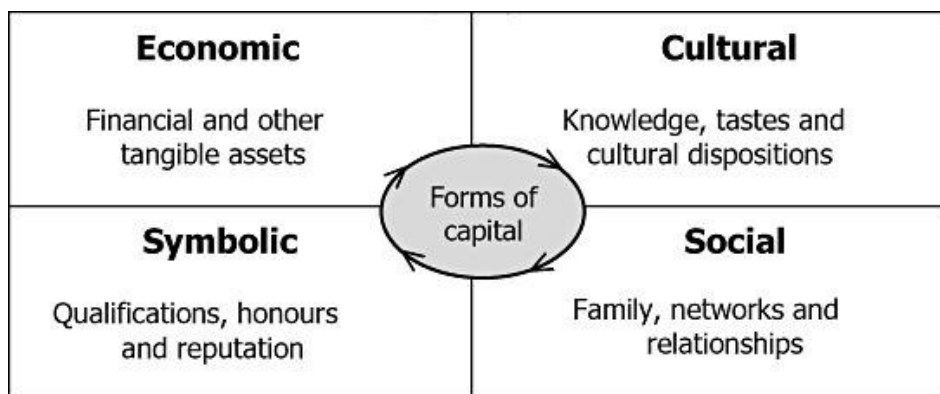
Bourdieu explains social inequalities, the stratification of society, with the differential distribution of capitals. Simply put, for Bourdieu capital means power, or the capacity of the individual to control her future. Thus the accumulation of one’s capital is what determines her opportunities in life and shapes her ‘social trajectory’. (Tabb, 2011) Ergo, social advantage (and disadvantage), represented by class maintenance, in Bourdieu’s perception, is the intersection of four complementary and reinforcing capitals: economic, social, cultural and symbolic. These capitals are enabling privilege to consolidate and maintain itself over time, “as those with (more) resources continue to accumulate them and transmit them to subsequent generations” (Platt, 2016, p.64).

1. Economic capital is understood as the access to wealth and resources which can be instantly converted into money. It can be generated through income, inheritance or engagement in the economy for financial return (Hart, 2019).
2. The notion of cultural capital was developed in the *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977) and is considered the root of social reproduction. In *Distinction* Bourdieu (1989) elaborates on this concept by outlining how those who possess the most of cultural capital define ‘taste’, and how they create the distinction between cultures (‘high’ and ‘low’). This distinction is naturalised and legitimised, thus a “normative” culture is created (Platt,

2016). Nevertheless, cultural capital is determining also one's language (spoken language) but also one's bodily dispositions (see the nexus analytical term historical body above, and the bourdieusian term habitus below).

3. Symbolic capital, as Hart puts it (2019) is established as individual reputation, prestige and authority. This would be the "represented" capital of education in the form of degrees and honours.
4. Social capital acquired through social networks is the motor of social reproduction since this capital is the one through which all the other capitals can be acquired. This capital is "the aggregate of actual or potential resources". (Bourdieu 1997, p.51)

Below, see a figure containing Bourdieu's capitals, as in what these capitals encompass, adapted from Harvey et al, (2008, p. 29):



3 Figure (Harvey et al, 2008, p. 29)

Habitus, similarly to the historical body, is constituted by an individual's habits and dispositions deeply embedded within her body, describing her beliefs, values, common sense and predispositions (Bowman, 2010). The notion habitus has a historical perspective as well because it also refers to the cultural and familial roots of the individual, it starts to develop from the beginning of life. Bourdieu (1996) argues that the family functions as a (social) classificatory

scheme and is the main principle in the construction of the social world. This is how belonging to a “normal family” becomes a privilege, and is defining the conditions of the accumulation and transmission of economic and cultural capital (Kleanthous, 2013).

The family plays a decisive role in the maintenance of the social order, through social as well as biological reproduction, i.e. reproduction of the structure of the social space and social conditions. It is one of the key sites of the accumulation of capital in its different forms and its transmission between the generations. (Bourdieu, 1996, p.23)

Contrary to the general belief regarding the great contribution of education in the battle against social inequalities, Bourdieu and Passeron prove the opposite in their book *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1990). The theory of social reproduction posits that educational success (as well as the promise of the acquisition of more capitals with it, in other words “a better future”, or “more opportunities in life”) depends on inherited cultural capital (on advantages/disadvantages), which is determined by social class (by the monopolising “normative” culture) (Kleanthous, 2013). As a result, inequalities are carried on across generations and educational institutions are the invisible catalysts for the reproduction of the prevailing social order.

The educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture. (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 80)

3.1.2. National socio-political Discourses of disadvantages and education

It is axiomatic that educational institutions do not function in a social vacuum, since everything happening in these environments is inherently social and mediated, thus the social world with its inequalities can be depicted within (Radó, 2019; Scollon & Scollon,

2004). Furthermore, in some cases, the education system itself is formed in a way in which the enhancement of social advantages and disadvantages is happening in a more visibly institutionalised, systematic way, the education system itself being divided and selective. Narrowing the Discourse on social disadvantages to a national level, I will pinpoint some parameters regarding the institutional and political conditions of the Hungarian educational system.

Radó's current study (2021) shows that in the past decade (2010-2020) social inequalities in terms of income distribution have grown in Hungary, while the channels for social mobility have been gradually closing. With the combination of the two datasets, Radó deduces that the impact of the Hungarian education system on the country's social inequalities is almost non-existent, as indicated by the data of intergenerational mobility "according to which family background determines the social status of the large majority of Hungarians over their lifetime" (p.9). This applies especially to those who live in regions characterised by concentrated poverty, and to the highly marginalised Roma communities (but very often the two social groups overlap). Among all dimensions of societal inequalities, socio-economic disadvantages and advantages are the ones which uphold the most social status differences, these are the ones which have a decisive effect. Other dimensions of inequalities (like those of ethnic, spatial or residential) also emerge along class differentiation. Therefore, one of the main external challenges to education in Hungary is the extremely rigid social stratification with all its resulting social inequalities (Radó, 2021).

From 2011, the Orbán government gradually built an autocratic regime in Hungary. The quality of governance of the educational system was also affected by the authoritarian changes in politics (Radó, 2010). The aim was to end the relative independence of educational policymaking from direct political control, thus a centralisation process started, embedded in a nationalist discourse

(Radó, 2021). Concomitantly, the privatisation of education by traditional Christian churches also began, which were (and still are) supported by state funding, thus private church schools became the political allies of the government (Papp & Neumann, 2021; Radó, 2021).

The Hungarian educational system consequently divided into state-schools and the network of church maintained schools. The divide generated social processes of covert selection and segregation mechanisms (Kende, 2021). Ercse (2018) is calling this phenomenon state-motivated church-assisted segregation.

Radó (2020), on the basis of his observations regarding the social, political and structural changes and conditions of the Hungarian education system, states that: “highly selective education systems provide great latitude for ethnic separation” (p. 5). He then explains the term social selection in education (i.e. the tracking of students on the basis of their family background resulting in the homogeneity of schools) as “a complex phenomenon generated by the combined effects of various characteristics of educational systems” (p. 5).

Radó enlists 8 possible factors which need to be assessed when searching for the reasons behind social selection: 1. the strength of various social inequalities pressuring institutions and actors of education; 2. the strength of pressure for separation generated by prevailing pedagogical practice (in Hungary frontal teaching is prevalent) and the interests of individuals and institutions in the field of education; 3. the degree of educational performance gaps emerging at early stages in education; 4. the characteristics of school structure (concerning formal selection points); 5. the characteristics of school networks and the amount of redundant school capacity; 6. parental aspirations and choices (in Hungary there is a right to freedom of school choice); 7. the characteristics of the governance of school systems; and 8. overt and hidden external policy expectations (Radó, 2020, p. 6).

When it comes to the Hungarian Discourses of disadvantages in education, after 2010, the terms “equity”, “equal chances” and “educational inequalities” have been missing from the government’s vocabulary. Instead the term “catching up” (in Hungarian “*felzárkóztatás*”) is used in all official texts and statements, referring to the support provided to pupils falling behind within the educational system, although this educational program means the same approach of the same teaching methods, without the proper adaptation of an extra methodological support necessary for the inclusion of different student backgrounds.

Moreover, this “catching up” narrative entails a motive of responsabilisation, having a strong “their fault” connotation. In parallel with this ineffective problem-solving conceptualisation of disadvantages, the reinforcement of advantages happens by the prevailing policy approach of “gifted education”, that is the provision of more learning opportunities for “talented” students (Radó, 2021). Therefore, inequalities, the strengthening of the advantage-disadvantage paradigm within education is preserved and supported by the Hungarian government, not just on the social theoretical level, but also in terms of educational policies, embedded within the establishment of the educational system itself.

Since the idea that education as an omnipotent power for solving all societal issues was the starting point of this research and my personal trajectory not just as a researcher, but also as an individual wanting to have an impact on current social problems, education is the leitmotif of this paper. Thus, I am constantly narrowing down the perspective on the social issue of disadvantages keeping the context of education throughout the thesis. From theory to the national discourses, zooming further in, next I will present the “problematic” disadvantaged social group in relation to education. At this point I would like to note that I disagree with generalisations and stereotyping discourses, and I believe that disadvantages (in all their forms and combinations) and the disadvantaged (groups, individuals

defined by discourses, their historical bodies/habitus, interaction orders) are as diverse as they can get.

