

THE COLONIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL LIFEWORLDS:  
HABERMAS AND THE COMMUNICATIVE PROCESSES OF TEACHING AND  
LEARNING

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### Abstract

Jurgen Habermas' twofold conception of society as both system and lifeworld is an effective conceptual tool to analyse the tension between teaching and learning in the public school classroom and the systemic organization of public education.

Communicative action can be seen as an orientation point for pedagogical practice, and this necessitates conceptualizing the classroom as an educational lifeworld subject to systemic pressure. The example of standardized testing as a systems steering mechanism in U.S. public education is explored as a potential "colonization" of the educational lifeworld.

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## **Introduction**

Public schooling in western democracies occupies a distinctive terrain in the space between the public and private spheres. It has largely taken over socialization processes once the purview of the family, or at least the immediate community, and subjected them to systemic organization and rationalization. It is expected to assume responsibility for much of both personality and social behavioral development, while at the same time responding to larger societal demands for citizenship education and labor force preparedness. Schooling relies on both immediate face-to-face interactions of relationships and bureaucratic organizational imperatives in ways that other large institutions in democratic societies do not. As a developmental context for normative socialization and communicative competency, it must negotiate the tension between outside standards and systemic imperatives and the immediate dynamics of human relationships among both staff and students. As such, public education is a context in which critical analysis that employs a conceptual framework sensitive to these dynamics is crucial if we are to understand the ways in which public education achieves, or fails to achieve, the expectations set out for it by democratic publics. One such framework that I would like to apply to current practice in public education in western democracies is Jurgen Habermas' twofold conceptualization of society as system and lifeworld, which he articulates in his two volume work "The Theory of Communicative Action" (hereafter referred to as TCA). In particular, I would like to employ Habermas' schema alongside his colonization thesis to understand the relationship between systemic, bureaucratic imperatives, including a market driven understanding of human potential, and the lived worlds of public education. Habermas' work is particularly suited to understanding

this relationship as it posits a fully realized picture of human communication and learning processes as they have developed in modernity. Habermas' work is indebted to and a continuation of critical theory, which is sensitive to the forces of instrumental rationalization under late capitalist societies. It is my contention that Habermas' colonization thesis when applied to public education can yield important insight into what is being lost or impeded by increasing bureaucratic systemization in the education of children in western democracies.

I shall proceed first by an analysis of Habermas' notion of communicative rationality, and how this can be understood as operative in modern schooling systems especially in terms of its function in learning processes that Habermas identifies as crucial to the development of modernity. I argue that an understanding of communicative rationality is at the core of a number of modern pedagogical theories, specifically as it relates to the move away from content delivery and towards critical thinking and inquiry based learning. I further argue that Habermas' concept of communicative action provides a theoretical underpinning for these types of pedagogies and can be used practically as a point of orientation for best practice in public schools. Next, I will explore Habermas' twofold conception of society as lifeworld and system. In education, the systemic aspect includes aspects such as the political organization of public education, ministerial curriculum standards, and hiring and professional organization of the teaching profession, while I locate educational lifeworld contexts primarily in the public school classroom and the communicative procedures and relationships within which that context functions. I argue that conceptualizing the classroom as lifeworld is a powerful way to illustrate how the power of communicative rationality can be seen to affect both child development and education for democracy. I will sketch particular characteristics of educational lifeworlds in public schooling through the lens of communicative competency and normative development. Lastly, I will

explore Habermas' colonization thesis as it applies to educational lifeworlds to see how systemic media have undercut the crucial lifeworld functioning of educational contexts in modern schooling. Unlike most work that has been done in educational theory that utilizes Habermas, I will concentrate on primary and high schools rather than higher education. My contention is that the lifeworld of public education, the classroom, is at risk of systemic colonization primarily through teacher accountability mechanisms involving extensive standardized testing tied to teacher evaluation and salary. These have the potential to impede crucial lifeworld communicative procedures in the classroom, with profound effects on education for democracy, and the social and intellectual development of children.

## 1. Communicative Rationality, Learning Processes & Education

Habermas' work intersects with the concerns of philosophers of education at a number of points, which are useful to outline in some detail. He identifies mechanisms of societal learning processes, he distinguishes between reflexive and non-reflexive<sup>1</sup> processes of rationalization and modernity, and he explores the emancipatory power of intersubjective communicative practices. All of these concerns relate to formal education in ways both implicit and explicit, and I would like to outline some of these before turning to his notions of system and lifeworld and applying the colonization thesis to modern education in Canada and the United States, which will be my main focus.

As a contribution to the philosophy of education, the use of Habermas' work must come to terms with his conception of rationality and the preeminence of the place he gives to it. Habermas' work rests on the crucial distinction between instrumental rationality and what he terms communicative rationality. This distinction is a continuation of the critique of the picture of enlightenment reason initiated by the Frankfurt School, particularly in Adorno and Horkheimer's "Dialectic of Enlightenment". Adorno and Horkheimer indict enlightenment thought as a leveling reason which seeks to distinguish itself from a mythological world view yet reverts to a new form of mythology in this dialectic process. They locate the mechanism of this in the role of scientific thought in the enlightenment. In escaping myth, magic, and status quo, the enlightenment sought to obtain "sovereignty over nature". The scientific revolution, heralded and anticipated by philosopher Francis Bacon, would seemed to have accomplished just that, yet

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<sup>1</sup> "Reflexivity" refers in Habermas to the capacity for reflection which may occur within individual or discursively through the communicative interactions of a group.

in the process of turning knowledge into an instrument of domination of nature, mankind has lost contact with a capacity for self-reflection which would mediate this power with notions of freedom and human dignity. Adorno and Horkheimer see the twentieth century turn of philosophy to a positivism that would deny the possibility of metaphysics as undermining the freedom project of enlightenment: “For the enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect. So long as it can develop undisturbed by any outward repression, there is no holding it. In the process, it treats its own ideas of human rights exactly as it does the older universals”(Adorno and Horkheimer, 196). The totalitarian character of enlightenment is bound up in its positivist logic of identity, which has the effect of stripping the knowing subject to elements of mere power and domination. In reverting to a scientific domination over nature, the Enlightenment returns to a transformed but similar barbarity from which myth first arose:

What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order to wholly dominate it and other men. That is the only aim. Ruthlessly, in spite of itself, the Enlightenment has extinguished any trace of its own self-consciousness. (Adorno and Horkheimer 4)

It is in this need to dominate with which the knowing I approaches the world that it loses its capacity for self-reflection.

Habermas takes Adorno and Horkheimer as his starting point, but seeks a way out of the aporias they identify in “The Dialectic of Enlightenment”. He believes it is necessary to rescue a picture of reason that can restore its reflective capacity and move away from the domination of positivism. To accomplish this, he distinguishes between instrumental rationality and communicative rationality. In his picture of communicative rationality, he turns away from traditional philosophy of consciousness in which foundations are sought for metaphysical and

epistemological categories and in the distinction between subjective and objective worlds, and instead posits a philosophy of intersubjectivity which relies on an understanding of language and speech acts. Communicative rationality is dependent on intersubjective contexts of agents acting in the world, and it is in the structure of everyday speech that he intends to ground a picture of rationality that moves beyond instrumentalism. Habermas draws on the insights of American pragmatism in order to construe a picture of rationality that is a product of human inquiry, and his reading of Peirce and Mead informs his understanding of the social aspect of inquiry and language. For Habermas, rationality arises out of a process of inquiry which always has a social dimension and is always mediated by communicative practices. Communicative rationality is constitutive of the social world of actors that seek mutual understanding in order to co-ordinate action. Habermas terms this aspect of communicative rationality communicative action.

It is in this sense that Habermas intends to rehabilitate a picture of reason from enlightenment thought against the critique of post-modernism on the one hand and positivism on the other. For Habermas, the rationalization of worldviews (what Horkheimer and Adorno refer to as the “disenchantment” of nature) that accompanies modernity involves a “weak universalism” which he locates in the communicative practices that underlie societal learning processes. As he states, “The universalistic position forces one to the assumption that the rationalization of worldviews takes place through learning processes.” (Habermas *TCA* 1:67). The concept of learning processes is a complex one in Habermas’ thought. It has an evolutionary component, which I will explore shortly, and at different times in Habermas’ work it is employed broadly to include technical mastery, scientific theory, and normative and cultural development of a society. However, he wants to distinguish reflexive and non-reflexive learning processes through the mechanisms in which they occur, though it is not always easy to see where the

distinction lies in terms of the difference between scientific learning and technological. Scientific learning shares a reflexive function with practical, normative learning processes, and Habermas believes that technological advances are predicated on the scientific. Scientific learning involves a level of discursive reflection that is not present in mere mastery over physical conditions and development of technology. The reflexive learning processes that characterize modernity refers to both scientific learning and the move from social worlds demarcated by the sacred and mythological understanding to the discursive establishment of norms and social custom that finds an expression formally in modern systems of law. Scientific inquiry and normative discourse are predicated on similar communicative practices which he sees as universal to both. Technological learning is underpinned by the scientific, but both social and scientific learning must be reflective. Reflection in Habermas is a result of the discursive nature of learning processes:

...steering capacity changes as a function of growing control over outer nature and of increasing integration of inner nature. Evolution in both dimensions takes place in the form of directional learning processes that work through discursively redeemable validity claims (Habermas *Legitimation Crisis* 14).

Reflection in Habermas is an intersubjective phenomenon, a social process, whether it be in the relationship between psychotherapist and patient, among the scientific community, or political debate in the public sphere. This is in contrast to a Kantian notion of reflection which is an internal, subjective category<sup>2</sup>. Reflection is intersubjective because it is accomplished at base through language and validity claims. The connection between validity claims and learning

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas McCarthy interprets Habermas' concept of reflection as embodying both the classical philosophic reflection of the conditions of knowledge that we see in Kant and the idea of self-reflection in the sense of an individual or group coming to self-awareness through discursive examination. See McCarthy (95). What connects the two facets of the concept for Habermas is the social nature of the discourse involved.

processes is crucial here, as only through discursive examination of validity claims and argumentation can rationalization through reflective learning processes have any bearing on social life:

Processes of rationalization can attach to societal orders of life only because the stability of legitimate orders depends on the de facto recognition of validity claims that can be attacked internally, that is, shaken by critique, new insights, learning processes, and the like. (Habermas *TCA* 1:192)

Rationalization forces in society rely on argumentation and critique, which is the social form of reflection that in modernity first found full expression in Enlightenment thought. The learning processes that accompany modernity are an expression of rationality through argumentation, which acquired increasing legitimacy through scientific rationalism. The principles, though, are the same, and the acquisition of scientific knowledge through inquiry, which is a specialized kind of argumentation, also transformed normative cultural understanding.

