

**13th Edition of the International Conference on Sciences of
Education, ICSED 2015, 28-30 May 2015, Suceava (Romania) &
Chernivtsi (Ukraine)**

**“Educatia in Societatea Contemporana. Aplicatii”/
Education in contemporary society. Applications.
Editors: Otilia CLIPA & Gabriel CRAMARIUC**

ISBN: 978-973-166-409-5; e-ISBN: 978-973-166-438-5

Everyday Life of Education and Welfare Institutions. Selected Research Methods

Beata ZIĘBA-KOŁODZIEJ

pp. 249-256

©2015 The Authors & LUMEN Publishing House.

Selection, peer review and publishing under the responsibility of the editors.

How to cite: Zieba-Kolodziej, B. (2015). Everyday Life of Education and Welfare Institutions. Selected Research Methods. In O. Clipa & G. Cramariuc (eds.), *Educatia in societatea contemporana. Aplicatii* (pp. 249-256). Iasi, Romania: Editura LUMEN.

Everyday Life of Education and Welfare Institutions. Selected Research Methods

Beata ZIĘBA-KOŁODZIEJ¹

Abstract

The article deals with issues of educational institutions functioning. The author presents possible ways to study everyday life of educational and welfare institutions, but it can also refer to a number of other institutions and organizations - connected with various areas of human activity. Thorough comparison of the concept of "everyday life" meanings and interpretations are given. It is stated that in the Polish study of education the topic of everyday life rarely appears. Institutions are viewed as an integral part of social reality that's why institutions are interpreted to be not stiff, lifeless buildings with a sign on the outside, but a living organism, a part of a much wider system. Grounded theory as one of the paradigms of field research, close to humanist approach is used in the given study. The author comes to conclusion that both grounded and ethnography theories can be successfully used to study everyday life in educational institutions and welfare centers or other because they allow to know the specifics of place and noticing phenomena impossible to capture with a quantitative study.

Keywords

Everyday life, uncommonness, qualitative research, quantitative research, organization, institution, ethnography, grounded theory, "compact description", phenomenology, symbolic interactionism.

Introduction

Exploring the "everyday life" of educational, upbringing, welfare, rehabilitation or any other institutions is not an easy issue. But everything what around us and what we create is common life, and sometimes uncommonness. Everything that "happens" is a part of the daily lives of people - individuals, groups, societies, and thus subject to research. The way how everyday life is researched and described, should not depend on the experience of the researcher, their past and present experiences, convictions,

¹ State Higher Vocational School, Memorial of Prof. Stanislaw Tarnowski in Tarnobrzeg, Poland, email: beatazkolodziej@wp.pl.

but primarily on the ability of objective perception and noticing the existing world and the adopted research paradigm.

The question therefore appears: is it possible to study everyday life of institutions? Or maybe this question should be regarded as a rhetorical, in light of the definition of “everyday life”? Everyday life, in fact, is in everything that surrounds us, or else - everything is commonplace. It is impossible, therefore, any scientific research that would not touch everyday life. “Everyday” is what happens in institutions, what characterizes them, what is created by people and what affects their daily lives, not only during the stay in the institution, but also beyond.

This article presents possible ways to study everyday life of educational and welfare institutions, but it can also refer to a number of other institutions and organizations - connected with various areas of human activity. I undertake the attempts to considerations regarding the concept of “everyday” which I attribute such synonyms as “everyday life”, “everyday world”, being aware of the possible differences in interpretation.

What is every day life?

As A. Schütz wrote - *the world of everyday life*, from the very beginning is “intersubjective world of culture. It is an intersubjective world, because we live in it as people among other people associated with them by interaction and work, understanding others and being understood by them. It is the world of culture, because the experienced world from the very beginning is for us the universe of meanings, or meaningful structures (...), which we interpret and meaningful references that we establish in this world only through our actions” (Schütz A., 1989).

Everyday life is a category, which everyone experiences. For some, everyday life is passivity, and for others - activity; for some - solitude, for others - participation in the everyday life of others.