3.1.3. The inevitable Roma topic

Roma are the largest, the most marginalized and vulnerable ethnic minority group in Europe. There are numerically close to twelve million citizens, highly concentrated mostly in the CEE region (Central and Eastern Europe), and approximately 750,000 live in Hungary (Kende, 2021). Roma communities historically experienced exclusion, widespread poverty, racial segregation and perpetual discrimination, all of which created and is still fuelling an intergenerational poverty and deprivation cycle determining the realities of Roma today (Rostas & Kostka, 2014).

The growing intolerance and prejudice towards this ethnic group leads to an increased exposure to social exclusion, more structural discrimination and a new, neo-liberal victimisation visibly and directly connected to the Roma minority's deteriorating socio-economic conditions. Thus the deterministic cycle is becoming thicker and seemingly imperishable. Understanding how this structural discrimination, how the multiple forms of disadvantages, inequalities and exclusion define the position of Roma within society, it is crucial to recognise, reveal and comprehensively act upon the intersection of inequalities (spatial, economic, social, political, environmental, cultural, knowledge and identity-based) faced by the ethnic minority on a daily basis (Howard & Vajda, 2017).

When it comes to the social inclusion of the Roma minority, education is one of the biggest challenges in CEE countries, the educational attainment gap between Roma and non-Roma children is still significant, especially beyond compulsory education. The enrolment of Roma in early childhood education and care is still low (in this perspective Hungary is a good exception), even though since

the 1990s multiple attempts were made based on EU initiatives to tackle Roma exclusion (OECD, 2020).

Hart (2018) distinguishes 3 types of education-related inequalities: 1. inequalities in the opportunities to access formal education; 2. inequalities in the *experiences* of education, in other words the *quality* of education; and 3. inequalities in the *outcome* opportunities available to individuals upon leaving formal education.

Radó, in his comprehensive study *Selection in Education: The wider context of the segregation of Roma pupils in Hungary* (2020), explicates in detail how and why the Hungarian Roma minority faces disadvantages within all three education-related inequality dimensions in the form of ethnic educational segregation.

First, the above mentioned church schools, even in smaller, rural settlements, are mostly accommodating the education of children of more affluent families, meaning that the state-maintained schools remain the segregated schools of the Roma (a 2019 study of Krisztina Ercse depicts the process of such segregation perfectly in a small town in Hungary, Encs). This happens because of the right to the freedom of choosing schools, not necessarily because of non-Roma trying to avoid the Roma, but selection based on the presumed quality of schools (Kende, 2021). Which leads us to the next inequality dimension: the access to quality education in Hungary is especially restricted due to the shortage of didactic personnel, thus to the growing number of classes taught by non-specialised teachers, especially in the schools where the proportion of disadvantaged (and Roma) children is high (Kende, 2021). The third dimension of inequalities concerning the opportunities after leaving formal education is due to early school leaving: every other Roma drops out of school without any qualifications. More than half of those who complete secondary school are actually receiving vocational training, and only one-fifth of the Roma students graduate from grammar school.

On the other hand, within the non-Roma population these numbers are reversed (Kende, 2021). Beside these social and systemic inequality-generating factors within education, there are others too (see Radó, 2020, 2021), as well as statistics and concrete numbers (like OECD PISA), showing that Hungary's educational system is among the least equitable and most selective. It can be said that it is the least able to compensate for social inequalities.

In 2011, Hungary adopted the National Social Inclusion Strategy (2011-2020) especially aiming at improving the living conditions of Roma and in general of families living in extreme poverty. The initiative also embraced educational scholarships, and established extracurricular tutoring centres, the so called after school program (the "tanoda program" in Hungarian), as well as one-on-one mentor programs in higher education (especially for gifted Roma students). Although, if the formal education system worked well, one might ask why the need for such complementary "catching up" programmes (Papp & Neumann, 2021).

In the case of Roma, by recognising the power of racial discrimination as well, it is easier to notice how all inequality dimensions (environmental, cultural, spatial, economic, social, political, knowledge based, educational) intersect, how they overlap with each other. One form of social inequality, one type of social disadvantage can deepen or just simply drive the other (Howard & Vajda, 2017). Culturally devalued identities, in our case Roma identities, are more exposed to racial discrimination, which leads to a social "underclass" defined by intersecting inequalities. Howard and Vajda, with reference to Paz Arauco et al., believe that through the intersection of disadvantages a persistent intergenerational poverty is created, and they also accentuate the problem of how these can further entrench perceptions that the marginalisation of certain groups is justified (2017).

3.2. My nexus of practice: an NGO

APA uses the United Nations' (Department of Public Information) definition of NGO (Levery, 2008, see on webpage):

A not-for-profit, voluntary citizen's group that is organized on a local, national or international level to address issues in support of the public good. Task-oriented and made up of people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizen's concerns to Governments, monitor policy and program implementation, and encourage participation of *civil society* stakeholders at the community level.

The terms NGO and CSO very often are used interchangeably, even though NGOs are a subset of CSOs, most of the time these are involved in development cooperation, in development programs, projects initiated by CSOs. The definition of CSO adopted by the OECD DAC (2009, see on the webpage) is the following:

[CSOs] can be defined to include all non-market and non-state organizations outside of the family in which people organize themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain. Examples include community-based organizations and village associations, labour unions, co-operatives, professional associations, etc.

Thus, CSOs can be regarded as a third sector next to the state (government) and the conglomeration of profit-seeking firms and entities (economy). Civil society is generally seen as a political force in pressuring governments for action, holding states accountable through the advocacy of social justice and equity.

In Hungary the landscape of civil society is vast and heterogeneous, and when it comes to Roma rights representation it is regarded as a prominent presence not just in politics, but also in terms of "good inclusion practices". The latter is due to the fact that NGOs and local associations had to fill in the gaps of tackling poverty and discrimination because of the continuum of social issues faced by the Roma minority, and people living in deep poverty without a minority ethnic affiliation, issues which were not acted upon by the State. In Alexiadou's words (2019, par. 52): "The policies and actions

of these NGOs to a large extent substitute for the functions and responsibilities of local and national governments, and they perform equality work at local level.”

Various civil society organizations created for the cause of the social inclusion of the disadvantaged connect local communities with governmental institutions, provide practical help (financial and material) and moral support (cultural activities, community building) and they also take initiatives at the different levels of schooling, promoting inclusion in education (OECD, 2020).

Even though Bourdieu’s theoretical description of society and its issues felt deterministic, I still had my faith in education (in what I believe “good” education could do for the greater good), I still wanted to make a difference somehow, and not just as a silent observer through a simple Q&A research, but as an educator-ethnographer immersing myself in the actual social work necessary for change.

I can’t remember how, but I found this NGO, which started out as an art school developing its own threefold visual education methodology, that focuses not only on visual communication, but on the children’s social competences as well, while also compensating disadvantages by aiming at personal development, especially with the enforcement of “sense of achievement” and “self-worth”.

The school is based in a small city in one of the poorest regions of Hungary, but because the most disadvantaged children living in the nearby villages could not join these after-school art courses (due to commuting issues), the founder of the school decided to “expand” and take the art lessons to the children. In the present, the art school operates in 7 settlements, the art classes taking place in 10 different schools and one orphanage altogether. It is important to clarify that this NGO was not and is not using discourses of affirmative action, but wants in general to work against poverty and social inequalities. The ethnic minority of Roma in Hungary “just happens” to be the most disadvantaged population, this is why sometimes the Roma thread is

inevitable in the European and national discourses of social inequalities.

Becoming obvious through the educational practice, that the social integration of highly disadvantaged children would never take place solely in (and by the means of) educational institutions, the NGO was created based on a long term (20 year) complex strategy which meant profound involvement in three distinguished areas: 1. education and family care; 2. community development; and 3. institutional cooperation.

The emphasis of the long term project is on *enabling* the underprivileged social class defined by extreme poverty, giving the long term aid for developing capacities to “move up” the social ladder. The NGO operates its long term integration strategy project in a small village, where for the purpose of creating job opportunities for the locals, the organisation started a social entrepreneurship program with a craft line (creating craft objects for everyday use) and a food processing line (based on agricultural activities, selling bio, jarred food).

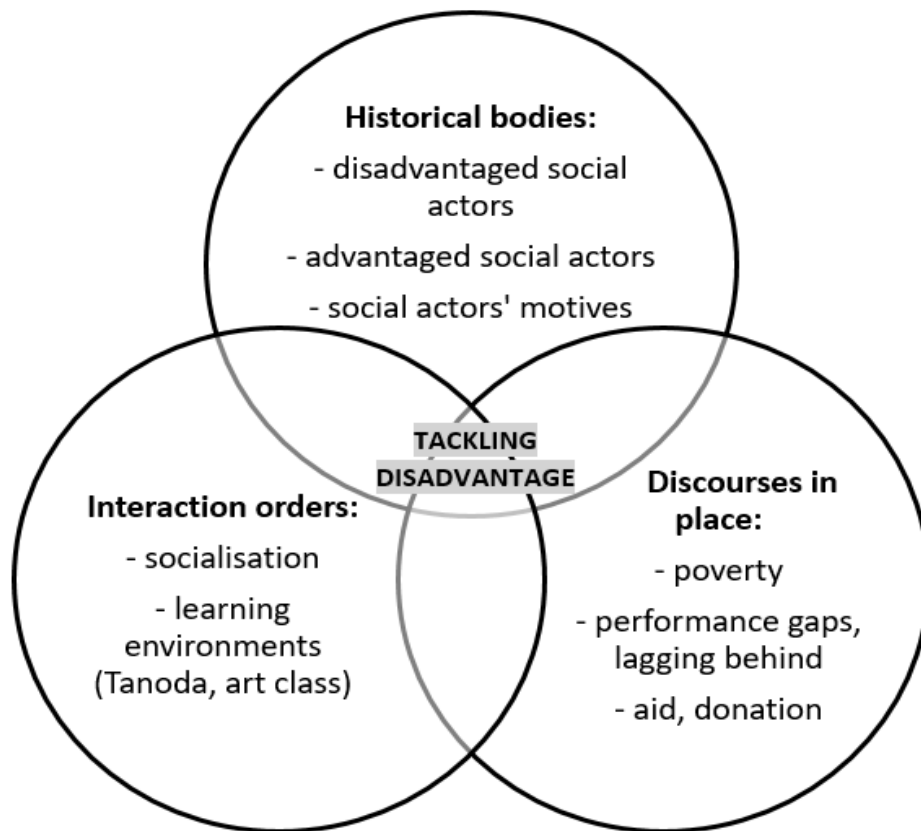
Different community building programs are organised on a weekly basis in the village (this NGO pursuit could be regarded as “adult education”, with the purpose of developing individual competences of adults, such as self-support, crisis management, health education), and in addition to the primary art school, the NGO runs an after school program as well (the Tanoda) to help children with their school work.