Habermas sees scientific inquiry as having an intrinsic social dimension which makes this point explicit. He draws on the insights of American pragmatism here. In an early work, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, he characterizes Peirce's picture of scientific inquiry as leading to a version of communicative action. In analyzing Peirce's logic, Habermas concludes that in order for pragmatism to avoid the positivism from which it seeks to distinguish itself, it must have recourse to the social construction of meaning. He locates the impetus for the social construction of scientific knowledge in Peirce's assumption of the "community of investigators" which underlies the construction of all scientific knowledge. Peirce's notion is that truth is the effects of a concept that would eventually be agreed upon if an inquiry is extended long enough by a community of investigators:

The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in. and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits and capable of a definite increase of knowledge. (Peirce 152)

This notion is predicated, according to Habermas, on the argumentative and communicative procedures of that community. What is a theoretical conception in Peirce becomes a practical point of entry for Habermas' intersubjectivity:

Had Peirce taken seriously the communication of investigators as a transcendental subject forming itself under empirical conditions, then pragmatism would have been compelled to a self-reflection that overstepped its own boundaries. In continuing his analysis, Peirce would have had to come upon the fact that the *ground of intersubjectivity* in which investigators are always already situated when they attempt to bring about consensus about metatheoretical problems is not the ground of purposive-rational action, which is in principle solitary. (Habermas *Knowledge and Human Interests* 136-137)

Purposive-rational action, if it is to lead to theoretical progress in the scientific or normative/political realm, must be predicated on intersubjective communicative contexts. For scientific knowledge to accrue and progress in the sense implied by the concept of societal learning processes, inquiry must be grounded in the relations of the community of investigators:

But the community of investigators requires the use of language that is not confined to the limits of technical control over objectified natural processes. It arises from symbolic interaction between societal subjects who reciprocally know and recognize each other as

unmistakable individuals. This *communicative action* is a system of reference that cannot be reduced to the framework of *instrumental* action. (Ibid. 137)

Scientific inquiry rests on the irreducibility of communicative action to instrumentalism. In this early version of communicative action, Habermas locates scientific learning processes in the reflective capacity of investigators who have initiated scientific inquiry and hypothesis in the sense of which Peirce speaks. Inquiry is distinguished from instrumental rationality by the social dimension in which it occurs and which it relies upon. In order for scientific progress to be possible at all in the pragmatic sense, there must be an ongoing inquiry in which hypothesis are posited and tested and subjected to peer evaluation and argument. The community of investigators elevates the instrumentalism of scientific inquiry to the theoretic level and allows scientific knowledge to progress through building upon and clarification of previous experimentation.

These learning processes which are characteristic of modernity are at the core of Habermas' picture of rationality, which is the rationality of enlightenment thought newly contextualized in intersubjective action contexts. Argumentation, that is, the examination of validity and truthfulness in an intersubjective inquiry community, is the key to understanding how these learning processes work:

Argumentation makes possible behavior that counts as rational in a specific sense, namely learning from explicit mistakes. Whereas the openness of rational expressions to criticism and to grounding merely *points* to the possibility of argumentation, learning processes – through which we acquire theoretical knowledge and moral insight, extend and renew our evaluative language, and overcome self-deceptions and difficulties in comprehension – themselves *rely on* argumentation. (Habermas *TCA* 1:22)

As an evaluation of societal rationalization, learning processes can be measured in the degree to which reflective mechanisms can be institutionalized, which is dependent on communicative structures. Knowledge, both scientific and practical, accrues in society only if institutions develop that allow for reflective learning processes:

The continuity of this knowledge can be guaranteed only by learning processes becoming reflective – that is, being coupled in feedback relations with specialized and institutionalized forms of argumentation. (Ibid. 239)

The reflective nature of learning process must become accessible through forms of argumentation that are institutionalized. This involves a rationalization of world views in which reasons and argument replace the store of unquestioned information of traditional worldviews. For Habermas, rationalization of worldviews takes place through these learning processes, in which intersubjective contexts of communication can posit and examine reasons about elements of the objective, subjective and social worlds. Learning and rationalization, then, are two sides of the same coin in Habermas' picture. Reasons, in the form of validity claims, must be subjected to intersubjective verification, and this process of rationalization becomes institutionalized in modernity.

In one of his earliest works, *Towards a Rational Society*, Habermas sketches out the parameters of a picture of rationality and rationalization forces that would inform his mature positions. He notes that questions of scientific theory and practical normative issues both rest on a picture of critical argumentation which occurs, for science, at a meta-theoretical level, and normatively in the public sphere. This is in distinction from rationalization of technically utilizable knowledge which does not necessitate a critically reflective perspective. He sees a “subterranean unity of theoretical and practical reason” (Habermas *Towards a Rational Society*

7) which will be brought to full understanding in his later work on communicative action. This kind of rationalization, however, and the communicative mechanisms behind it, must be distinguished from the technical and unreflective employment of science. Societies that mistake technically utilizable knowledge as an end itself not subject to critical reflection not only run the risk of a ideological violence overtaking forces of socialization and industrialization but they also undercut the emancipatory potential in reason itself, which for Habermas should inform democratic processes and institutions in modernity. The crucial difference is that deliberation of practical, political, and normative concerns should occur in a context for political discussion and will formation through communicative procedures that can activate rationality in a context “free from domination”. It is important going forward to keep this distinction between rationalization in society achieved through discourse free from domination and technically “expert” rationalization that occurs in non-reflective thought.

There is an underlying evolutionary element to Habermas’ work. In taking a post-metaphysical and historical stance in his picture of modernity, Habermas assumes a picture of evolving human consciousness through history, traceable in broad cultural movements. Indeed, his entire theory of system and lifeworld presupposes evolving social complexity in which learning processes play a role. In an earlier work, he employs the terminology “nature-like” to describe technical innovation that is not reflexive: “The enhancing of productive force has its limits, to be sure, in the persistence of unplanned, nature-like development of technical innovations. (Technically utilizable knowledge is not extended through reflexive learning)” (Habermas *Legitimation Crisis* 20). The implication seems to be that system adaptation which occurs outside of discursive contexts involving reflexive learning are similar in kind to forces of

organic evolution and are observable to the social scientist in much the same way as the biologist.

As in adaptation, learning processes for Habermas move in a progressive, though non-linear manner: “ The history of secular knowledge and technology is a history of truth-monitored successes in coming to terms with outer nature. It consists of discontinuous, but in the long run, cumulative processes.” (Ibid. 11) Here Habermas is getting at the intuitive notion that despite the critique of modernity, and well-founded suspicion of “progress” in western thought, there is a sense in which scientific achievement and the secular demarcation of rights and democratic processes is cumulative, and the learning processes that enable this cumulative progress are somehow related to emancipatory movements. If progress in scientific knowledge is not to be completely cut off from political and social progress, however tentative and subject to reversal, we must understand both in a framework of rationality that delineates the similarity in mechanisms.

The similarity is to be found in reflexivity: it is reflexive learning that differentiates human evolution off from the natural world. Habermas is suggesting that a measure of “progress” in the sense of a reflexive awareness in human consciousness that is embodied in institutional structures of discourse is an orienting point in modernity which must be uncovered both empirically and in critical theory. Habermas’ concept of learning processes depends on an empirical evaluation of the reflective capacity of social institutions:

The level of development of society is determined by the institutionally permitted learning capacity, in particular by whether theoretical-technical and practical questions are differentiated, and whether discursive learning processes can take place. (Ibid. 8)

Rationalization of practical questions, in the sense of a democratic consensus achieved through argumentation and discourse free from domination as it is embodied in social institutions, is the central idea in the narrative of modernity that Habermas wants to construct. In relation to formal education, then, identifying where this rationalization loses its discursive reflexive function and gets dragged back into mere instrumentalism is the task of a critical theory of education.

Habermas sees a connection between these societal learning processes and individual learning processes such as the schematic provided by the work of Piaget. It is no coincidence that he refers to one of the most influential pedagogical thinkers of the 20th century in explaining societal rationalization, as it is in the domain of public education, be it at the elementary or university level, that much of the process of this rationalization takes place.

Institutionalized education plays a role in the “decentration” of world views that Habermas believes is at the heart of rationalization in modernity. The concept of decentration is from Piaget, and it is employed homologically to imply that just as the child progresses in stages to a mature understanding of self and other, societies advance through rationalization in which worldviews are subject to rational examination and debate. Habermas believes that this process of decentration is key to an emancipated society, and he ties that vision to the role for communicative rationality:

A critique of this sort can be based on the procedural concept of communicative rationality if it can be shown that the decentration of world understanding and rationalization of the lifeworld are necessary conditions for an emancipated society. (Habermas *TCA* 1:74)

This is a strong and controversial claim. Habermas is saying that decentration of worldviews through a particular kind of communicative rationality are the “necessary conditions” of

emancipation. It is not my purpose to argue or critique this claim<sup>3</sup>. Rather, I would like to proceed by taking Habermas at his word to see how the function of institutionalized education fits into his picture. The role of education in the process of decentration will determine whether it can fulfill its role and emancipatory intent as promised by enlightenment thought. In order to defend this view of education, however, the picture of rationality that is employed must avoid the charges of instrumentalism which is leveled against modernity, and this is what Habermas claims to have achieved. If he is right, the consequences for educational theory are profound.

Communicative rationality, construed intersubjectively, straddles the space in philosophy of education between the idea of a theory of learning processes set loose from the restraints of rationality and therefore at risk of a crisis of meaning within which the question of learning processes themselves become problematic, and a purely instrumental picture in which these processes are reduced to mechanical operations. It is my view that rationalization of worldviews through the mechanisms of communicative rationality is at the heart of any public education system, and inquiry in its pragmatic sense relies on a picture of this rationalization without which education can only be mechanical and rote. The danger, however, is that institutionalized education risks being employed ideologically, which occurs if it is unable to muster the resources needed for reflective, critical learning processes. If institutionalized education is to avoid that risk, the mechanisms for the development of these learning processes must be robust. Habermas believes that communicative rationality, as distinguished from purely instrumental, itself

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed critical examination of Habermas' position on the weak transcendentalism of his arguments and his use of reconstructive science see Seyla Benhabib's *Critique, Norm, and Utopia* (1986). Benhabib is critical of the transcendental claims yet sees an empirical justification for Habermas' method, upon which I have based my assumptions for this thesis: "What distinguishes rational reconstructions from both hermeneutical and deconstructivist accounts is not their special philosophic status, but their empirical fruitfulness in generating further research, their viability to serve as models in a number of fields, and their capacity to order and explain complex phenomena into intelligible narratives" (Benhabib 269)

contains the mechanisms of this reflexivity. In order to look at how public education fulfills the role outlined above, then, it is necessary to look in some detail at Habermas' picture of communicative rationality, and its relationship to concrete learning processes and procedures that take place in modern, systematized education.