According to philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels everyday life means “ordinariness, usual sort, in contrast to the extraordinary (...) Everyday life is the routine, the tradition, passive recreation; uncommonness refers to new, creation, uniqueness. Everyday life is predictable and flat; can be easily identified with the sphere of the profane (...), while uncommonness belongs to the sacred. Everyday life is something that is specifically ocular and tangible in contrast to uncommonness understood as a perfect sphere structure” (Borkowska G., Mazyr A., 2007). Everyday life is an interdisciplinary category - sociological, philosophical, historical, anthropological, psychological, political, ethnological and ethnographic, because, as previously mentioned, it is

what surrounds us and what we make - past, present and future. It is also an educational category, entered into lives of students, teachers, parents and institutions - educational, upbringing, welfare, rehabilitative and others. In the Polish study of education the topic of everyday life rarely appears. Maybe, as Dudzikowa Maria and Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak say, “it is due to the fear of accusation of trivialization (what is normal and daily is trivial), with the possible shortcomings of the methodological instruments, especially in the field of research in the qualitative, interpretative paradigm, and perhaps of fear that it is difficult to attract others interest with the results of own research” (Dudzikowa M., Czerepaniak-Walczak M., 2010).

P. Sztompka attributed eight essential characteristics to everyday life. These are the life with others, and among others, repeatability and rhythm of events, ritual forms, physical commitment, location in space decisive about its character, persistence and time frames, often lack of reflection and spontaneity (Sztompka P., Bogunia-Borkowska M., 2008).

How should we understand the institutions and what can be researched there?

Institutions are an integral part of social reality. Their appearance is an expression of civilizing and organizing of societies, and organizing of public life. They are part of culture firmly rooted in the history of the world, also in the history of education, welfare and upbringing. In this aspect of the considerations I reject the norms and morals for the organization of any aspects of life, which is also sometimes understood as an institution, such as the educational institution, the institution of law, social welfare institution or institution of the family and I focus on institutions understood as the “establishment of a public nature, dealing with a specific range of issues, working in any field” (Tokarski J., 1980). Institutions mentioned in the title are social institutions, and from the anthropological point of view - organizations, working for other people, in which the entities set goals and tasks, determine ways of activities and provide the means for performing the tasks, responding to the needs of a particular group or community (Rybicki P., 1979). In this case - students, wards of educational and welfare institutions. They include, among others: kindergartens, schools, boarding schools and dormitories, dayrooms, orphanages, care centers and a number of other institutions operating in the public sphere. Education and welfare are also system of individuals and subgroups’ actions. On one side they are people organizing the life of the institution - managers, teachers, educators, supervisors, administrative staff and serving employees; on the other - a

group of people for which these actions are taken and who is also involved in co-organizing the institutional daily life.

Taking into account the above thoughts, the institutions are not stiff, lifeless buildings with a sign on the outside, but a living organism, which is part of a much wider system. Each of the mentioned and not mentioned institutions is surrounded, as Goffman Erving says, by notable and established barriers behind which there is a specific type of activity. Behind its walls “one can find a team of executors working together in order to provide the definition of the situation to public. It includes the concept of own team and the audience, as well as assumptions regarding ethos, supported by the rules of politeness and morals (Goffman E., 2000). This is what is visible outside, stored in documents, able to be controlled.

The question is what can be researched in educational and welfare institutions? One can explore a lot, among other things: the way of organization - work place, means of implementation, division of work, the documents, the level of fulfillment of social mission, the achievement of specific objectives, functions and responsibilities, cooperation of institutions and other entities, as well as human systems - relationships of entities, conflicts, dependencies, social status, occupational hierarchy, social climate, communication, behavior patterns, rituals and symbols (Zięba-Kołodziej B., 2010).

Methods for testing everyday life in educational and welfare institutions - fieldwork

Is the phenomenon of “everyday life” - “uncommonness” so tangible that one can assign features to make its interpretations, draw conclusions? How far is cognition of everyday world objective and is the objectivity of the everyday world possible? If people construct everyday life, then they themselves, as its creator, have their own attitude and perceive it in their own way. Is everyday life explored by researcher a commonplace of the surveyed participants? Or is it the vision of researcher’s “everyday life”? There is no doubt, however, that such educational and upbringing and welfare institutions should be studied, in order to know them, improve, modernize, use so-called “Good practices” from other establishments, change to make it more friendly for those who are the actors of the institutional scene. In the opinion of M. Merleau-Ponty “there must be studied a lot of problems, which have not dealt so far, only because of the missions attributed to another function, but also because it was not taken into account in studies of different epistemological perspectives and

methodologies (usually conducted quantitative research), giving a much greater possibility of noticing important (...) issues” (Marleau-Ponty M., 1997).