The organisation puts an emphasis on governmental, institutional cooperation in terms of social work, offering guidance and help in everyday administrative tasks to the villagers, additionally helping in health crises too (paying for medicine, ensuring assistance if needed with doctoral appointments). Monthly scholarships for the children, support for providing school equipment, clothes, financial and material aid for the families is also provided. They provide material,

educational and financial support to approximately 1200 families per year.⁵

When I applied for an internship at the NGO two and a half years ago, I thought I knew the *whats* of disadvantages and I was mostly interested in the *hows* of tackling. I had a strong preconception of what I will encounter composed of objective and theoretical declaratives (Discourses). But as I started to engage in the nexus of practice, the social actions of “compensating” disadvantages made me aware of the complexity of *whats* and *hows*. Thus I was constantly questioning the *hows*, as well as constantly thinking about my motives as an activist researcher, while also wondering about the motives of the other social actors of the social action I wanted to “expose”. This is what I was expecting when arriving to the nexus of practice, what my idea of the social action of tackling disadvantages looked like (before engaging in the nexus of practice):

⁵ All the information in this paragraph is taken from the NGO’s website. For ethical considerations, I am not referencing the webpage to make sure that the official name of the organisation remains anonymous.



4 Figure Expected nexus of tackling disadvantages (adapted from Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 20)

4. ENGAGING THE NEXUS OF PRACTICE

In the first task, engaging the nexus of practice, you have established the social issue you will study, found the crucial social actors, observed the interaction order, and determined the most significant cycles of discourse. This has given you your zone of identification and helped to identify the crucial mediated action (or actions) where that social issue is being produced, ratified, or contested. (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 159)

In this chapter I will present how I established my zone of identification and how the positioning of myself in the nexus of practice challenged my preconceptions of what I thought disadvantages “looked like”. I will form this first phase of my nexus analysis into a narrative: first I will “tell the story” of how I ended up in the village and then I will describe my two sites of engagement in which I became a participant.

For each site I will enlist the crucial actors, the interaction orders and the significant cycles of discourses, all of which are enabling the social action(s) of addressing disadvantages but in different ways, for and with different actors. Then I will tell some “stories of disadvantages”, as I heard them, as they were told in the village. These being the intersecting cycles of discourses circulating through the scenes of the village, the scene of the Tanoda and the Baby and Mommy club. Finally, I will elaborate on the ethical aspects of this nexus analysis, discussing the ethical issues arising from the fact that my insider ethnography research is especially thematising vulnerability (defined by social inequalities) and I am constantly engaging throughout the work of the analysis with vulnerable people, adults as well as children, and even infants.

4.1. From the Art school to the village on the border. The social action under study.

My involvement in the social work of the NGO started with an internship in the early spring of 2019. Everyone at the organisation knew that while working there, I was also doing research and I received consent from all my colleagues to observe their activities and take photos (6 teachers, 3 social workers, 3 administrative staff, 1 psychologist, 1 handyman and the head teacher of the school/founder of the NGO). However, all the data I collected during my time being at the “office” and at the art school became irrelevant as soon as I arrived in the village. Still, I feel that I need to at least present a sketch of this initial phase of my involvement in the NGO’s wide-ranging activities.



For 6 months I worked on an educational-entrepreneurial project. The goal was to create a social and emotional learning tool, a paper theatre together with the children and teachers, then make a product out of this, which could be sold under the NGO’s brand name.

My job was to write sensitising stories with the children of the art school. Following this stage, the teachers helped illustrate these, and then we made recordings (YouTube videos) of the children telling/playing the stories they wrote and drew with the wooden frame of the paper theatre.

During the 6 months I was present at all the school and NGO meetings, I travelled with the teachers of the art school accompanying them on their lessons, I went to a 3-day vocational training held by the teachers of the art school in a bigger Hungarian city, and I helped with the sorting and packing of dozens of Christmas aid parcels and of the so called shoe box gifts.

During this time, I wrote a “learning” journal which contains 20 entries, took 86 photos and I also kept all my lesson plans which I made while working on the paper theatre project (15 plans altogether, with reflexive comments on past lessons and “predictions” on future lessons). Again, after arriving in the village and becoming more and more engaged in the social work done there, I felt that I needed to start from scratch, hence I needed to collect new data and immerse myself in a new and very different participatory research, different to what I had expected.

The first time I went to the village where the NGO is implementing its long term integration project was in July 2019 (the 9th year of the 20-year framework). Until the end of summer, every two weeks I was there for 7-8 days consecutively, I helped the Tanoda in organising 3 summer camps for the children in the village, and I was also offered a paid part-time job at that time by the founder of the NGO to organise weekly Baby and Mommy club event.

During that summer I entered in the field of practice of the NGOs intense and focused educational-social work and I felt instantly drawn in, I wanted to stay. In terms of my nexus analysis, I needed more time to get familiar with all the children who attended the after-school activities of the Tanoda, their parents and older siblings, with the Tanoda teachers and the volunteers of the Tanoda, with the young moms and their babies from the Baby and Mommy club. I needed recognition, I needed to get into the zone of identification *with* the participants in the nexus of practice. During the next 6 months I learned the “ways of doing things” and the “ways of saying things”.

4.1.1. The Baby and Mommy club

Altogether, I have been organising the weekly Baby and Mommy club for 2,5 years. I was responsible for the early-years education and care program of the NGO. The social action under focus in this site of engagement was, on the one hand, childrearing and childcare, and, on the other, the action of “growing up”. The literal space where all the B&M club activities happened was on one of the properties of the NGO. We used the garden for a lot of outdoor play and we also had a designated B&M room.

For all of these gatherings I prepared ahead, I wrote plans in which I outlined the schedule of the weekly event, and I specified one main activity (such as making baby toys, cooking healthy baby foods, sensory play, games for specific gross and fine motor skills, language development, etc.). Before each club meeting I wrote an open invitation on the village’s Facebook group, and after each club meeting I wrote a long Facebook post, with lots of photos attached (taken at the event). These Facebook posts were public, but only accessible to the members of the group (who were mainly villagers and individuals related in one way or another to the NGO).

After each event I also wrote an entry in my fieldwork journal (this was accessible only to the workers of the NGO), related to the children's development. These entries fulfilled both a pedagogical and a social work function in terms of methodology and assessment, and they incorporated numerous observations regarding how both children and mothers interacted, how they behaved and/or what they said during our club meetings.

In the beginning, the above described "ways of doing", organising these pedagogical-community events were not so systematic, they only became "practice" during the phase of navigating the nexus of practice. Also, in the beginning, the above enlisted documentation was not meant to become data, since I was only focusing on getting into that zone of identification and fulfilling my job description. But after realising how precious these documents were, I started generating these and handling these as data, but only after asking for consent from all the Baby and Mommy club members and the NGO. I received written consent from everyone. Thus in the first phase of this nexus analysis I did not collect data in the classical sense. Still, I was mapping my site of engagement, positioning myself in it, as it follows.

The crucial social actors

Altogether, in the 2,5 years of my active role as the facilitator of the B&M club, more than 10 moms attended the events, 3 mothers on a regular basis, the other 7 mothers came once or twice in 2 - 3 months. Some of the mothers brought with them 2 children. The age range of the children was between 0-3 years. During the 2,5 years 12 children were club members, and 5 children were considered regulars, meaning that they came to these events regularly with their mothers.

Interaction order

The main activity on the mothers' part during the B&M club events was assisting their children during the organised and free playing activities. They also had to help with the preparation of snacks and with the tidying up before leaving for home. The B&M club gatherings seemed to be also a good platform for them to meet and discuss recent events, happenings in the local community.

On the children's part the B&M club events were all about playing and discovering their surroundings, socialising with their cohorts. Depicting the interaction order within the mother and child relationship during these meetings was also possible.

The most significant cycles of discourse

Overt and covert discourses regarding childcare and childrearing were predominant in the site of engagement of the B&M the club. Discourses regarding the daily lives of the community were also predominantly present (in connection and regardless of the presence of the NGO).