## 2. Communicative Action and Pedagogy

At the heart of Habermas' theory of communicative rationality is his concept of communicative action, which can be understood as "action oriented towards understanding". Communicative action is distinguished in Habermas' schema from three other kinds of action: strategic (which is an expansion on the Aristotelian concept of teleological action), normative, and dramaturgical. Communicative action involves agents reaching understanding through language in order to proceed with a plan of action, and it underlies the possibility of human communication and learning processes:

Finally, the concept of *communicative action* refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of *interpretation* refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions which admit of consensus. As we shall see, language is given a prominent place in this model. (Habermas *TCA* 1:86)

The intersubjective picture of communicative action Habermas constructs relies on three "formal world concepts" which we must assume to make meaning through language possible. Actors entering into a communicative exchange must take up a position on three aspects of their communication: the objective world, the world of subjective experience, and the social world. All three world concepts are activated in communicative action, whereas other modes of action need only reference the world concepts separately or at most, in pairs. In this sense, communicative action is the ground for action coordinated through language in social settings.

Critically, communicative action involves interpretation on the part of the actors, in how the three world concepts are integrated in the effort to reach understanding with the other:

For the communicative model of action, language is relevant only from the pragmatic viewpoint that speakers, in employing sentences with an orientation to reaching understanding, take up relations to the world, not only as in teleological, normatively regulated, or dramaturgical action. Speakers integrate the three formal world-concepts, which appear in the other models of action either singly or in pairs, into a system and presuppose this system in common as a framework of interpretation within which they can reach an understanding. (Ibid. 98)

The three world concepts are the necessary ground for coordinating action through communication. A participant in an act of communication must presuppose an understanding of an objective shared reality between communicators, a world of social norms and expectations, and an interior subjective world of experience for both participants. This intersubjective system is Habermas' method of bypassing the philosophy of the subject which he thinks is no longer capable of providing a normative foundation for critical theory. Instead, the social aspect of meaning is emphasized in the presupposition necessary for communicative acts among agents. The "performative attitude" of agents seeking to reach mutual understanding in order to coordinate action is the point from which Habermas' philosophy can move from action theory to philosophy of language and thereby bypassing the philosophical problems entailed by western thought's taking the subject as the starting point for rational certainty:

Now this attitude of participants in linguistically mediated interaction makes possible a different relationship of the subject to itself from the sort of objectifying attitude that an observer assumes towards entities in the external world. The transcendental –empirical

doubling of the relationship to self is only unavoidable so long as there is no alternative to this observer-perspective; only then does the subject have to view itself as the dominating counterpart to the world as a whole or as an entity appearing within it. No mediation is possible between the extra-mundane stance of the transcendental I and the intramundane stance of the empirical I. As soon as linguistically generated intersubjectivity gains primacy, this alternative no longer applies. (Habermas *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 297)

Once Habermas makes the move from the objectivating subject to an intersubjectivity defined by the effort to reach mutual understanding in order to proceed with action, he needs to examine the basis of how this intersubjective communicative context works.

Reaching understanding is prior to and the foundation for other kinds of communication and action. Habermas relies on Austin's theory of speech acts here, and the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. In the "performative attitude", one's speech is intended to be understood by an other, and any of the presuppositions necessary for that understanding are theoretically accessible through validity claims that can be accepted or rejected by the other. Coming to understanding in this picture is not merely an idealized notion but the foundation of language use: "Reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech". (Habermas *TCA* 1:287) Furthermore, following Mead, Habermas wants to emphasize the intersubjective context necessary for reaching understanding as being primary to statements of meaning about the world. Language is world constitutive but also self-constitutive, and constituting the self through language always involves a conception of other and social context. It is in this world that rationality arises. "With the concept of communicative action there comes into play the additional presupposition of a *linguistic medium* that reflects the actor-world relations as such. At

this level of concept formation the rationality problematic, which until now has arisen only for the social scientist, moves into the perspective of the agent himself' (Ibid. 195) It is in this sense that the use of reasons and language come to define rationality as distinct from instrumental mastery. For Habermas, communicative action involves four implicit or explicit validity claims: comprehensibility, propositional truth, normative appropriateness, and the authenticity of the speaker's intention.

In communicative action, speakers assume that their utterances are defensible and can provide reasons for their beliefs which would aid in coming to understanding in an action context. Strategic action, in which speech is used to elicit a desired effect from another, is "parasitic" upon action oriented towards understanding. The possibility of strategic action, using communication to achieve ends through the action of another, relies on the resources of communicative action. This distinction between the forms of action, and the primacy of communicative action is central to understanding Habermas' notion of communicative rationality. Instrumental rationality is only possible given a larger context of communicative rationality in which agents act cooperatively towards ends by employing language.

In this thesis I will assume an understanding of communicative rationality which can be constructed through this intersubjective lens of the three world concepts. For my purposes, I do not need to wade into the debate about Habermas' conceptual apparatus in detail except to defend this view of communicative rationality as a distinct form of rationality which involves moving beyond subject centered reason. In part, this is because formal education presupposes to some degree the structures of communicative rationality that Habermas outlines. Action oriented towards understanding is the baseline model of action in the classroom, especially if one considers current pedagogical theory and practice. In the move away from content delivery and

towards inquiry based and constructivist learning, we see a shift in the relationship between teacher and student that puts it more in line with the kinds of interactions on which communicative action is premised. In fact, a cursory examination of many current pedagogical practices shows that they assume a picture of communicative rationality at their core. Dialogic inquiry, constructivism, concept-based education, and teaching for critical thinking all have a picture of communicative rationality in which it is the relationship between the teacher, student, and the material to be learned which must be negotiated in the classroom through an intersubjective attempt to reach understanding , and not mere delivery and reception of content. At a fundamental level this involves a communicative context of inquiry in which the intersubjective considerations of the three world concepts identified by Habermas as essential to communicative action, the objective, subjective, and social worlds, are constantly at play in both the teacher's educational intent and the students experience of the classroom.

Something like Habermas' picture of communicative action, or action oriented towards understanding, then, can be understood as both an ideal and a practical orientation point in the communicative contexts of education. A number of commentators have taken up the potential use of communicative action in educational contexts. Robert E. Young extrapolates from Habermas' concept of the "ideal speech situation" to develop a notion of the "ideal pedagogical speech situation". (Young 99) Young takes issue with the traditional characterization of classroom discourse as purely strategic in that a teacher must manipulate discussion in order to transmit the lesson to the student. Young looks at patterns of questioning in traditional classrooms and notes the one sidedness of questioning techniques that rely almost wholly on a teacher's position of authority and arbiter of knowledge. He distinguishes between reflexive and non-reflexive learning, noting that on a developmental continuum, practices of discourse in the

classroom should orient towards the development of critical, reflexive capacity in students. In this picture, communicative action can be employed pedagogically as an ideal and practical orientation to distinguish from purely strategic communication in the classroom.

Outlining the intersection between strategic and communicative action in the classroom is the source of some debate among scholars seeking to utilize communicative action in pedagogy. Miedema (1994) proposes to append Habermas' four actions with a fifth – pedagogical action. He sees the asymmetry in power relations between teacher and student as being a necessary structural element in schooling that demands a special kind of action on the part of the teacher. Kachur (1998) rejects this argument as being ideological and deviating from Habermas work as critical theory. He prefers to characterize pedagogical action in the classroom as a dialectic between communicative and strategic action which continually unfolds in classroom practice:

What Miedema overlooks in defining pedagogical action is that Habermas is not making a logical and exclusive distinction between strategic and communicative action. The actions dialectically inform each other in various ways. Coordination of strategic action may or may not require communicative action. The nature of the coordination is an empirical question. (Kachur 278)

How then do we theoretically demarcate the uses of communicative and strategic action in the classroom that would make it accessible as a tool of critical pedagogy? The danger for Kachur is that seeing children as less than communicatively competent or only even potentially communicatively competent opens the door to the abuse of power and the subjection of classroom discourse to the expert social scientist and the imperatives of the educational bureaucratic system.

The issue of the use of power and authority in classroom and educational contexts is important to consider. Dialogic theory attempts to mitigate questions of power and authority in the classroom through the social engagement with the material. Paulo Freire's work has inspired much research in critical pedagogy by examining power relationships and literacy teaching among oppressed populations. A number of commentators have taken up the theoretical affinities between Freire and Habermas and emphasize the shift in thinking that occurs when pedagogy is seen through the lens of communicative action. The learning process involved becomes supported by the emphasis on social inquiry and an awareness of the place of authority and power in the classroom frame the background understanding of educational communication. Morrow and Torres (2002) see Habermas as providing a theoretical foundation for Freire's pedagogy. The emphasis on dialogic learning and communicative competency are portrayed as the tools of transformative pedagogy:

The initial foundational premise of Freire and Habermas is that human autonomy and higher levels of cognitive and moral reasoning can be realized only through interactive learning processes. Rationality is not ultimately a property of an isolated ego, but rather the cumulative outcome of communities of inquiry and embodied social practices...

A second shared premise is that becoming self-conscious of educational activities marks a decisive phase of human evolution because it unleashes previously suppressed possibilities for reflexivity (Morrow & Torres 116)

One might wonder if it is ever possible to separate out strategic power from pedagogical intent in the interest of unleashing that power of reflexivity that Habermas and Freire seem to promise.

Patricia Gouthro argues that communicative action should be the guiding principle for educators

precisely because power dynamics will always intrude on educational contexts and there needs to be a theoretical orientation with which to approach this issue:

Educators are challenged to create a dialogical environment where students can learn to conceptualize their world in different ways. As hooks (2003) notes, there is never a truly “safe” place where people can learn, since power always intrudes upon relationships. Yet if we believe that educators can “think the practice” as Freire (1998) argues, then we have to imaginatively conceive of the characteristics of a learning context that we ideally would like to create. What guidelines can we use to develop the capacities for our students to communicate effectively with others? Habermas’ theory of communicative action sets out criteria for developing a context where ideas can be shared, contested, mediated. (Gouthro 5)

Gouthro gets at the core of Habermas’ appeal to philosophers of education. Yet she is concerned primarily with adult education in this context, and I think the concern for developing communicative practices aligned with an emancipatory intent must include consideration of school age children in addition to adult learners.

If we understand the development of autonomous individual capable of entering into a communicative relationship as eventual equals with teachers and professionals, then we must have in mind the points at which unfiltered communicative action is possible between teacher and learner. This happens at a very early age and indeed it seems that it is intimately bound up with individual learning processes. Recent research on literacy development with young children has noted that dialogic conversation about the reading material is as important as more mechanical skill development in phonics and decoding. (Parish-Morris, Mahajan, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, and Collins, 2013), It is in the communicative relationship between learners and

teachers in which structures of meaning develop which support the necessary skill development. As that relationship shifts more towards co-inquiry, along a developmental axis, questions of power and authority become less important overall. However it is important to note that at the outset, from the earliest social learning experiences, communicative action must be the orientation point for educators and questions of strategic action and power are secondary to that relationship. This is also not merely a philosophical perspective, but a practical point of orientation in pedagogical practice, as I hope to show.