Everyday life in institutions should be seen as an empirical reality available to people here and now, which is “a natural object of study not only sociology, even not only the social sciences and humanities, but also natural science. Research of the common reality goes beyond already at the starting point so, that at the beginning abolish any assumptions and language to describe this reality derived from the so-called common sense or everyday thinking” (Kędzierzawski W., 2009, p. 17).

In the studies of education, upbringing and care and everyday life of institutions assigned the mentioned areas of human activity, we deal with different methodological approaches. They concern the ways of knowing the world, and the differences concern assumptions including the possibility of scientific knowledge, the presentation of the social environment and undertaken activities by human, as well as the degree of standardization of research tools. The feature that differentiates methodology in the current social and humanistic sciences is also a range of generalizability of the results.

At this point I refer to qualitative research, especially field research - grounded theory and ethnography. Mentioned ways of learning about everyday life of institutions allow to explore the world from two perspectives - the perspective of the researcher, and much more important, although subjective, perspective of participants of social organizations. In studies of educational institutions the most important acknowledgment is not what should be (often “for show”), but noticing - how it actually is, because the description of everyday life should focus “on the description of the social world, in the state in which knowledge about the world is neither being problematic nor even clearly formulated (...) In other words, there must be studied subjective interpretations of the socio-cultural realities that have gained value of inter-subjectivity” (Kędzierzawski W., 2009, p. 19).

Grounded theory, in a classical variant of Barney Glasser and Anselm Strauss or a modified theory of discovery of Kathy Charmaz, as well as ethnography, makes it possible to study the social space of experience, meanings and symbols transmitted by humans; allows to see the reality as the participants of everyday events see. In both cases, the researcher allows “life to go on”, watching what happens and asking about what is not understandable, and how others understand what surrounds them. A characteristic feature of qualitative research, including mentioned methods / methodology is the lack of hypotheses, which can affect noticing the nuances of everyday life or rigid research tools collecting data, which is often expected by the researcher, as well as direct contact of the studied person with the tested world. In the research we should ask ourselves not only the

question: What is going on? But also: Why is it so? What influences the reality and what do the other participants think about it? Qualitative studies are reliable methodological foundation, but fieldwork is not always appropriate. One should always remember that the choice of methodology depends on the research problem and what the researcher wants to achieve and on the subject. However one should note, that “any test method, regardless of whether it is quantitative or qualitative, itself is no better than another” (Silverman D., 2008). Therefore, a good solution is a triangulation of methods in the studies, where it is possible, or even - necessary.

Grounded theory

Grounded theory is one of the paradigms of field research, close to humanist approach. It was established in opposition to the research based on positivist vision of exploring the world. It is based on the interpretation and intuitive meaning, leading to construct a theory of the average range. Research strategy used in grounded theory is the case study, and the basic concepts are: theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, coding, categories and their properties, theoretical notes and continuous comparison. With regard to educational and welfare institutions each facility may be the case. Applied research strategy allows the researcher to approach the point of view of participants of organizations - social actors set in the formal structure of the institution. For the researcher meanings and symbols assigned by the participants of the everyday life are important. “One of the varieties of the case study is a multiple case study (collective case study), in which, within a single project a few separate cases are studied at the same time or together, in order to capture a phenomenon, describe the population or circumstances occurring phenomena” (Zięba-Kołodziej B., 2010).

In this way one can get to know existing in educational institutions ways to satisfy needs, relationships, systems, and to explore phenomena that are difficult to detect in quantitative research, if we take into account only what “is”, but not necessarily “why”. I mean for example, phenomena such as school violence, especially its character; as well as the social climate and wards’ well-being at the facility, their approach to the place and people with whom they had to live together. The grounded theory techniques to gather empirical data are observation, individual and group interview, analysis of documents and visual materials. Grounded theory emerges from the continuous notes, emerging categories until saturation, when researcher discovers nothing new.