4.1.2. The Tanoda

The tanoda is not operated by governmental organizations, and is based on the local peculiarities, the voluntary participation of children and young people, and on individual needs. It is a community scene with independent infrastructure. The tanoda gives a complex service which is looking after the whole scale of personal development, which is not well-approved in the educational system, and not accessible for children and young people coming from marginalized communities (TanodaPlatform).⁶

After the summer, I started volunteering at the Tanoda, but later with different funded educational projects, I was given a salary for my work. I worked there for 2,5 years, spending 2-3 days in the village every week. The “ways of doing things” in the afterschool were already given, since the leader of the Tanoda and the two teachers there (one of them being a math teacher, the other one a special education teacher) built the whole concept together. I just had to familiarise myself with how the Tanoda regularly operated, what the tasks were that needed to be done, and get myself involved.

The Tanoda was open from Wednesday until Saturday. Within this time period the students, who live in the village, had the possibility to receive one-on-one learning sessions after school with one of the teachers/volunteers of the Tanoda once a week. The teachers and the volunteers planned ahead for each child’s individual, one-on-one learning time in accordance to the child’s needs and his/her individual learning development (this being based on each child’s individual literacy and math skills after a basic assessment, or on the basis of the child’s learning diary).

⁶ The TanodaPlatform is a fellowship of all after school programs in Hungary. It is a network of non-governmental after school facilities, especially of those which have a clear and strong educational focus.

The learning plans were personalised and the learning itself was organised based on experiential learning practices. Each child had a learning diary: after every “Tanoda-time” (particularly after the individual learning sessions) the teacher/volunteer had to fill out the child’s learning diary (with specific rubrics, grading scales and complementary written evaluation in an excel table), thus the learning paths of the pupils were methodically and systematically monitored, their knowledge and skill sets continually assessed.

Kindergarten children also received pedagogical support by the Tanoda through a program helping them to prepare for elementary school (this was again preceded by a comprehensive pedagogical assessment).

Beside the possibility of individual pedagogical support for all the children living in the village, the Tanoda also organises several camps a year, all of them lasting several days during summer, autumn, winter and spring breaks. These camps are more about having fun and engaging in bigger projects in groups, as well as about board games, since the Tanoda has a strong board game-pedagogy profile.

With the permission of the Tanoda leader, I gained access to data from over 10 years, data specifically monitoring the development of each child who received/was receiving educational services from the Tanoda.

In the navigating phase of this nexus analysis, because of a lack of capacity, I decided not to use this data. Nevertheless, I did write field notes, observations during my disadvantage-compensating work within the site of engagement of the Tanoda, but only when I was learning with the children whose mothers were members of the Baby and Mommy club.

Altogether, there were 10 Tanoda children whose mothers also attended the B&M club. 2 mothers gave me consent for research involving the observation of their school-aged children (4 children). I also asked for consent from the children. One of them did not want to participate in my research, and two wanted me to show them what my field notes, the observations looked like before agreeing. After showing them my field journal, they agreed.

Thus I observed 3 school-aged children, who were in the Tanoda's after school program for 1 month, in 2020 October (this means I observed 4 one-on-one learning sessions per child). However, I did not analyse this dataset in detail, but only wrote some general observations connected to the “bigger picture” in the changing phase of this nexus analytical research (I will refer to this data-segment accordingly).

The crucial social actors

The social actors of this site of engagement are all the children who attend the after school activities of the Tanoda (52 pupils), and the teachers and volunteers of the Tanoda (3 teachers constantly present, me, and 4-5 volunteers who come to the village for 2 days once every 1 or 2 months). There are 3 school children whose one-on-one learning in the Tanoda I observed, in these individual learning sessions I was also a participant.

Interaction order

All learning sessions started with a “warm up”, then there were literacy related activities and games, as well as assignments based on mathematical concepts. After all the “learning”, there is also a “cool down” (this is the RJR model of learning⁷). The learning plans usually had a theme (about the seasonal holidays or based on the interest of the child). In the learning environment the child and the teacher/volunteer were sitting at a table using learning tools, DIY objects for learning or board games. They interacted, played learning-games, even read together. After the learning session, the children who had the same learning time slots had the possibility to play board games together or play on tablets/computers individually.

The most significant cycles of discourse

Everything that is related to school and schoolwork is just as determining as the other discourses which are characterising the daily lives of the children (happenings at home, important family events, the bigger and smaller discourses of the whole village). The personnel of the Tanoda was preponderantly holding up a professional discourse regarding education, methodology, each child’s development. Additionally, there was also the cycle of the Tanoda related organisational discourse.

⁷ “Ráhangolódás, Jelentésteremtés, Reflektálás” - trans. in English: Getting attuned to the learning, Making sense of the learning material, Reflecting on the learning material



6 Figure Nexus of the Tanoda (adapted from Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 20)

4.2. The disadvantages of the village

The village is a dead-end settlement with 270 habitants. The population is of 70% Roma and 30% of Hungarian or Romanian ethnicity. There are no shops and there is no school. The children are commuting to school to the nearby town by bus. This town is 7 km from the village and there are 4 busses between the two settlements during weekdays, and 3 on weekends and bank holidays.

There is one (governmental) educational institution in the village: a kindergarten. The villagers who do not have a car often pay someone else to take them shopping for groceries, clothes, medication. Once a week a doctor comes to the village, thus there are 6 consulting hours available for the sick per week. The post is being handed to the villagers personally on a daily basis. The postman drives through the 4 streets of the village with a car, stops at the houses, sound the horn, and waits for the recipients of the letters to come out.

During the week, the disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged children are entitled to a warm meal, thus at lunch time many families go to the local governmental building to pick up these meals (the amount of the food per family depends on how many underage children there are in the family). In the village they even refer to this event of the day as “going after lunch”. When it comes to work opportunities, there are three possibilities: the villagers can work in the NGOs social entrepreneurship program, they can do communal work (most of the families do: work as an assistant at the kindergarten, assist at the kitchen or do gardening) and/or they can do seasonal work (mostly for the mayor). Others are commuting to provide for their families: they work at nearby factories, they accept undeclared manual labour, they move to the capital for several weeks, or sometimes they cross the border and work on different construction sites as undeclared workforce.

Prostitution, child abuse, modern day slavery, domestic violence is commonplace in such settings. Ruinous houses with broken windows, piles of trash in the yards, rats and mice running around the houses are ordinary sights. This village (with aging “original” inhabitants alongside the social phenomenon of “increasing” Roma residents in especially small, deprived and impoverished settlements, specifically common in CEE countries) represents a new type of slum, a different one from poor, crowded city areas, but more of a forgotten, outlandish, socially excluded space, without any opportunities whatsoever for social mobility.

4.3. Ethical considerations

Throughout the implementation of this research, ensuring that I do everything I can in order to conduct this nexus analysis in line with proper, unquestionable ethics was very important to me. Especially because I am studying disadvantages, and I am aware that all participants of this research (women, children, infants) are vulnerable.

I learned the ways to correct scientific conduct based on the BERA ethical guidelines for educational research (2011) and the European code of conduct for research integrity (2017).

4.3.1. Ethics on Data generation

I consider that gaining access to the community of the village and then being able to do insider ethnography was mere luck. In the last two months of my internship (in 2019), because it was the summer and the art school was closed, I went to volunteer in the summer camps of the Tanoda. Thus I started to familiarise with the community, mostly with the children but with the mothers attending the Baby and Mommy club as well.

After realising my precious position in the nexus of practice of the NGO, I decided that I wanted to collect data purposefully for this study. Accordingly, I asked all my possible participants to give me their written consent if they were willing to participate in my research. I gave them a translated template of a consent form adapted to the needs of my study. I read the form together with them and explained what the document entailed line by line, making sure that they understood what their signature meant. The one-page form included the following: the purpose of the study, its procedures, participation and withdrawal, and making sure the research participants remain anonymous, asking consent to also observe their underage children.

When I wanted to include the site of the Tanoda for data generation, it was important to me to ask participation consent from the children as well. Even though I received consent from the children, in the end I did not use this dataset.

Several times during my fieldwork, I reminded the participants that besides facilitating the B&M club I am also observing the happenings of those occasions.

During the in-depth interviews, when I felt that the topics which came up were too sensitive, I stopped the flow of the interview and asked the participant if she was comfortable with sharing that type of information with me, and if yes, was she comfortable with me incorporating that information in my research ensuring her anonymity.

4.3.2. Ethics of writing up and report the findings

I assigned random letters to the participants to make sure that they will not be recognised. I considered that their age is valuable information for gaining a better understanding of the social disadvantages I wanted to depict, thus I kept this information, but before doing so, I checked with the participants to make sure that they do not mind. When mentioning the civil organisation which provided the nexus of practice for my study, I simply used the NGO abbreviation to ensure further anonymity.

When reporting my findings, I tried my best to make sure that I follow the primary criteria of validity: credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity (Whittemore et al., 2001, as cited in Aarnikoivu, 2020).

5. NAVIGATING THE NEXUS OF PRACTICE

The nexus analysis consists of navigating the cycles of discourse and the histories of the historical bodies which constitute a mediated action and of the discourse analysis and motive analysis of how that navigation is done by both the analyst and the participants. Where it is abundantly clear what the key mediated actions are, the only really indispensable aspect of engaging the nexus of practice is to establish the researcher within a zone of identification. (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 156)

In the navigating phase of this nexus analysis, as being established in the zone of identification in not just one but two sites of engagement (the Baby and Mommy club and the Tanoda), I reached out to the selected participants and asked for their permission to collect data purposefully for this study. I received the consent forms in January 2020, after which the generated data was my tool for zooming in and out, of mapping and circumferencing the nexus of practice. Some of the data collected was (as before) simply to serve my work-related requirements, but supplemented with comments and reflections especially with the objective of this nexus navigation. I call these hybrid data. Whereas other data was especially generated to serve the implementation of the research. During the navigation process, although I collected data within the site of the Tanoda as well, I decided not to use them primarily.