The idea that communicative rationality underpins the practitioner's understanding of best practice in classrooms can be related to certain contemporary movements in education. In any pedagogy that emphasizes the teacher as a co-inquirer, or guide, through the learning processes of the classroom, one can see communicative rationality at work. In the movement for inquiry based learning, in constructivist pedagogy, and in teaching for critical thinking, the traditional role of teacher and student is re-imagined with more emphasis on learners constructing their own meaning. Even in primary grades, knowledge is presented as having to be uncovered and discovered as oppose to committed to memory, and meta-cognitive thinking is stressed. Insofar as education is framed as inquiry and not dissemination, communicative practices and relations between students and teachers come to the fore as the context of learning processes. This is distinct from the dissemination model of teaching, in which a body of knowledge is presumed to exist untouched by classroom inquiry and must only be served up to the students in a way that makes its intact transfer possible. The role of the teacher is transformed when education is viewed through this lens. Jerome Bruner sums up the shift that occurs in thinking about teaching and learning as a co-project, and how the role and relationship of the teacher changes:

One of the most radical proposals to have emerged from the cultural-psychological approach to education is that the classroom be reconceived as just such a subcommunity of mutual learners, with the teacher orchestrating the proceedings. Note that, contrary to traditional critics, such subcommunities do not reduce the teacher's role nor his or her "authority". Rather, the teacher takes on the additional function of encouraging others to share it. Just as the omniscient narrator has disappeared from modern fiction, so will the omniscient teacher disappear from the classroom of the future. (Bruner 22)

Bruner's point is that the classroom, as a context of inquiry, is reconstituted by reimagining the roles of students and teachers. Forms of communication in the classroom are transformed as well, as we will see, when pedagogy orients towards mutual understanding and away from compliance and regurgitation. Dialogic theory has also posited a pedagogic model along these lines. Skidmore's (2006) survey of dialogic pedagogies and the research behind them concludes that structures of classroom discourse should not be the focus of dialogic pedagogy as much as the reimagining of the communicative relationship between teacher and student: "What matters most is not simply the frequency of particular exchange-structures in classroom discourse, but how far students are treated as active epistemic agents, i.e., participants in the production of their own knowledge." (Skidmore 505)

Three things result from this shift in emphasis: firstly, students are given the chance to develop communicative competency. That is, they are able to engage in critical inquiry, defend their positions in socially acceptable ways, and connect their personal conceptualization of the subject matter involved in the inquiry to the discourse of a social group. This can begin to happen in the earliest grades. Secondly, learning becomes more active as learners engage in communicative dynamics which structure their very understanding of the knowledge and

concepts involved. Thirdly, knowledge itself is transformed through this process as school becomes an institution in which debate and critical perspectives are brought to bear on issues of social justice, the effects of scientific discovery on society, and moral understanding. The public school becomes a locus of societal learning processes in the sense Habermas outlines in TCA. All three of these results of the emphasis on communicative action in education can be best understood in an examination of the dynamics of educational lifeworlds.

At some level, then, modern pedagogy recognizes that education cannot be merely strategic or instrumental because of its social nature, and modern practices assume this to greater or lesser degrees depending on their emphasis on communicative procedures. In Habermasian terms, education relies on communicative action because it is a social process in which the store of a society's practical and theoretical knowledge is renewed and revised through communicative media and relationships. Action oriented towards understanding is the basic presupposition of how a teacher approaches designing and delivering learning experiences to a class, no matter what the age. Transmission of knowledge, development of conceptual understanding, even skill development relies on an attempt between teacher and student to reach mutual understanding. In a sense, the typical criticism of Habermas that communicative action can never be divorced from the strategic does not apply in the context of education because just what one is being strategic about is the understanding of the other, which must negotiate all three world concepts to be effective. The distinction between strategic and communicative action hinges, for education, on this access of the three world concepts. Every public school classroom relies on communicative procedures which must simultaneously address the objective, subjective, and social worlds, and in this sense Habermas' concept of the lifeworld as the context for communicative action is useful in understanding communication in education. Themes of

power and communicative competence can be best understood with reference to Habermas' picture of the lifeworld, where strategic action is more easily separated from communicative action and where the issue of system colonization provides stark empirical evidence of the impediments to social learning processes in advanced capitalist societies.

### 3. The Concept of the Lifeworld

In Habermas' view, rationality in its enlightenment form was at least potentially aligned to human emancipation. In modernity, the emancipatory impulse is overtaken by an instrumentalism that is the result of increasing societal complexity and the differentiation of action spheres. This splitting off of "system" and "lifeworld" occurs just as rationalization of lifeworld processes have begun to supplant pre-modern, religious understandings with scientific rationality. As societal complexity increases through increasing industrialization and bureaucratization in early modernity, the forces influencing integration of action contexts in society separate. Habermas sees a distinction between "social integration" and "systemic integration" which necessitates the twofold conception of society as system and lifeworld. Social integration is achieved through the communicatively structured world of norms and actors, whereas systemic integration relies on norm free steering media to facilitate action.

Rationalization of the lifeworld involves subjecting normative cultural understanding and learning processes to communicative procedures which appeal to reasons in ways that pre-modern lifeworld understandings could not. The emancipatory potential of a fully rationalized lifeworld, has, in this view, never fully been realized. Communicative procedures through which lifeworld rationalization could unleash its emancipatory potential have been circumvented by increasing systematization of action contexts. The emergence of the dominance of steering media, for Habermas mainly money and bureaucratization, has short circuited public deliberation on normative, cultural, and political concerns. System colonization occurs when these media block the communicative flow of a rationalized lifeworld and impede citizens from full

democratic participation. My contention in this paper is that not only is democratic participation impeded by system colonization in education, but personality development and the ability of human individuals to engage normative understandings is undermined when systems colonize educational lifeworlds, which in western democracies are located first and foremost in the public school classroom.

The concept of the lifeworld is a rich and nuanced conceptual tool which can be employed in the philosophy of education to help understand how social learning contexts function. For Habermas, the lifeworld is the intersubjectively shared context of understanding among a group of people from which all utterances and speech acts are given meaning, and to which lifeworld participants add and transform meaning. It is a store of background assumptions, both linguistic and cultural, which agents use to orient themselves in the process of achieving understanding with others. “Language and culture are constitutive of the lifeworld itself” (Habermas *TCA* 2:125) The perspective of the lifeworld is a practical hermeneutic one. Actors are always engaged in communicative action from within the lifeworld; it is the meta-context of possible meanings. The “totality” of the lifeworld is “co-given in the flow of experience”. For Habermas, it “circumscribes action situations”. Language and culture, as a stock knowledge of patterns and meanings upon which actors can draw in order to coordinate actions, are in some way the quasi-transcendental conditions for understanding in a given social context. “The very medium of mutual understanding abides in a peculiar *half transcendence*.” (Ibid. 125) Habermas wants to employ the concept of the lifeworld in order to understand communicative action contexts in society but also to provide a theoretical perspective to the theorist from which to approach a critical theory of society.

Habermas appropriates the concept of the lifeworld from both phenomenology and sociology<sup>4</sup>, but he transforms it through the lens of communicative action. He distinguishes between the phenomenological concept of the lifeworld, as portrayed by Husserl<sup>5</sup>, the common usage concept of the lifeworld, and his technical concept as the corollary to his concept of communicative action. He calls this distinction his “communications theoretic lifeworld”. He wants to change the paradigm of philosophy of consciousness to one of the philosophy of language and therefore, his concept of the lifeworld is determined by linguistic and cultural parameters, as opposed to a phenomenologically given world of experience in the sense understood by Husserl and expanded upon by Schutz. This at once limits his conception and makes it more functional within the framework of philosophy of language and the questions of action theory. His communications theoretic lifeworld does take essential features from the phenomenological tradition. Quoting Schutz: “I must understand my lifeworld to the degree necessary to be able to act in it and operate upon it.” (Ibid. 128) This would seem to be the minimum requirement of membership in a lifeworld, however limited by cultural and linguistic difference. The three characteristics of the lifeworld which Habermas wants to retain from Schutz reformation of the phenomenological lifeworld are:

- a) the naïve familiarity with an unproblematically given background
- b) the validity of an intersubjectively shared world
- c) the at once total and indeterminate, porous and yet delimiting character of the lifeworld.

(Ibid. 130)

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<sup>4</sup> See Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann *The Structures of the Lifeworld* (1973) for a sociological account of the lifeworld.

<sup>5</sup> Husserl’s use of the lifeworld concept appears in *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (1970).

The first is interpreted by Habermas as meaning that the structures of the lifeworld themselves cannot be called into question or “thematized” in the same way as any other utterance within it might. At best, the lifeworld would cease to function: “The unproblematic character of the lifeworld has to be understood in a radical sense: qua lifeworld it cannot become problematic, it can at most fall apart.” (Ibid. 129) When the background assumptions of the lifeworld are called into question, this activates a need for discursive examination of those assumptions.

These limits of the lifeworld, the “horizons” by which participants in communicative action linguistically orient their understandings, are always in the background of cultural and linguistic understanding. When something is problematized within the lifeworld, the horizons shift but are themselves still determined by that background. In this way, as actors draw upon the resources of the lifeworld, they also enable both the transmission and the transformation of cultural and linguistic tradition through time, in an evolutionary way. Learning processes are possible through these shifts in lifeworld horizons. Aspects of the lifeworld as lifeworld do not appear problematic because they are background assumptions. Once they are thematized, however, they cease to become assumptions because they are no longer taken for granted and are subject to critical reflection. Yet the lifeworld itself subsists beyond this new shift as the context of that reflection; it can never be fully transcended by participants. When assumptions are called into question, the horizons shift, meaning has become problematized, and aspects of the lifeworld have come into view:

“Every step we take beyond the horizon of a given situation opens up access to a further complex of meaning, which, while it calls for explication, is already intuitively familiar.

What was until then “taken for granted”, is transformed in the process into cultural

knowledge that can be used in defining situation and exposed to tests in communicative action". (Ibid. 133)

Shifting lifeworld horizons relates back to Habermas' concept of decentration. Rationalization of the lifeworld involves decentering worldviews so that fewer aspects of lifeworld horizons can be taken for granted. As worldviews are rationalized, actors in a lifeworld must rely on their own efforts to come to rational agreement, where previously accepted and unquestioned elements of the background knowledge needed for consensus took on that role:

The more the worldview that furnishes the cultural stock of knowledge is decentered, the less the need for understanding is covered in advance by an interpreted lifeworld immune from critique, and the more this need has to be met by the interpretive accomplishments of the participants themselves, that is, by way of risky (because rationally motivated) agreement, the more frequently we can expect rational action orientations. (Ibid. 70)

The role of formal education in the decentration of the worldviews makes the educational lifeworld more insecure in the sense that critique which calls into question lifeworld horizons should be a structural element of a well functioning educational lifeworld. Educational lifeworlds are by definition more fluid and tentative than, for example, the lifeworld of business workplaces because the members of an educational lifeworld constantly experience shifting horizons and problematization of assumptions as a necessary feature of their experience. The task for educators, then, and it is a difficult one, is to step beyond given contexts of meaning in order to open up reflective knowledge of culture without threatening the viability of the educational lifeworld itself as a community of inquirers.