Ethnography

Ethnography is equally important for the study of everyday life in educational institutions and care centers. Liberalism of methodologists' views allows ethnography once to be the method, another time - a set of methods. Among the techniques for collecting empirical material, ethnography uses: participant observation, free interviews and with key informants, gathering the life history or visual materials. In its classic form, this method requires from the researcher to participate in the life of the study group, to better understand their everyday world. K. Charmaz treats the ethnography as "registration of particular group's life that is associated with permanent participation in the life of the environment, the community or in the social world" (Charmaz K., 2009). In ethnography one looks for many dimensions of daily life, and what is important - the ethnographer tries to understand them. Their actions define problems and research objectives, a person who meets and limits they face. Research plans may therefore, as in grounded theory, be continuously modified. Especially when unusual, unknown, surprising or festive phenomena enter the familiar everyday - foreign to the researcher, but close to the studied group, especially when they appear with some regularity, such as school ceremonies or rare rituals. The way of creation the text of reality is equally important. According to Geertz, ethnographic description characteristic feature is its detail and accuracy, even "microscopic size" which allows for a more generalized visions and interpretations proclaimed by the other sciences, from the perspective of the researcher known "small matters" (Geertz C., 2005). The ethnographic researcher can apply the logic of grounded theory, especially in relation to the coding of the collected material. Ethnography allows applying at the local level, which means that the generated theory can be extended even to similar places, institutions or groups. Generalizing of the conclusions from ethnography is strongly narrowed.

Conclusion

Both grounded and ethnography theories serve the generation of middle-range theory. They successfully can be used to study everyday life in educational institutions and welfare centers or other because they allow to know the specifics of place and noticing phenomena impossible to capture with a quantitative study. Neither school nor any type of educational, social, rehabilitative and medical institution is, technically speaking, the production establishment. People live there, they create them, and institutions affect their lives. Existing differences between institutions are the result of differences between people. They concern the way of organizing work,

relationships, degree of involvement and understanding of common goals by entities involved in everyday life, willingness to cooperate, interpersonal conflicts, and many other factors. Can the everyday life of educational institutions exist without these nuances? And are these dependencies, often invisible “with the naked eye”, important for the functioning of the people in the institutions? They are important and should be known.

References

- Borkowska, G., Mazyr, A. (2007). *Życie codzienne, jako kategoria literacka i badawcza, w: Codziennosc w literaturze XIX (i XX) wieku. Od Alberta Stifera do wspolczesnosci*. Opole: Wydawnictwo UP, 27-30.
- Charmaz, K. (2009). *Teoria ugruntowana. Praktyczny przewodnik po analizie jakosciowej*. Warszawa PWN, 33.
- Dudzikowa, M., Czerepaniak-Walczak, M. (2010). *Codziennosc w szkole. Szkoła w codziennosci, w: Wychowanie. Pojecia. Procesy. Konteksty*. Gdańsk: GWP.
- Geertz, C. (2005). *Opis gesty - w stronę interpretatywnej teorii kultury*, w: M. Kempny, E. Nowicka (red.), *Badanie kultury. Elementy teorii antropologicznej*. Warszawa: PWN
- Goffman, E. (2000). *Człowiek w teatrze życia codziennego*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR.
- Kędzierzawski, W. (2009). *Codziennosc jako kategoria antropologiczna w perspektywie historii kultury, Studia i Monografie nr 425*. Opole: Wyd. UO
- Marleau-Ponty, M. (1997). *Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung, Berlin 1966*, za: H. Dauber, *Podstawy pedagogiki humanistycznej*. Zintegrowane układy między terapią i polityką. Kraków: Impuls, 57.
- Rybicki, P. (1979). *Struktura społecznego świata*. Warszawa: PWN, 521.
- Schütz, A. (1989). *Feomenologia i nauki społeczne*, tłum. D. Lachowska, w: *Fenomenologia i socjologia. Zbiór tekstów*. Z. Krasnodębski (red.), Warszawa.
- Silverman, D. (2008). *Prowadzenie badań jakościowych*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Sztompka, P., Bogunia-Borkowska, M. (2008). *Życie codzienne - temat najnowszej socjologii, w: Socjologia codziennosci*. Kraków: ZNAK.
- Tokarski, J. (1980). *Słownik wyrazów obcych*. Warszawa: PWN, 309.
- Zięba-Kolodziej, B. (2010). *Jakościowe badanie instytucji w pedagogice społecznej*, w: *Funkcje pedagogiki społecznej czasu terażniejszego (mitu, wolności i młodej demokracji), Próby i Szkice Humanistyczne, T. 4 (1)*, T. Frąckowiak, K. Marzec-Holka, A. Radziewicz-Winnicki (red.), Wielkopolska Wyższa Szkoła Społeczno-Ekonomiczna w Środzie Wielkopolskiej. Poznań - Środa Wielkopolska: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Polskiego Towarzystwa Pedagogicznego, Zakład Pedagogiki Społecznej WSE UAM.