When it comes to methodology, the Scollons (2004) designed nexus analysis based mainly on ethnographic methods. Under the sizable umbrella of ethnographic data types, as well as considering that I had many of these types of data at hand, I was obliged to choose due to the limitations of an MA thesis. Accordingly, my primary methodology was insider ethnography (Giazitzoglu & Payne, 2018; Aarnikoivu, 2020), and for this I picked semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participant observations as my main data. The latter I call hybrid data, since it is a mosaic of a *field journal* which

contains notes about the children’s development and general behavioural observations I made during the Baby and Mommy club events (more than 60 entries over the 2,5 years), of all the Baby and Mommy club *plans with comments* I made for each event, and of the “clublogue” in the form of *public Facebook posts* with attached *photos*. From this hybrid data I selected randomly 2 B&M club events of which datasets (journal, plan, clublogue) I examine and present in this paper.

The data collected during the navigating phase of nexus analysis is summarized in the table below.

Site of engagement	Social actors/ research participants	Type of data	Theme	Represented NA concept	Navigating - how?
B&M club	2 mothers and 4 children	2 plans with comments, 2 field journal entries and 2 Facebook posts with attached photos	What we do at the B&M club	Interaction order	Zooming in, examining present discourses
B&M club	2 mothers (N. & I.)	Semi-structured, in-depth interviews	Childhood School Motherhood	Historical bodies	Zooming out, examining past discourses

1. Table Data summary

In this chapter I will first “zoom in”, examining the social action under study, namely childrearing and childcare among disadvantages, by observing the interaction order during 2 Baby and Mommy club events. I will outline the relationship between 2 mothers and their children. This dataset was chosen at random, the only consideration was the participation of two mothers (both of them being B&M club members with 2 children) in the 2 B&M club gatherings of which documentation I wanted to analyse. One of these

B&M club events took place on the 24th of May 2021, the other was held on the 23th of June 2021.

The second segment of this navigation phase is about zooming out (both in time and space), understanding how the historical bodies of 2 mothers came to be by trying to depict how the discourses of disadvantages engraved themselves into these bodies. The three main topics of the in-depth interview discussions were based on the chronological principle of narrativity, the main themes of the conversations were childhood, school/education and motherhood.

5.1. The Baby and Mommy club - interaction order

Ethnography entails gaining access to naturally occurring events, observing, uncovering and comprehending the meanings which the social actors involved attach to these events to produce a systematic written account of what has been ethnographically observed and heard. (Giazitzoglu & Payne, 2018, p.1150)

My focus during the Baby and Mommy clubs as a social worker was twofold. I was interested in the social action of childrearing and childcare and I also wanted to scrutinise the socialisation and development processes of the children. In this site of engagement, in order to examine both subject matters I had to closely observe, on the one hand, the interactions between the mothers and their children, and, on the other hand, the way the children played with each other or by themselves. As a researcher conducting a nexus analysis, I was especially interested in the interaction orders of mothers and children, and of children and children.

During the 2,5 years of organising the B&M club events, my field journal became substantial. I have written more than 60 entries of observations. The portfolio of event plans I made is likewise large, and it is important to mention that these plans were built one upon the other for pedagogical purposes. I included certain activities to obtain specific outcomes in terms of child development, but also with the intention to shape the site of engagement of the Baby and Mommy club, hoping that habits, discourses and observed interaction orders will also be changed by certain consistent activities, routines and rituals.

However, due to limited capacity, in the upcoming part I will discuss my analysis of only two B&M club events, two journal entries, two plans with added observations, starting off with the two translated clublogues of each B&M club occasions (from Hungarian to English). With each presented B&M club occasion I am focusing on one mother and her children. Through my insider positionality as a researcher, as well as a social actor in the nexus of practice, with the knowledge and consent of all the social actors whom I was studying, I tried to zoom in on the social issue I was interested in. In the following I will attempt to depict the manifestations of disadvantages with the studied interactions during the B&M club by reporting my observations.

The journal entries I am using are each 2 pages long, the plans are 2-2 pages, these also contain images I found on the internet (the images helped me prepare for the given B&M club). I also included photographs I took during these B&M club events in which none of my research participants can be identified.

All Baby & Mommy clubs started with a welcome-singing circle, where the mothers sat down with their children and the older ones (1,5 - 3 year olds) picked out 4-5 nursery rhyme cards from the magic box. We sang these rhymes/songs together as a group. Next, there was free play, but before each B&M club I prepared the play area according to my plan (I appointed certain development areas for that particular B&M club and I put out toys, created play stations, play corners, where those development areas could be developed through free play and sensorimotor activities). About mid-way through, we gathered the children to wash their hands, and had a healthy snack together at the table. The mothers helped prepare these and also helped with the dishes afterwards. Before leaving for home, the children could have another play session, then we tidied up together (children and mothers), said goodbye, and headed home.

5.1.1. B&M club1

The first hot Baby and Mommy Club

Summer is finally here, so we celebrated it with lots of water play at today's Baby and Mommy Club.

On the one side of our activity table there were water mills and boats, on the other side we had a desert with huge ice cream cones and scoops. This magic table awaited the older children. For the younger ones we had our sensory tray filled with water and balls. F. decided that she wanted to play with the soapy water as well. The youngest children played on the play mat with baby books and plush rattle toys.

Of course, the different vehicles also made an appearance (R. even rode a little on the pedal bike with some help from his mom), and as we just had to repair them, we also took out our toolkit. Different toy cars tested the grounds of our garden, we played with balls and had fun on the swings and the slide. We didn't forget to marvel at and feed the chicken, and J. even watered his flowers.

All in all, we had a great time at this Baby and Mommy club with lots of inquisitive children, rummaging hands and merry mothers.

(Translation of the clublogue entry written by me as a public Facebook post)



J., F. and V. (J. is 26, F. is 1,5 and V. is 3 years old)

J. brought both her girls, her eldest one was at kindergarten. She missed the last 3 occasions of the B&M club. When she arrived, she was very irritated. F. and V. climbed out of the stroller on their own (they were sitting in the same single stroller next to each other), and went straight to the activity table. J. sat down and started complaining about her neighbour. When I asked the whole group to gather around and follow along with the nursery rhymes and children's songs at the beginning of our B&M club, J. and another mother didn't join the circle and didn't try to involve the children in the activity (she was murmuring to the other mother that there is no point in sitting down with them by force, because they will only scream and get up anyways). She waited for me and the others to finish, for the free play to start. J. then brought up topics regarding the donations given by the NGO (she was dissatisfied) and started to talk about village gossip threads. J. didn't interact with her children so much, but she kept an eye on them. She was mostly chatting with the other adults. Sometimes, when F. walked to her, she nursed and cuddled her while chatting. When V. rode out to the street with the pushbike a couple of times, J. tried to call her back, shouting, saying that she is a "bad girl", but didn't go after her, only when the child started to go off towards home on the bike. At the end of the B&M club, after J. calmed down and started enjoying herself, she participated more in the activities, she then helped the children group feed the chickens.

V. couldn't play for a longer period of time with just one toy. If she saw her sister or another child playing with something she liked, she took it from them by force, played with it a little, then threw it on the ground and went to grab another toy. Her attention span was very short, everything around her seemed to overstimulate her. Climbing and playing on the swing was something she really enjoyed, she didn't want to take turns. During snack time she sat at the table with the others, but was fully immersed in the activity of eating (didn't interact with the other children in any way). She didn't approach her

mother at any point during the B&M club. When feeding the chickens, she screamed if someone wanted to take seeds before her from the bucket. At one point, V. squatted down and peed on the ground while she was playing at the activity table (she was playing with sand), without letting anyone know that she had to go to the toilet. (V. only had a dress on and was barefoot. During the nights J. has to put diapers on her, but she is potty-trained).

F. doesn't talk yet, but she is everywhere, her physical development is in accordance with her age (only in some specific motor areas, especially fine motor skills shows some fall-backs). She immersed herself in play, she didn't mind the other children, but she didn't interact with anyone except her mother. Sometimes she ran to J. asking for comfort and breast milk. At one point she took off her clothes randomly. Mum grabbed her and shook her a little, saying: "I told you not to do that. You can only be naked at home... I can't put on her clothes, because she always strips off, can't go with her anywhere..." (F. had a way too big T-shirt on her, only that T-shirt, she was barefoot, didn't have a diaper on. When it is warmer outside, J. lets the kids be naked.)

At the end of the B&M club event J. helped a little with gathering the scattered toys, asked for some diapers (all mothers can ask for diapers, 14/week/child), and left with F. and V. before everyone else, before to group managed to tidy up properly.

2.1.2 B&M club2

The experimental Baby and Mommy Club no.1

Today we conducted several experiments and explored the different properties of water with various repetitive games, and with several water splashing stations - as it was really hot, we held a water play day!

With the youngest ones we made some colourful water bags for sensorimotor play, and we also had a sensory tray at hand with ships and balls. Not only B. and F. were excited to touch the colourful, floppy bags, but so was J, who even helped us make them!

The activity table was simply filled with water on the one side, while on the other there were coloured balls and all kinds of spoons, inviting the kids to some dexterity play. With the tools they had to transfer the coloured balls from one compartment to the other, or to a different bowl a little farther away. And, of course, we also had a water mill installed!

And the experiments: colour blending (using the jugs filled with different coloured water), and closely observing the “blooming” of the paper flowers thrown into water (to increase attention span). We even spiced up the colour blending activity with some role play, making a ball soup.