While educational lifeworlds may be more dynamic and fluid, it is important that the concept of the lifeworld in its Habermasian sense retains its transcendental character. It is

necessary as a forum for discourse and argumentation, for communicative action, but it cannot itself be thematized completely. The lifeworld is an intersubjective world that cannot be doubted; it is not subject to Cartesian doubt as it has a “social a priori” built into it: “Again the commonality of the lifeworld has to be understood in a radical sense: it is prior to any possible disagreement and cannot become controversial in the way that intersubjectively shared knowledge can.” (Ibid. 131) The lifeworld is what must be assumed if there is to be anything like intersubjective meaning possible. Given this concept of the lifeworld, one can picture that any two agents who share almost no linguistic or cultural background can comprise a shared lifeworld if meaning in the communicative sense is possible. It is not hard to devise thought experiments to confirm this. One has only to picture first meetings between alien people or even, individuals with no shared culture or language and one can see that utterances, facial expressions, gestures, and a shared space in the physical world are enough to form a context that itself is not questioned by the two parties. All three world concepts must be assumed – subjective, objective, and social, even at the barest minimum understanding of the contents of those worlds as shared between the two parties.

Habermas' communications theoretic conception of the lifeworld arises out of his need to balance a hermeneutic sociological perspective with a theoretical one. The perspective of the sociological observer differs from the lifeworld participant, but in order to access the lifeworld, the observer must assume a participant's stance. This has implications for education. The participant always acts from within his or her own lifeworld in terms of background cultural assumptions even when seeking to bring into critical reflection those background assumptions. To be able to act within a lifeworld in an educational context is the extent to which one can be a participant in one's education. In a community of inquiry, when background assumptions are

thematized it allows examination of those assumptions through discourse; that is, the inquiry becomes oriented towards a meta-theoretical understanding of how the learning community understands how it is constructing meaning. Conceiving the lifeworld communicatively as opposed to phenomenologically has the effect of making the lifeworld itself accessible to discourse, whether to lifeworld participants whose background assumptions can be thematized or to the theoretical sociological perspective of an outside observer. In addition, an intersubjective picture of the lifeworld construed communicatively has the theoretical advantage of not needing direct access to the interiority of subjective experience, as in a phenomenological conception, but through the three world concepts that are activated by communicative action, interiority must be brought into discourse or at least potential discourse. Any classroom teacher knows that the insights students provide when they are communicating openly about their learning and their emotional experience of the classroom are invaluable to maintaining a healthy and functioning learning environment. Classroom procedures and relationships have to maintain this communicative orientation towards lifeworld dynamics if learners are to be provided with a developmental environment suited to their experience and needs.

What one might construe as the limitation of Habermas' picture of the lifeworld, then, that it focuses on reasons and linguistically accessible cultural understandings while only implicitly assuming aspects of the "given" world, phenomenologically speaking (for example, emotional experience, power dynamics, sensory input, etc.,) is in fact its strength as a sociological concept. The experience of these elements can only be thematized through their being brought to light through discursive procedures. This is not to say that an understanding of the lifeworld does not include these elements, but in order to engage them sociologically or as participants in action contexts they can only be accessed through communicative rationality,

through the assertion and criticism of reasons. While I would like to keep Habermas' communications theoretic conception paramount in my reconstruction of educational lifeworlds, I would like to supplement his concept with more explicit awareness of these elements that seem to be implicitly assumed, in part because criticism of Habermas' lifeworld concept seems to miss the potential richness of the concept as a critical resource. For example, Nancy Fraser's (1985) critique that the concept of the lifeworld merely replicates power dynamics of the traditional family emphasizes the institutional aspect of Habermas' concept. Fraser's critique suggests that the role of power in lifeworld dynamics is neglected in Habermas, in favor of an emphasis on the bureaucratic power of systems. I think it is a misreading of Habermas to assume the split between lifeworld and system corresponds to a split between communicative and strategic action. Clearly, lifeworld relationship and patterns of communication involve dynamics of power and strategic action as well as the at least potential communicative action achieved through consensus and understanding. The salient point is, I think, that while both lifeworld and system involve strategic action and power dynamics, only in lifeworld contexts can the latent emancipatory power of communicative action become a resource for society. The fact that certain lifeworld structures and dynamics are themselves institutionalized does not mean they should be immune from critique or aren't subject to thematizing communicative action which would expose and potentially restructure power dynamics. In a very real sense, this is exactly what Habermas means by the idea of rationalization of the lifeworld. If the lifeworld is in some sense favored over system in Habermas, it is not because of the necessarily more just social contexts of lifeworld institutions, like the family or the school, but it is because only through lifeworld dynamics can communicative action unleash its emancipatory power.

The power of the concept of the lifeworld is in its appeal to a given social world which is intuitively known and feels familiar to subjects within it, as opposed to a systematized social world which can give rise to a feeling of alienation from the perspective of the participants within it. It is in this spirit that one may append Habermas' communicative concept of the lifeworld with a more holistic picture that is true to its phenomenological origins. The communicative aspect allows us to thematize and identify structures of communication which assist or impede cultural reproduction. But more than this, the concept of the lifeworld allows us to imagine empathically the worlds inhabited by students and teachers alike. These are worlds bordered by the systemic roles and expectations but more fully located in emotional and cultural landscapes. Educational lifeworlds can be worlds of curiosity and expectation, of a desire to know and understand and a willingness to take risks to find out. Yet they are tentative and at risk because the assumptions and understandings which comprise the horizons of any lifeworld are, in education, constantly shifting and being challenged. To understand how Habermas' concept of the lifeworld can best be utilized in philosophy of education, it is necessary to outline communicative features of the educational lifeworld in terms of Habermas' picture of the communications theoretic lifeworld.

#### **4. Communicative Structures of the Educational Lifeworld**

The institutional nature of the public school involves organizational elements that can be categorized as either system or lifeworld. Schools are structured by systemic imperatives determined by outside agency such as government ministries, local school boards, teachers unions, and external curriculum organizations. Funding, employment contracts, enrollment procedures, neighborhood catchments, etc are systemic features which define the institutional parameters of schools in most western jurisdictions. In addition, evaluation and reporting procedures are determined by ministries and often administered by outside agencies and these procedures have a direct affect on the pedagogical functioning of schools and the experience of the students. One can understand the systemic features of education, then, as forming the outside structure of the educational experience. The process of education itself, that is, the individual and societal learning processes that are the purpose and goal of the public school as an institution, takes place in the context of lifeworld communication within that systemic structure. The delivery of content, the skill development, and the socialization processes which are expected of public schools and are outlined by these systemic imperatives happen in a specific lifeworld context involving students and teachers. It is important to keep in mind that though these imperatives are determined by systemic forces, they can only be accomplished through lifeworld functions, that is, through the communicative procedures in which teachers and students engage in critical inquiry in social contexts. The most important context for the educational lifeworld in this picture is the classroom.

When constructing a picture of the lifeworld inhabited by students and teachers in public school classrooms in western democracies, certain salient features can be identified which will

allow the employment of Habermas' colonization thesis to throw into relief elements that are being compromised. I would like to sketch out areas of the classroom experience from both the students' and teacher's perspective that I think are the most important features of the educational lifeworld of the classroom. In doing so I will be keeping in mind Habermas' communications theoretic lifeworld, that is, elements of the lifeworld that form the background of communicative practice, and as such are subject to discursive understanding and examination. I want to sketch out a normative model of communicative practices that I believe is essential for an educational lifeworld in public schools at all levels.

Shared cultural understandings, linguistic resources, unproblematized norms are components of most lifeworlds which would be generally easy to sketch out and uncontroversial. However, the public school is both a context for the clash of cultural understandings and the development of normative and linguistic competences. The first feature of educational lifeworlds in public school classrooms that I would like to explore, then, is the plurality of backgrounds which individual students bring to communicative contexts in the classroom. Students bring elements of familial lifeworlds to their school experiences, and these can sometimes clash both implicitly and explicitly with the communicative action contexts in which they find themselves in the public school. This aspect of the plurality of cultural backgrounds is one of the most consequential notions that comprise modern educational lifeworld, both in its facticity in educational setting, in the lived experience of students, and also in the way it informs and structures inquiry into social phenomena in the classroom. If public education is one of the tools of lifeworld rationalization in modern democracies, then the clash of worldviews between the experience of home life and school life would be an inevitable fact of experience for many students in public school systems. Pluralism defines the relationship of the classroom and the

home, as Tomas Englund (ed. Murphy & Fleming, 2010) suggests, because as students move from one to another they will necessarily encounter tensions in worldviews and lifeworld horizons which may or may not be thematized in their educational experience. For Englund, this fact means that “the principle of pluralism becomes a fundamental and crucial element of deliberative communication”. Englund argues that pluralism defines the school space as a public space in the sense that Habermas understand the public. Using the fact of pluralism in the classroom as an opportunity for the development of communicative competence is, for Englund, key to the development of what he calls citizenship literacy. Attending to how pluralism plays out as a lifeworld component in the assumptions and understandings of students is key then in the healthy lifeworld functioning of the public school classroom. The role of the teacher is not to act as an authority in this sense, but to bring out difference and foster skills to explore difference in classroom contexts. Whether or not that involve a confrontation of views and recognition of privilege is the matter of some debate. For our purposes, suffice to say that pluralism must be thematized openly and consistently in the classroom as it forms the inescapable horizons of student lifeworlds.

Next, we can sketch out how normative understandings work in classrooms. Normative contexts of educational lifeworlds are subject to many influences, such as school rules, patterns of discipline and behavioral expectations, character education programs, even the classroom routines of individual teachers. These all combine to create a matrix of behavioral expectations which students must negotiate and which form the normative horizon of classroom lifeworlds. Some of these influences are open to discussion and argumentation, others are unwritten and unspoken but nevertheless determine agency within classroom contexts. On top of these authoritative influences, students are influenced by the normative demands of peer relationships.

Educational lifeworlds are largely determined from the point of view of student as participant by peer relationships. This often seems the area most outside of a teacher's influence, and the attention and interests of students in the lesson or knowledge being uncovered is often trumped by students concerns with social issues and unseen social dynamics among students<sup>6</sup>. From the earliest grades, teachers attempt to equip students with social skills through communicative coaching, and schoolyard conflict is an essential forum for social development, yet by the middle grades, it would appear that students occupy a social world never fully accessible to the adults around them. Bullying, which has become such a focus in public discussions of education, is addressed with more or less success at every level of public schooling, yet the percentage of students who reported witnessing or being the victim of bullying in educational contexts remains stubbornly high<sup>7</sup>.