(Translation of the clublogue entry written by me as a public Facebook post)



Zs., J. and B. (Zs. is 24, J. is 3,5 and B. is 8 months old)

Zs. is a regular at the B&M club, she never misses these events, there are only rare occasions when she can't make it. She knows exactly what goes where and knows the routine. She is very proactive. Often she reminds me of certain things (things that I wanted to do) if I get lost in the chaos of a B&M club happening. On this occasion they were alone, until another mother and her child arrived an hour later. Zs. put her 8 month old on the play mat, and showed him the plush toys, gave him the rattle and then opened the baby books for him. She didn't sing the nursery rhymes, but she sat down in the circle, did the actions and held the child in her arms, trying to convince the older

boy to come and sing with us as well. On this occasion we made colourful sensorimotor bags for the little ones using water, food colouring and zipper bags. Zs. invited J. to help us. Zs. held the bag and let J. pour the water in and add a few drops of food colouring, she sealed the bag and handed it over to J., then she encouraged him to give it to B.

J. is not supposed to be a B&M club member because he already turned 3, but he can't go to the kindergarten, since he was born right after September and the kindergarten had also reached its full capacity. Even though he is 3,5 years old, he can't talk at all, his communication skills are at the level of a 1-year old's. He points at things and shouts, lets everyone know what he wants with nonverbal communication. His older brother is 4,5 years old, and he is not talking either, although he uses a few mispronounced words. J. understands everything. He is the most immersed in activities where he has to use his hands, thus the dexterity game of transporting colourful balls with spoons seemed enjoyable for him. Sharing doesn't come easy for him, he doesn't like to interact with others.

B.'s physical development seems to be on track, he crawls everywhere although his muscle tone is high, sometimes his muscles tighten up. He constantly looks for his mom, if she is not around he starts crying. B. is very curious about everything. Zs. always puts B. down on the floor and lets him explore his surroundings. Zs. is very often criticised for this by other mothers. (It is common that other mothers who attend the B&M club events don't put down their babies, they hold them constantly in their arms. This practice often leads to early motor delay. In the Baby and Mommy club tummy time is encouraged. Up until I started visiting a few homes of the B&M club members, I didn't understand the reason for this overprotectiveness. Then I realised that the hygienic circumstances and the cold floor especially during winter explains this practice.)

It is important to mention that all of Zs.'s family members have some sort of mental disability with clear symptoms of speech

impediment. Zs. left the Baby and Mommy club a bit earlier to go after lunch. Before leaving she washed the bowls we used during snack time.

5.2. The Baby and Mommy club - historical bodies

If we think of an action as a moment in time and space in which the historical bodies and the interaction order of people and the discourses in place intersect, then each of these can be thought of as having a history that leads into that moment and a future that leads away from it in arcs of semiotic cycles of change and transformation (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 160).

Relying on Scollon and Scollon's (2004) field guide about how to do nexus analysis, my leading question in this analytical segment regarding the historical bodies of the mothers' who attended the Baby and Mommy club was the following: *How did these participants all come to be placed at this moment and in this way to enable or carry out this action?* (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 160). That is the actions of childrearing and childcare determined by disadvantages.

Thus, I wanted to widen the circumference of time, to start from the childhoods of the interviewees, and arrive at their sense of motherhood in the present. In accordance, the topics of our conversations were as follows: childhood, school/education (how they remembered school and how they perceive education today) and last but not least, motherhood. The goal throughout this mapping is to grasp the meaning and the impact of disadvantages, without stating what the cycles of disadvantages are.

Both interviews were voice recorded (the recordings were about 46 and 47 minutes long, respectively) then transcribed within a week (the transcripts were 13 and 14 pages, respectively). The interviews were taken one after the other, the same day, on the 10th of December 2020. Straight after each interview I wrote down some observations regarding the environments, the interviewees' non-verbal communication, preceding events and the circumstances of the interviews. The language of the conversations was Hungarian, thus the excerpts presented here are translated by me (I tried my best to keep the "dialect" in the translation as well). The interviews were analysed with the dual method of thematic and narrative analysis, combining the two approaches (Shukla, Wilson & Boddy, 2014). First I did an analysis on a semantic level, identifying the 'surface meanings' (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to generate codes for finding the patterns of disadvantages. Then, with a narrative analysis, I examined how the interviewees positioned and explicated themselves in their stories, as well as how they built up their narratives (Riessman, 2002), trying to frame the context of disadvantages.

In the following I am presenting the two mothers' narratives.

5.2.1. N's story

N. at the time was 28 years old⁸. She had 4 children from 4 different fathers, she was a single mother and she was accommodated with her children through the social housing project of the NGO. Her oldest child was in the 3rd grade and her youngest was 18 months old. In the present (2021) she gave birth to another child, a baby who is now 3 months old.

⁸ She is the same age as me. I think this is an important footnote in terms of the differences between our life trajectories: the social advantages I have and the social disadvantages N. has.

It was obvious that she was expecting me. She left her children in the care of her sister, so that we could have a “quiet” conversation. She tidied up, even bought and prepared tea for me, but she was very nervous. In the room it was warm, there was fire in the stove and wood in the corner.

1. Childhood

When asking my first question, what was your childhood like, she gave me a simple and short answer: “Sometimes it was good, sometimes it was bad.” Then, when asking her to elaborate on this, the key figure of the *caretaker* emerged:

After I was born my mum left me at the hospital, grandma came after me, brought me home, and afterwards she only gave me to my mum for feeding, and then took me straight back.

N. has seven younger brothers/sisters. She is the oldest and the only child from a different father, thus she is “the stepchild” in the family. In her narration the relationship with her siblings, the patterns of *bullying* and *money* in direct relation to care are the most descriptive and suggestive.

Well they bully me, beat me up, or I don't know, send me away, give me the boot. They don't give me anything, I have to buy everything for money...

Love and care had a strong semantic interrelation with material “things”, and this understanding was a strong leitmotif in N.'s life-story, especially in terms of what being a good and loving caretaker, being a good mother meant. When describing her mother's relationship with her brothers/sisters, a contrast was well depicted.

But not with the others [i.e. she did not make them pay for the things they asked - Zs.M.], she bought them things, gave them things. Just the other day, they had a bar of chocolate. She bought it from her son, obviously. But she gave him some to eat, but not to us, only for money. [The mother bought the chocolate from her son, then gave some to him - Zs.M.].

I asked N. about how she was punished as a child.

As a kid? They locked me away in a dark room... If I cried, yes. I cried for them not to lock me away. Or the house there was full of gophers, mice, everything. Then they put me to stand on my grandma's side-table in the middle of the room, I had to stand there.

When asked what is her fondest memory of her mother, she stayed silent for a long time. But because I didn't ask her another question, she replied;

Probably that she had me. Otherwise not much, what else would there be?

2. School

While talking within the second theme of school, a contrast between the life spaces of home and school stood out. N. said that she liked going to school, even though she did not have clothes, shoes or a backpack, or "*nothing*".

And then my clothes weren't that clean either, they sometimes washed them, sometimes didn't. B. [her sister - Zs.M.] and I wore them in turns. But I liked going to school anyway. At least I wasn't at home... I thought, I am not at home, I don't have to do this, that and the other, because that I was always good for. At least, I thought, I go to school and just be there. They don't bully

me, and I don't have to watch as she entertains the others, plays with them, walks with them, wanders about with them while I sit at home, mind the fire and do the chores.

When asked about *studying*, N. gave a short answer.

Well, I only learned at school because at home I couldn't, there was always something to do. What I could learn in school, I did, and that was that.

After this, I was very interested in her teachers, if they were aware about her socio-economic background and if they were able to offer her some sort of help. I was curious about how she saw herself in that space in relation to others. She said "of course" the teachers and her classmates *cared*. Up until the 4th grade.

They gave me clothes, coats, shoes, they always brought me something. Or my classmates brought me some cookies. They always offered me something. Because I never brought food with me to school, I couldn't. They didn't pack me any food or drinks. The other kids had, and they had seen that I just sat there watching them, so from then on the son of one of our teachers always brought me some as well, the teacher always packed extra for me.

N. *stopped going* to school at the 10th grade. She met the father of her first child, who did not let her go anymore. N. also talked about her relationship with this partner, who was *abusive* not just to her, but also to the child. Before getting into the details of this segment of her life, I stopped her for to make sure that she is okay, and that she does not feel any pressure to share. She wanted to talk about this. For the better understanding of disadvantages, I included this excerpt as well.

He threatened to hit me now as well. He actually hit K. [the child - Zs.M.] the last time he was here. Because she didn't go to him. He said to her come here, mama. K. said no. He said, come, I brought you shoes. She still doesn't go. Then he throws the shoes in the ditch and tells her to go after them. Then I say, what, you think this kid is a dog, so you can play fetch with her? Then he threatens to hit me. Then as K. still didn't move, he actually hit her. This was during the summer, while the summer camp was going here at the Tanoda. K. even ran in there.

3. Motherhood

Are you a good mother? When I asked this, the above mentioned leitmotif (care and love being expressed through material things, especially sweets) appeared in her answer again.

Well I give them more than what I was given. I buy them presents for Saint Nicholas Day, we celebrate their birthdays. Even if it is from my last pennies. If there is something needed for school, I pay for it. Just the other day G. [child - Zs.M.] brought home a notice that there will be a photo shoot, 1500 [Forints - Zs.M.]. I went about asking until I had enough to give him. I paid for their packs as well, everything. I pay their class money, even in kindergarten.

When asking N. what she usually does together with her children, she did not know what to answer, what to make of my question. She seemed confused by it. I helped her a little and asked if she reads books or sings nursery rhymes. She said that she doesn't, but her oldest child does:

We have already received some books. We have Ludas Matyi that she [her child - Zs.M.] reads them every evening. But just that one book. And the things they learn in school, they do at home, recite nursery rhymes, for example. They entertain themselves.

5.2.2. I.'s story

I. was 36 years old at the time of the interview. She has 5 children, her youngest child was 20 months, the oldest 16 years old. We have a lot in common, because both of us are from Romania (we used to talk a lot about "home"). She and her husband bought their new home approximately a year ago with a governmental loan which is mostly (almost exclusively) accessible to middle class families. I. had to divorce her husband for this loan (on paper), because he is an ex-convict. On the property they bought there are two buildings, with at least 5 rooms. Before they lived in a very small house, with only one bedroom.

I. was in the middle of her washing up when I arrived. She forgot that I will pay her a visit so she was surprised to see me. Her two youngest children were home and while we were talking they played in the room, eating candy and other sweets. Very often they interrupted our conversation, sometimes they interacted with their mother, and sometimes they wanted to interact with me. Her husband also came into the room at one point and we had a short conversation. The recording of this interview was very loud and chaotic, with a noisy background., which made transcription difficult.

1. *Childhood*

In I.'s answer about how she would describe her childhood, the key figure of her *caretakers* (mother and father), and in general her *family* came up as primal elements. *Family* had a decisive role in this narrative throughout the whole conversation.

I was the apple of my mother's eye, and still am to this day... But, to tell you the truth, we couldn't hang together [with her sisters - Zs.M.] much because, as I said, I was the „son” of the house. And my father always took me [to help him in his day

labour - Zs.M.] And when I got home I didn't have time as I was completely exhausted by then. And what was my remuneration? Always an ice cream.

The theme of *poverty*, of being poor was preponderantly present in I's narrative. Not just in relation to her childhood memories, but as a distinctive and determinative attribute in regard to her educational path as well.

And when we got home from school we were always trying to help our parents any way we could. Because the poor folks worked from dawn till dusk... And I had to [work - Zs.M.], Zsuzsa. Though, surely, it was not a smart thing to do, because had I finished school, I wouldn't have ended up like this, but on the one hand I don't really regret it.

2. School

Hence, I. assigns the reason for poverty in her adulthood to leaving school before finishing her compulsory education, but also highlighting the fact that leaving school was her decision.

And then when I was the age that I should've finished lower secondary school, not because I failed, but I didn't have such job opportunities. So then with my parent's accord, with my mum's accord, because I said that I would like to help them and I would like to contribute, so, I said, I would like to go to work. [She started working at a shoe factory at the age of 15 - Zs.M.]

I. talks with no shame about poverty during our whole conversation, but when it comes to her children, she becomes hesitant:

D. [her child - Zs.M.] asked, mum, why didn't you finish compulsory school, did you fail? I said no, but I haven't gotten around, you know, to explain to my children why didn't I go to school. But when the time comes, I will tell them.

In her comparison of the schools of the past and the present, *ethnic discrimination* comes up for a moment, although when I asked further questions, she did not want to elaborate. She changed the topic and suggested that today schools are different, that ethnicity is not so important if the parents really want to support their children:

We had a lousy headmistress. That hated the gypsies a little... well in the old world who could say that their child went to learn a trade [as a gypsy - Zs.M.]? Because they finished lower secondary school, and godspeed, go do communal work. But they are parents now, me for example, I don't care how much it will cost for my child to pursue further studies, I will do everything in my power, help them in any way.

Later, when *discrimination* came up again, she switched the perspective:

It depends on what kind of a man a gypsy is. If they can communicate, speak properly, they are paid attention just as any Hungarian is.

3. Motherhood

I., when I asked about motherhood, recalled her own *mother* as an example in terms of how to *raise* her children, but also how to punish them.

Take me, for example. We weren't oh, so rich either but my mum taught me decency. The saying goes that my mum said, daughter, always mind to raise your children decently... I don't hit them, I just punish them a little by not giving them anything.

I. also made a semantic correspondence between love in the form of giving “things” and punishment in the form of not giving “things”. When I asked her how she helps her children with their school work, she became cheery. It is important to note, that her biggest child is in her second year at a vocational school, she is studying to become a police officer. She was the first child in the village to even get to upper secondary school (since the NGO started its activities in the village, at least). She is even considering getting a baccalaureate exam.

When it comes to learning they don't need help. I would be able to contribute zero. I don't know anything. (She laughs.) And believe me, D. has the will to finish school. And I am proud of her, dear Zsuzsa. I am very proud, but I don't show it.

6.TOWARDS CHANGING THE NEXUS OF PRACTICE

In a few words, this is the first and perennial social change that takes place in a nexus analysis - the change of positions and identities of the researcher. (Scollon & Scollon, p.81)

The last phase of a nexus analysis is about the examination of motives and the recognition of changes throughout the conducted research. The Scollons argue that nexus analysis, first and foremost, requires a close study of the researcher's activities in the nexus of practice in which changes occurred during the navigating phase (may these be positively welcomed or negatively received). The most important criterion of this type of qualitative research, unlike with most other modes of inquiry, is not to provide answers to pre-defined research questions but to ask new and better questions which would lead to further inquiry, to arrive from the declaratives to the interrogatives of the social issue under study (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

Therefore, the results of this research are questions, questions which I formulated throughout this nexus analysis, especially during the navigating phase. Results are also the changes which came about in the nexus of practice as well as in me, as a researcher, a social worker, as a teacher and an ordinary individual. In this chapter I will present my results firstly by summarising the past 3 years in the nexus of practice, then I will examine my motive(s) throughout those years, and present the questions that came up during this time. Lastly, after pointing out some changes which happened during my engagement in the nexus of practice, I will scrutinise myself, trying to grasp the changes which came about in me, to reflect on the changes for which I am who I am today.

6.1 3 years of personal engagement in the nexus of practice

Social inequalities, especially the problem of disadvantages in education, was the social issue I wanted to do something about since my early 20s. I had failed attempts to engage in other sites before (like the social-educational work on the garbage dump-ghetto next to Cluj-Napoca, where I did my BA studies), but looking back now, I feel that working within this nexus of practice presented in this research was meant to be. The NGO's complex, multifaceted and combined approach in the field of social work, especially its origin story of becoming the NGO it is today, drew me to engage in this particular nexus of practice of tackling disadvantages.

During the first six months while I was an intern with a paid scholarship from my university, I familiarised myself with the ways in which such a civil organisation works on a daily basis and with the Hungarian civil sector in general. I saw the day-to-day struggles of staying afloat as an NGO, especially in the anti-civil political environment of the Orbán government. I saw the power of crowdfunding fuelled by the strong topic of child poverty. I had the possibility to have a pique in the ways of how a pedagogical methodology of compensating inequalities is put in practice, by developing children's social and emotional skills through visual education. And I also had the chance to see how an art school operates next to other government funded schools.

In the next half a year I was mainly engaging in the nexus of practice. Learning "the ways of doing things" and "the ways of saying things". I was positioning myself in the site of the village where my journey as a social worker/educator started. I became a social actor within the nexus of practice of the Tanoda and the nexus of practice of the Baby and Mommy club, both areas built on educational support-work, trying to compensate for disadvantages.

The next year (my second year in the village) I was completely focused on my work within the Baby and Mommy club, trying to create a ritual, a B & M club schedule, an early-years education methodology for assessing and developing skills of children between ages 0-3, as well as equip the B & M club's room with proper, age appropriate toys, books and other development-enhancing objects/tools. Meanwhile, in this same year, I started a literacy project with the school-aged children of the Tanoda as well. This project was funded (thus I also received a salary), and through it I had the possibility to continue my pedagogical work related to teaching reading and writing by the means of the paper theatre. In the spring of 2020 the pandemic enforced other changes within the whole nexus of practice of the NGO, and the Tanoda and the B & M club as well had to change its mediational means. Thus we had to meet and do the social-pedagogical work online. The work within the online medium took 6 months.

In my last year, after the NGO entered in a government and EU funded, national "catching up" project (which started in January 2021), the amount and the nature of my work regarding the B & M club changed significantly. I had to do family visits every week and thus I had the opportunity to focus on the development of each child individually, tracking, assessing their needs and preparing the activities accordingly. I was immersed in the job of "how to" set up this new nexus of practice, building on the previous one.

From September I started working at a private school, teaching students from the other end of the social spectrum, students whose discourses are characterized by social advantages, accumulated capitals. The experiences of the two nexuses of practice can be only described as extreme. Nevertheless, this is a new chapter of my trajectory as an activist pedagogue-researcher.

6.1.1 The journey - My motive analysis fuelled by questions, questions fuelling this nexus analysis and inquiry beyond

A motive analysis is an aspect of discourse analysis which seeks to understand how participants, including the analyst, are positioning themselves in giving explanations for actions - are they taking on full responsibility, are they displacing responsibility to society or 'people', or perhaps to technology, or are they giving a purely goal-driven (purpose) explanation? Or are they [...] just claiming that things have just happened? (Scollon & Scollon, pp.176-176)

The three questions which constantly made me oscillate between the analysis of the **D**iscourses and of the **d**iscourses of disadvantages I faced within the social work I was doing, and between the social action of tackling those disadvantages in the nexus of practice of the NGO in its sites of engagement (Tanoda and Baby and Mommy club) were **what?**, **how?** and **why?**. These are the guiding questions of a nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

What? was asked concerning the ethnographic content of the research.