Determining elements of the educational lifeworld must also take into account informational resources which form the bulk of student attention in the classroom. Textbooks and state curriculum mandates have made up the largest part of data available to student inquiry, though with the advent of more classroom internet access, the unquestioned authority of these sources has been challenged somewhat. In addition to the availability of internet in the classroom, students already are steeped in media culture from outside the school which informs their self and cultural understandings. Both information literacy and media literacy has become a focus of much pedagogical study recently as teachers realize that the skill set needed to approach information in the internet age is far more complex and time consuming than textbook literacy

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<sup>6</sup> Espelage (2015) provides an overview of recent research into peer relationships and aggression in the classroom.

<sup>7</sup> Neiman (2012) notes that statistics on school bullying incidents do not extend back very far, but an upwards trend is noticeable from 2005 onwards, with 32% of students in elementary and high schools reporting having experienced incidents of bullying in school.

once was. Kellner and Share (2007) identify critical media literacy as necessary for a curriculum that teaches active interpretation of the multiple levels of media and information in which students find themselves today. As a lifeworld component, teaching media literacy and information technology can seem almost overwhelming, but as they argue, participatory democracy demands that students have experience in engaging critical thinking in interpreting the effects of media and information technology on their understanding and lifeworld horizons.

Structures of classroom discourse are one of the most important features of an educational lifeworld, when seen through the lens of Habermas' conceptual schema, and are a crucial point of entry for Habermas' theory. Questioning techniques, collaborative discussion frameworks, oral examinations, literature circles, etc. are all communicative moments which are part of students daily experiences and which are directed by a teacher's orientation towards pedagogical techniques informed more or less to action oriented towards understanding.

Research in this area shows that teacher training in questioning techniques can have a profound affect on student understanding in the classroom. Marzano (2001) considers teacher questioning to be "at the heart of classroom practice". Structuring teacher questioning for engagement and dialogue is necessary to promote dialogic learning and student voice in the classroom. Recent work in the United Kingdom on student voice and questioning in science instruction (Martin and Hand, 2009) has shown that as teachers realign their questioning techniques to include more dialogic exchanges with students, conceptual understanding and student use of argument and reasoning in science increases. Student voice is defined as "the opportunity for students to engage in dialogical interactions with the teacher and as well as in social contexts with peers" (Martin and Hand 21). Conceptualizing the elementary school classroom as a community of inquirers involves students becoming adept at scientific argumentation in a way that mimics the

discourse of mature scientific communities. Martin and Hand find three things that results from teachers realigning communicative practices in elementary science classrooms:

There is a critical role for the teacher in promoting argument; shifting questioning pattern produces more active student voice, and as student voice increases, elements of science argumentation are practiced.” (Martin and Hand 35).

They are describing a communicative ideal of an educational lifeworld in science in which the classroom begins to approximate Habermas’ reading of Peirce’s “community of inquirers”. That is, the communicative structures underlying scientific inquiry upon which learning processes and validity is based can be seen as operative in the classroom through these pedagogies. The attention to student voice in this context has the effect of leveling student and teacher interactions away from strategic action and towards communicative action. There is a positive feedback loop here between the picture of inquiry informed by Peirce, i.e., that inquiry leads to knowledge established through hypothesis and experimentation within a communicative context of peer relationships, and pedagogy which aligns towards communicative action. When societal learning processes involving science and normativity are mirrored by classroom practice, we can expect to find a reinforcement of the effectiveness of both educational contexts.

In addition to teacher questioning and dialogic exchanges between teacher and students, explicit structuring of collaborative learning experiences among students is a crucial skill set for teachers that allow for practice and teaching of communicative skills in educational contexts. There is a body of research on the effectiveness of small group activity in promoting student learning. Cohen (1994) suggests that the benefits of collaborative learning, which her research seems to indicate, is conditional on a structured and informed approach to that learning in teaching practice. In particular, she notes that the richest collaborative learning experiences, and

the ones with the highest academic outcomes for students, are ones where the students have been explicitly coached in the communicative skills needed to achieve the objective:

These studies suggest a useful generalization: If students are not taught differently, they tend to operate at the most concrete level. If teachers want high-level operation, particularly verbal, the students will require specific development of skills for discourse, either in advance of cooperative learning or through direct assistance when groups are in operation. The transcripts of Barnes and Todd suggest a similar proposition concerning interpersonal skills. These are not an automatic consequence of cooperative learning.

Either through some kind of motivational device or through deliberate instruction in these social skills, something must be done to provoke the desired behaviors within cooperative groups. (Cohen 7)

Careful attention to the structure and implementation of cooperative learning strategies is necessary, then, to achieve the potential pedagogic gains that are possible through these types of activities. Collaborative learning as a structural element of the educational lifeworld, is crucial.

Another element that needs to be considered in a communications theoretic lifeworld is literacy teaching. As noted above, there is empirical evidence to support the importance of dialogic interaction in early literacy, and we have also seen a model of literacy teaching informing the connection between Habermas and Freire such that the relationship between the student and teacher is re-imagined along dialogic lines. In the United States and Canada, there has been much debate about competing philosophies of literacy teaching. On one side, the whole language movement was predicated on constructivist ideals of learners engaging with texts and constructing meaning through classroom discussion, and on the other the autonomous picture of early literacy whereby the task of learning to read is broken down into phonics, decoding, and

comprehension. As we will see when we look at the colonization thesis, the debate between these positions has important consequences for teacher accountability regimes and standardized testing. For the moment, I would like to note the importance of a dialogic approach to literacy and the potential importance of it as a feature of the lifeworld of literature circles, discussions, and the like.

Finally, the notion of communicative competence should also be an element of the educational lifeworld which must be kept in view by educators, because it attends to the development of a skill set which activates student participation and student voice in the sense required by the feedback loop I noted above. A general outline of communicative competence in education has been developed that includes four elements: sociocultural competence, strategic competence, discourse competence, and grammatical competence. (Savignon, 2002). Habermas has been influential in this area of educational research, and teaching for communicative competence has been developed since the 70's, though for the most part, discussion of communicative competence and pedagogy relate to second language acquisition. Claire Kramsch (2006) notes that the original democratic impetus for the development of the idea of communicative competence has been diluted through practice and the increasing demands of accountability and measurability. She argues that the idea of communicative competence should be supplemented with her notion of "symbolic competence". She identifies a further three elements of symbolic competence: production of complexity, toleration of ambiguity, and appreciation of form as meaning. Again, Kramsch is working mostly in the area of post secondary education, but if the elements of communicative competence and symbolic competence are transposed on grade school contexts in first language situations, we can see that what is assumed for communicative competence development in grade schools involves a

continuum of competencies which demands rich communicative learning experiences. Again, we can use Habermas' notion of communicative action as an orientation point to examine elements of the educational lifeworld in which communicative and symbolic competence can be developed.

If we take this broad outline of an educational lifeworld that exists in public school, it is possible to identify areas where teachers can develop communicative competency in their students that would allow them to become more active in their education in terms of being able to engage lifeworld horizons and critical reflection on social issues. Development of communicative competency has a twofold advantage in the educational lifeworld. It makes student participatory learners and allows the development of a true community of inquirers. This aspect, then, has a concrete pedagogical justification. But it also has a further effect on the role of the public school as a public sphere: it enables the functioning of a school as a context for normative deliberation. We can see instances of the importance of this aspect of communicative competence in a number of areas where normative discourse and debate in public schools has spilled over into issues in the public sphere in Canada. In the development of LGBTQ alliances<sup>8</sup>, in the challenge to dress codes based on feminist principles<sup>9</sup>, and in the debate over sex education that has been current in Ontario over the past year, to name a few current examples, normative discourse is often initiated in school contexts by students themselves, often in reaction to the systemic imperatives they perceive as being imposed from above. Whether this phenomenon is happening because of or in spite of the attention to discourse in the classroom is

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<sup>8</sup> Many school boards have developed policies towards these student initiatives in response to public debate and concern. See, for example, the Toronto District School Boards policy at <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/HighSchool/Getinvolved/Studentleadership/GSAs.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> For a recent instance of student protest of dress codes for girls, see this report in the Toronto Star: <http://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2015/05/26/toronto-students-organize-crop-top-day-to-protest-dress-codes.html>

an interesting question, but in any case, the classroom as a context for normative deliberation and debate is crucial to its developmental function for students and its democratic function as a “weak public”.

With this in mind, the development of communicative competence in students should be a lens through which student lifeworlds can be constructed. Social, interpersonal, pedagogical, disciplinary, and intermediary relationships with teachers and the broader school community can be examined as to their potential as contexts for communicative action, or conversely as contexts more necessarily restricted to strategic action and power dynamics. Again, it should be remembered that strategic action need not be equated with systemic influences on the lifeworld, but may be part of lifeworld dynamics itself. The other consideration to keep in view is the developmental nature of lifeworld dynamics. Full communicative competence cannot be attributed to children of all ages, but identifying where the development of it may be impeded or where opportunities for development are being missed is crucial.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive picture of the educational lifeworld; it is simply too complex a task which would involve more empirical research and theoretical knowledge than is possible here. Nonetheless, I hope to show that such a reconstruction along broad lines of Habermas work can be illuminating. The normative model of the elements of an educational lifeworld in a public school classroom under the influence of teaching and pedagogy that I am proposing, has, then, the following elements:

- An awareness and accommodation of plurality in classroom discourse and curriculum,
- Attention to critical media literacy
- Attention to the social dimension of learning in structured collaborative learning and communicative procedures in the classroom

- The community of inquirers actualized among student of all levels in science and social studies through student voice and argument.
- Dialogic and constructivist approaches to literacy.
- Communicative competence as a goal for individual learning processes.

The question I want to turn to now is in what sense systematic imperatives can be in tension with this picture of the educational lifeworld. I will first explore the conceptual details of Habermas' "colonization thesis", and then see in what way we can apply that thesis to understand the impediments to the functioning of this normative picture of the lifeworld.

## 5. The Colonization Thesis

The twofold conception of society as system and lifeworld allows Habermas to account for the cultural and material reproduction of society through action contexts in modernity which have become highly differentiated. The material reproduction of society, the production of goods and infrastructure, for example, has been taken over by subsystems of rational behavior which have their own steering media. For Habermas, money and bureaucratic power are the two most important examples of these media. In the rational subsystems involved in material reproduction, action is no longer coordinated through language oriented to mutual understanding, as these subsystems follow their own logic which has been separated off from normative social contexts. In order for these action contexts to be separated off from lifeworld functioning, they have to be abstracted out of actual relations and social spheres in such a way that the steering media of money or bureaucratic power can assume the coordination of action. For example, Habermas notes that in order for labour power to be coordinated through the subsystems of late capitalism, it has to be abstracted through commodification. This is a rethinking of Marx through the lifeworld/system dichotomy:

The transformation of concrete work activities into abstract labour power that can be sold as a commodity even served Marx as the model for real abstraction. A process of this type sets in whenever the lifeworld, in its interchanges with the economic or administrative system, has to adapt itself to steering media. (Habermas *TCA* 2:322)

The abstraction of lifeworld products to system steering media only occurs, for Habermas, in the material reproduction of the lifeworld. The cultural reproduction of the lifeworld must still depend upon action coordination through communicative action. Habermas includes under the term “cultural reproduction of the lifeworld” such things as cultural tradition, socialization,

character formation, etc. For Habermas, these elements are formed and reproduced in society communicatively, drawing on the resources of communicative action:

The processes of reaching understanding upon which the lifeworld is centered require a cultural tradition across the whole spectrum. In the communicative practice of everyday life, cognitive interpretations, moral expectations, expressions, and valuations have to interpenetrate and form a rational connectedness via the transfer of validity that is possible in the performative attitude. This communicative infrastructure is threatened by two interlocking, mutually reinforcing tendencies: *systemically induced reification* and *cultural impoverishment*. (Ibid. 326)

Cultural impoverishment occurs with the break up of traditional ways of life in modernity which are supplanted by the separate development of science, morality, and art, ways of life once bound to comprehensive forms of cultural tradition, but increasingly influenced by an expert knowledge no longer tied to the day to day lifeworld of a given culture. “Systemically induced reification” refers to the phenomena of reification when system imperatives supplant communicatively achieved consensus in cultural areas. This is the core of Habermas’ “colonization thesis”.

Habermas draws on both Marx and Lukacs for his concept of reification, and the colonization thesis is intended to act as a theory of reification reimagined through the lens of communicative action. The classical Marxist understanding of reification is the phenomenon of abstractions becoming perceived as real. As labour is commodified in capitalist markets, the commodity value splits off from actual labour and this commodification is perceived as having its own existence. Lukacs (1971) expanded on Marx’s idea noting that social relations in modernity can become reified through the roles of bureaucracy and law when people perceive these roles as the natural order of things. For Lukacs, reification implies a change in perception

and consciousness which affects how people view their place in a system. For Habermas, reification is the result of systems undermining the communicative structures of the lifeworld: “the subjective inconspicuousness of systemic constraints that *instrumentalize* a communicatively structured lifeworld takes on the character of deception, of objectively false consciousness”. (Ibid 185). Reification then manifests in social “pathologies” of the communicative structures of the lifeworld. These pathologies should be empirically evident, and I intend to show that they are in the case of education.

The “everyday consciousness” of members of modern welfare states has become fragmented in a process that on the one hand results from the disintegration of traditional worldviews such as religion and metaphysically grounded philosophy and on the other from increasing complexity of action spheres differentiated off according to the systemic imperatives of advanced capitalism. Shared knowledge in the lifeworld, the horizons of understanding of its members, no longer has recourse to the certainties of pre-modern understandings and does not have the capability to encompass the systemic demands of complex bureaucracies and market forces:

Everyday consciousness sees itself thrown back on traditions whose claims to validity have already been suspended; where it does escape the spell of traditionalism it is hopelessly splintered. In place of “false consciousness” we today have a “fragmented consciousness” that blocks enlightenment by the mechanism of reification. It is only with this that the conditions for a *colonization of the lifeworld* are met. When stripped of their ideological veils, the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld from the outside – like colonial masters coming into a tribal society – and force a process of assimilation upon it. (Ibid. 354)

The metaphor of colonization implies a number of things. Firstly, an imbalance of power. Habermas sees the system imperatives as overwhelming the communicative resources of lifeworlds in the way that technologically advanced societies overwhelm more traditional. Colonization also implies an imposition of new norms and values on the colonized, as well as a loss of the power to determine agency independent of the colonizing forces. In the metaphor of system colonization, the force that is doing the colonizing is, in Habermas' own picture, norm and value free and steered only by its own imperatives. This loss of norm and value binding power that is not replaced with anything excepting the logics of market and bureaucracy is the crux of the paradox of colonization process in modernity. The colonized are, however, forced to adapt to these new standards, in order to continue to occupy the land that was formerly theirs. Similarly, lifeworld colonization forces adaptation of the lifeworld to system imperatives in areas that were formerly subject to communicative action. The effects of this colonization, for Habermas, should be subject to empirical verification in the "pathologies" observable when action contexts which were formerly coordinated through communicative action have been overtaken by steering media.

System colonization occurs for Habermas in a very specific context of governance and economic development. The model he is working with is the European welfare state. The historical development of the democratic welfare state is problematic for Marxist theory in that the services provided to middle and working class citizens undercut the revolutionary logic of Marxism. In the transformation of the roles of citizen and worker to client and consumer, Habermas notes an acceptable tradeoff that changes the relationship of individuals to the state and economy. This is one of the conditions of colonization. In accepting the tradeoff, individuals relinquish interest in communicative areas of responsibility. This allows for transformation of

consciousness and reification, and for Habermas this has observable empirical consequences. Habermas believes the value of his colonization thesis is that it can be used as a lens to view social phenomena and it can be verified through empirical analysis. In our sketch of educational lifeworlds we have noted areas which rely more on communicative action and which are not easily reducible to measurable metrics of teaching and learning. The question, then, is whether these areas suffer from the overbearing attention to system imperatives that are too restrictive to allow for the lifeworld functioning of what we have understood as the key communicative areas of teaching and learning. If we can identify areas of systemic organization of education which take on a teleology of their own in terms of systemic media and in doing so actually impede the communicative practice of teaching we will have shown that system colonization of educational lifeworlds does occur and puts the aims of democratic public education at risk. I would like to turn now to an issue I see as a potential source of system colonization of educational lifeworlds, and that is the use of standardized testing in public education.

## 6. The Colonization of Educational Lifeworlds: Standardized Testing

According to Habermas, society functions as both lifeworld and system, and system organizations relieve the burden of material reproduction from communicative practices of the lifeworld through the steering media money and power. When these media turn back on to lifeworld practices in areas that depend on communicative action, colonization occurs. Habermas notes that the transformation of action spheres from lifeworld communicative contexts to system imperatives often is accomplished through what he terms “juridification”, that is, the increase in spheres of action under the control and direction of legislation and law. This tendency towards juridification of action contexts is pronounced in advanced welfare state capitalism, and one of the areas in which it can be seen is in public education. In education, we must look for steering media used to coordinate the systems of education through juridification which infiltrate the communicative practice of teaching and learning itself. In the final chapter of volume two of “The Theory of Communicative Action”, Habermas turns his attention to the lifeworld contexts of the family and the school and sketches out how he sees the colonization thesis as applying to these areas. He identifies juridification as a potential source of system colonization in education because the legal and governmental bureaucracy must coordinate and organize educational systems in modern democracies, though the process of education itself depends upon communicative action:

In fact, however, in these spheres of the lifeworld, we find, *prior to* any juridification, norms and contexts of action that by functional necessity are based on mutual understanding as a mechanism for coordinating action. Juridification in these spheres means, therefore, not increasing the density of an already existing network of formal

regulations, but, rather, legally supplementing a communicative context of action through the superimposition of legal norms – not through legal institutions but through law as a medium. (Ibid. 369)

This juridification of action spheres once communicatively coordinated leads to a transformation in the relationships between lifeworld participants:

The formalization of relationships in family and school means, for those concerned, an objectivization and *removal from the lifeworld* of (now) formally regulated social interaction in family and school. As legal subjects, they encounter one another in an objectivizing, success-oriented attitude. (Ibid. 369)

In this analysis, Habermas talks about education as a lifeworld process at risk of system colonization primarily from the side of the media of bureaucratic power, which is the result of this juridification process. He notes that learning is a communicative function of the lifeworld and that with the increasing systemization of public education and control exercised by ministries and school boards and the like, that teaching needs to protect its communicative processes from over-regulation and bureaucratic control:

There are structural differences between the legal form in which courts and school administrations exercise their powers, on the one hand, and an educational task that can be accomplished only by way of action oriented to mutual understanding, on the other. (Ibid. 372)

As we have seen, the task of education is dependent on communicative relationships between teachers and students which, as I have argued, should be oriented towards communicative action and away from strategic. System imperatives in the form of bureaucratic power can be an impediment to communicative action in education when it coordinates the action of teaching

divorced from an understanding of its communicative context. This puts pressure on the teacher as the one who negotiates the relationship between student learning and educational systems.

Habermas notes that where system imperatives encroach on teaching and learning in the classroom, the domain of pedagogical practice is damaged in one of two ways:

These structural differences leave the teacher insecure and evoke reactions that

Frankenberg describes as over- or underutilization of the pedagogical scope of action, that is, as overattention to or concealed disobedience of the law. (Ibid. 372)

The teacher either has to choose to either pay strict adherence to the demands of system at the cost of what he or she knows to be student needs or they must subvert educational law in order to accomplish the pedagogical task as they see it.

Habermas sees the potential in colonization in education in a top down approach to curriculum and evidence for this colonization in the resistance of teachers and parents to education systems they see as removed from their needs and the experience of their children. The steering media through which colonization occurs, then, is bureaucratic power. I think this diagnosis is true, and it points at ongoing debates over curriculum and methodology we see in both the U.S. and Canada. There is always a tension between teaching as a lifeworld process and the systems we put in place to accomplish the goals of public education because public education demands a strong bureaucratic approach in order for it to be manageable, yet teaching itself is first and foremostly about lifeworld communication. However, I think since Habermas wrote that section of TCA in 1981, that juridification has taken on a new dimension as student performance is being tied into school funding, teacher salaries, and job security through the medium of standardized testing. My contention is that when money and bureaucratic power combine through juridification of education, system colonization occurs in the interchange between the

measurement of student learning and the financial organization of education. The area I would like to focus on for a brief empirical analysis is the issue of standardized testing in the United States, and how the use of standardized testing in public education shows evidence of systemic colonization by the media of both bureaucratic power and money.

Standardized testing of students itself takes on the characteristic of steering mechanism in its function as an organizational imperative which coordinates student learning and placement within the educational system. However, this steering mechanism is subject to the influence of both money and power, in Habermasian terms, because it is systematically used in accountability mechanisms to evaluate both students and teachers. As a necessary assessment tool for coordinating the educational system, especially in the relationship between secondary and higher education, it provides functional interchange between educational action contexts. However, in the further development of tying teacher compensation and job security to standardized testing in some jurisdictions in the United States, we have even starker empirical evidence of how the communicative process of teaching and learning is being undercut by systemic imperatives. The movement toward more stringent school accountability and teacher evaluation based on standardized testing in the United States is based on a demand from the public and political class who see public education as failing in its mandate. As a result, there has been an increase in both the amount of standardized testing and the stakes attached to the results in the last twenty years (Baker, Oluwole, and Green, 2013), and student achievement on standardized tests has been increasingly tied into school funding formulas and teacher salary. I will begin by placing this in historical context and then look at studies that investigate the results of this increased reliance on standardized testing by educational systems.