- What happens in the Tanoda?
- What are the one-on-one learning sessions?
- What is the Baby and Mommy club?
- What happens at the Baby and Mommy club?
- What is said and what is done?
- What are exactly those disadvantages that we want to "tackle"?

How? is the question of discourse analysis. Throughout the navigating phase, the hows together with the whats are the questions which generate the inquiry that perpetuates the change within the nexus of practice. These questions made me reflect and constantly alter my own practices of tackling disadvantages. I was constantly trying out new things.

- How is the practice of one-on-one learning (in the Tanoda) construed?
- How can we connect in a better way with the children during these learning occasions?
- How is the social action of childrearing and childcare I am looking at construed?
- How are those disadvantages manifested through the everyday actions of the social actors?
- How can we “tackle” those disadvantages exactly? (What are these? How to address these? How do I want to approach that educational disadvantage pedagogically? What happens at home? How can I react to the things that create disadvantages?)
- How to reach those individual developmental goals with the children?
- How to reach those developmental goals with the mothers?

Why? for me is the biggest question. The question of motive analysis and also the question I asked the most from myself, especially when I faced the overt forms of disadvantages, which made me wonder;

- Why are these dividing disadvantages?
- Why did this happen?
- Why am I here, doing this work?
- Why am I still here, doing this work?

Answering the last two questions, of what is/was my motive to conduct this research, to position myself in the nexus of practice of addressing social disadvantages, I have to say the guilt of being lucky enough to start with social advantages and be able to see and grab the opportunities for “a better life”. I feel that it is my obligation to do something about the social inequalities defining the society in which I live and which I help construct.

In regard to the results in the form of good questions, I realised that I was asking almost the same questions over and over again, of whats and hows, as these created a cycle of constantly trying in a different way, with a different approach to change the practice of addressing disadvantages in order to compensate as efficiently as possible. The cyclical inquiry of disadvantages opened up, stretched, nuanced this social phenomenon, detected new forms of its manifestations and asked for a different approach to address it by the practice social work.

What are disadvantages?

How can these be tackled?

What are disadvantages?

How can these be tackled?

What are disadvantages?

How can these be tackled?

...

6.1.2 Change?

Inarguably, changes did occur during these 3 years in the nexus of practice of the NGO. In the following I will present these.

The Tanoda

First as a volunteer, then as a Tanoda educator, I had more than 100 one-on-one learning sessions with the school aged children living in the village. I also managed a literacy project for more than a year engaging all the Tanoda children in one way or another in creative writing and storytelling exercises. Thus, I contributed actively to the pedagogical work of compensating educational disadvantages. I created learning plans, I filled out learning diaries, I participated in professional meetings regarding the educational practice and methodology of the Tanoda, giving input into its constant transformation in the last 3 years, especially during the time of COVID, when the whole operation of the Tanoda had to be rethought.

The Baby and Mommy club

When taking over the leading position of the B & M club, I found that there was no educational concept, no pedagogical methodology behind it, that even though this was meant to be an early education and care program, it lacked an organising principle. When I took over, the Baby and Mommy club was a simple recreational weekly event for mothers and babies.

Beside equipping this program with proper educational tools, age appropriate toys and books for basic skill development over the years, I also tried to build a routine and an activity repertoire based upon a proper early-years education methodology, with documentation and assessment criteria similar to what I have seen in the Tanoda. Within the national and EU funded project, I helped through my participation (as an employee) to expand the program of the Baby and Mommy club with substantial social work and a wider consideration of its educational aspect.

I want to believe that my pedagogical work also had an influence on the social actions of childrearing and childcare of mothers who were B & M club members. They often told me that they will try or that they had tried the healthy baby food recipes at home (which they first encountered at the B & M club events), or they will play the B & M club games and do skill-developing activities with their children at home.

I also hope that the pedagogical work I have done within the site of the Baby & Mommy club has added to the development of the children as well.

The Tanoda and the B & M club

One of the biggest changes which took place is a structural and organisational one. The pedagogical program offered by the NGO in the village expanded, and the educational services offered by the B & M club became a part of the Tanoda's comprehensive educational program, offering compensatory pedagogical services not just to school-aged children, but from 0 years above. I think that this bigger change was possible because of my education oriented leadership of the B & M club.

6.1.3 Critical reflections on what I learned

The biggest lesson I learned throughout this nexus analysis could be traced down in my thinking. What I mean by this is that I approach and see everything in a more nuanced way, dismissing definitive and simplistic understandings, portrayals. I sense a big difference between the way I think now and the way I used to think about everything, including social issues prior to engaging in this nexus of practice of tackling disadvantages. I feel a paradigm shift in the way I peg myself down in society, a big difference defining myself in relation to the world around me.

I became more aware and sensitive to the social issues that surround me. The experiences I gained by conducting this 3 year long nexus analysis, working in the field of social work as a teacher for such a long period of time, altered my attitude. I feel that I became humbler. This learning curve is something similar to what Aarnikoivu (2020) paraphrases, citing Green (2016) "humility reminds the researcher that their activist efforts might not be as influential as political or economic changes, no matter how well-planned and important" (p.103) (Green, 2016, as cited in Aarnikoivu, 2020). Indeed, my self-conscious, rigid activist bubble had burst, I know and I understand that the changes I generated by positioning myself in the nexus of practice do not have a big, world-altering impact. However, this recognition of my limits didn't make me retreat from my wish to do something about the social issue I am concerned about.

And last but not least, I learned a great deal about working with disadvantaged children. I gained valuable teaching experience, experience that I would not have acquired if I would have thought in a governmental school for example.

7 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

One of the obvious limitations of this study is that I chose nexus analysis as my mode of inquiry without considering any other alternatives that might have been just as suited for studying my research topic. Disadvantages could have been scrutinised through the means of other research methods, other approaches doing it justice the same way, if not even better.

Another limitation would be that even though I tried to be selective and maintain my focus throughout the research, I was able to only give a glimpse of the problem I wanted to outline with this investigation. Albeit I acknowledge that I had a great opportunity for precious fieldwork in a setting that very few could access.

Interviews with my colleagues from the Tanoda on the topic of ways of compensating disadvantages would have added another perspective to the research. Also, had I included the data analysis of the one-on-one learning observations from the Tanoda, I might have achieved a more nuanced and holistic view of disadvantages. Thus, through a prolonged navigating phase, with more circumferencing, mapping and discourse analysis within the site of engagement, the picture of disadvantages and the changing processes/practices of addressing these would have been more detailed and this would have added more value to the study.

Because the language used within the settings of my nexus analysis and the language of the academic work and write up were different, I also felt the pressure of translation, I was worried not to get lost in translation. I might have missed or interpreted wrongly certain important semantic momentums during the analysis.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Baby and Mommy club Plan 1

Kis fagyisok (0- 1,5)

eszközök/előkészülni: tepsibe víz, színes lasztik benne, játszószőnyeg (kiépítő), waldorftorony, egyéb baba-játékok

1. Vizezés



2. Játszószőnyeg
3. Hinta
4. Egyéb baba-játékok

Nagy fagyisok (1,5 - 3)

eszközök/előkészülni: Félig víz, félig Homok - tevékenykedő asztal. Homokozó eszközök, vizező eszközök, járművek.

1. Öntözés - öntözzük meg a virágokat
2. Homokozás



3. Vizezés
4. homokozó-vizezés
5. Hinta
6. Járművek
7. Labda

Appendix 2. Baby and Mommy club plan 2

Kis fagyisok (0- 1,5)



eszközök/előkészülni: vizes tepsi 1 (lasztikkal és egyéb lebegő dolgokkal), vizes lavór 2 (poharakkal, kanalakkal - töltögetős), színes sensory vizes párnácskák (4 színű)

1. Kikészített vizezős edények
2. "száraz zug" (könyvek, plüssök, zörgők),
játsszőnyeg
3. Játsszőnyeg
4. Hinta



Floating Rainbow Balls in the Water Table



Nagy fagyisok (1,5 - 3)



POURING STATION
A NO COST, HIGH FUN
TODDLER ACTIVITY



eszközök/előkészülni: tevékenykedő
asztal vízimalommal - egyik fele
töltögetős, másik fele lasztis (lasztiknál
legyen merőkanál), kikészítve locsolók,
virágminták kivágása

1. Vízimalmos töltögetős (színes vízzel)
2. Keresd meg a lasztikat, dobd bele a vízbe
3. Lasztimerés
4. virágok hajtogatása, kivirágoztatása
5. Motorozás, egyéb járgányok
6. Hinta, csúszda

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VTFVUf8nAs&ab_channel=ScienceWorld

Appendix 3. Semi structured interview questions

Childhood:

1. What was your childhood like?
2. What is your first memory?
3. How do you remember your mother?
4. What was your relationship with your mother like?
5. What was your relationship with your siblings (sisters/brothers) like?
6. How were you punished as a child?

School:

1. How do you remember your school years?
2. Did you like to go to school?
3. How did you manage at school? How did you learn?
4. What is your highest qualification?
5. Why did you leave school?

Motherhood:

1. How do you think of yourself as a mother?
2. Are you a good mother?
3. What do you do together with your children? Do you read stories to them, sing nursery rhymes together?
4. What do you think about the educational institutions attended by your children?
5. How do you help your children with their studies/learning?

Extra: what do you think about the educational program of the Tanoda, Baby and Mommy club? Are they helpful in any way?