The history of standardized testing in the United States is well documented (see, for example, Gallagher, 2002). With the explosive growth of public schooling in the late 1800's, the U.S. government looked for ways to ensure standards and improve efficiency of public money being spent on education. A report prepared for the US Congress in 1992 notes that the increasing complexity and scope of educational bureaucracy in the States meant a turn away from oral examinations towards standardized testing which would ensure equity and accountability. These themes are still the center of a public discussion of the use and misuse of standardized testing. Testing was thought to be more objective and scientific in character, and this was tied in ideologically with the public desire for equity and fairness in education, managed by a rationalized bureaucratic approach:

Thus, standardized testing came to serve an important symbolic function in American schools, a sort of technological embodiment of principles of fairness and universal access that have always distinguished American schools from their European and Asian counterparts. As the methods of testing later became increasingly quantitative and "scientific" in appearance, the tests gained from the growing public faith in the ability of science and rational decision making to better mankind. (U.S. Congress 108)

The use of this more scientific approach to assessment would have two desired effects: to classify students according to ability in order to increase efficiency of teaching and to hold schools accountable for the effectiveness of their practice. At its inception, then, standardized testing was used as a bureaucratic tool to encourage both fairness and efficiency in an area that was seen as crucial to the country's interests and its democratic ideals. At the same time, the growing cost and complexity of the education system meant that accountability mechanisms were viewed as both rational and necessary to the aims of public education.

Early testing was influenced by the new social sciences which purported to lend scientific rigor to the classification of intelligence and ability (Gallagher, 2002). It is important to note that this scientific bias towards testing was implicit at the outset. It was assumed that student progress could be reduced to measurable metrics which can be converted into scientific data. This assumes a certain kind of picture of human learning that is biased towards rote memorization and mechanical operations. This apparent rigor gave impetus and justification to the streaming and ranking of students according to intellectual ability, which education legislators such as Massachusetts reformer Horace Mann believed would result in a general improvement in the mental fitness of the citizenry. Influenced by both new social sciences and progressivism, it was thought that functional improvements in the capabilities of the population at large could be influenced by standardized testing procedures and the feedback it provided. (Gallagher, 2002)

Standardized testing in the States continued to develop in the twentieth century and be influenced by a variety of sources, including the first Binet IQ tests and US Army “Alpha” tests of mental ability (Walsh and Betz, 1985). The development of the SAT and ACT tests were a functional bridge between high school and post-secondary education. By 1965, the U.S. government tied standardized testing into school funding, with the “Elementary and Secondary Education Act”. The current era of public school testing in the United States began with President George W. Bush’s signature education law, “No Child Left Behind”. Enacted in 2002, States were required to initiate standardized testing in grades 3 through 12, the results of which would be tied into school evaluations. Schools failing to show improvements in standardized tests of math and reading for five consecutive years were required to “restructure” which might involve large scale staff replacements, schools closings, contracting out to private interests, or state takeover (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002).

Following Bush, the Obama administration has made significant changes to federal education policies. President Obama's 'Race to the Top' program was a four billion dollar initiative to encourage schools and districts to compete for extra funding through a commitment to accountability and testing practices. The introduction of the Common Core standards in 2010 added another layer of testing and accountability from the federal government. Though the Common Core is mainly a restructuring of curriculum, its effect has been to make many of the states test more difficult (Figueroa and Bruce, 2014) at a time when teachers and students are adjusting to the new curriculum demands. Figueroa and Bruce argue that the combination of implementation of the Common Core standards from the federal level with concurrent increase in accountability initiatives through state organized standardized testing combined is both unfair and ineffective, because the implementation of new curriculum standards involves a drop in the performance of teachers and students as they adjust to new curriculum demands, yet the stakes for the testing remains high.

The net result of these major federal initiatives, which were to be enacted at the state level, is that in many states, teacher salaries and job security are increasingly tied to student achievement data from standardized tests (Baker, Oluwole, and Green, 2013). In some states up to 50% of teacher evaluations, upon which tenure, job security and teacher salary are based, are comprised of data from student testing. This puts an obvious pressure on teachers to ensure that their student meet or exceed standards in these testing systems, possibly to the detriment of other pedagogical interests. I would argue that tying personal financial security of teachers to the outside testing of their students, at the very least induces teachers to act more strategically in their classrooms, both in the administration and preparation of their students for the tests, and in their approach to pedagogy. Their pedagogical intent is transformed under such systems, and

there is much evidence to support this. Some studies have found that when teacher salary is tied into student performance on standardized testing, teachers change the focus of their teaching to those students most likely to show improvement, with much less attention paid to those who are already overachieving and those who are far under the standard and less likely to show improvement. Neal and Schazenbach (2007) argue that certain models of accountability systems have structural consequences for the delivery of instruction in public schools:

We argue based on a simple model of effort allocation within schools that the use of proficiency counts in accountability systems may provide no benefits for some students. A proficiency count system does not reward schools for improving student performance unless the improvements bring the students up to a specific proficiency standard. Thus, schools face weak incentives to devote extra attention to students who are either already proficient or who have little chance of becoming proficient in the near term. (Neal and Schazenbach 4)

Derek Neal argues that when teacher pay is tied to student performance as measured by standardized testing, “effort distortions” in teachers approach to their students inevitably occur:

Further, one of my main conclusions will be that accountability systems always create predictable effort distortions when employed as incentive systems. Systems that serve as mechanisms for providing public information about the achievement of students and the performance of schools relative to public education standards distort effort if they contain rewards or sanctions that provide incentives for educators. (Neal 9,10)

Distortions occur at the level of teacher interaction with students, but also when the administration of schools who are in danger of losing funding due to low test scores re-classify lower performing students as having learning disabilities in order to manipulate the data from

which their funding is derived. Figlio and Getzler (2002) found that in Florida, when school funding became more tied to student achievement, the percentage of students classified as disabled increased, and this was fifty percent times more likely to happen in schools serving lower social-economics populations. Other strategic “gaming” of accountability systems explored by Cullen and Reback (2006) showed that when high stakes testing was introduced in Florida, long term suspensions of lower performing students were used to take them out of the testing pool. In Texas, a disproportionate amount of black and Hispanic students were exempted from test taking either through reclassification as disabled or encouraging absences.

The systemic pressure administrations are under to maintain achievement levels as defined by standardized testing also comes from economic elements outside the schooling system such as the relationship with property values to school districts. Figlio and Lucas (2004) found that with the introduction of school grading systems in Florida in response to No Child Left Behind, changes in real estate values in the first year correspond with changes in letter grades for neighborhood schools. They calculate a difference from the highest to second highest grade school received in the first year at 19.5%, and from second to third 15.6%. They found that these effects lessened over time as the grades school received did not show consistency but the results clearly show a systemic feedback loop between school grades based on standardized testing and real estate property values.

There is much debate about No Child Left Behind and whether its increased emphasis on standardized test based accountability has had the desired effects. Dee (2010) that there has been some increase in test scores in math, but negligible increase in reading since the law was enacted. The same study did find, however, that the amount of instructional time devoted to these subjects increased by an average of 45 minutes of instructional time per week. Dee also states that since

No Child Left Behind, the type of questions the students see on standardized assessments influence the kind of activities and practice teachers gave the student in class. Davis and Wilson (2015), for example, found that students in grade one in Texas were taught a single strategy for reading comprehension testing that they were asked to show in all their classroom comprehension work, and that the principal of the school in which this practice was found would come in to classes and ask students to show their evidence of the use of that one strategy.

The issues around testing and whether it comprises system colonization in Habermasian terms involves many facets, but one of the simplest and most important is time. In order for the educational lifeworld as I have understood it to take into account the communicative aspects I have outlined, time for the classroom to become a true community of inquirers and for students to develop communicative competency is crucial. However, as educational jurisdictions in Canada and the US implement more and more standardized testing, the time and energy devoted to testing and preparing for testing has increased dramatically. According to the *New York Times*<sup>10</sup>, between kindergarten and grade twelve, students in major cities in the United States take an average of 113 standardized tests in their school career. The same article reports that the National Education Association estimates that teachers devote thirty percent of instructional time to testing. While data is available measuring the amount of time and frequency of testing in schools, it is much harder to measure the amount of preparation time and energy that goes into standardized in the classroom.

It is perhaps useful to look at specific testing procedures and its effects on school culture. One example of system colonization of literacy teaching through standardized testing that has

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<sup>10</sup> Cassidy, Christina Almeida “Opt-Out Movement Accelerates Amid Common Core Testing”, *New York Times*, April 17, 2015, found at: <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/04/17/us/ap-us-common-core-opting-out.html>

been documented in Habermasian terms is in Cheu-jeey George Lee's (2014) work on the use of the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) literacy assessment in primary grades in many states and Canadian provinces. Lee's work is important because it gives us a glimpse into actual educational practice in schools under what she considers to be systemic colonization. Lee describes her experience as a pre-service professor supervising students in schools where DIBELS testing and scores had all but taken over the teaching of literacy. In one of the schools she describes, the teachers lounge is covered in colour coded scores of students ranked from highest to lowest in an effort to ensure all students are meeting the achievement goals of the assessment, while teachers refer to the act of assessing their students individually as "DIBELing" them. Lee notes that the DIBELS test puts the emphasis on phonics and the speed of word recognition with little emphasis on comprehension and no attention paid to critical thinking skills in reading. Lee characterizes the manner in which DIBELS has supplanted literacy learning in the schools she has visited as "colonization" in that nearly all effort goes into the students making progress through that particular assessment tool, which is intended to provide diagnostic assessment of students for teachers. It instead becomes an end in itself:

Yet DIBELS decouples itself from the lifeworld domain and becomes a systemic force that comes back to encroach on or colonize the lifeworld by replacing communicative rationality with instrumental rationality. Through systemic colonization, DIBELS is no longer something to be reasoned communicatively in literacy education but taken for granted as a telos (or an instrumental goal) to be achieved. It facilitates and dictates how reading should be taught. (Lee 92)

This is just one example of one testing regime, but it shows how quickly standardized testing can take over areas of education, like early literacy, and produce a certain kind of teaching at the expense of what others may identify as best practice.

It is in the area of literacy education two competing models of approaches to early literacy and their amenability to testing are the source of some debate among scholars. Critics charge that standards such as the Common Core in the US rely on an “autonomous” model of literacy teaching in which texts are divorced from cultural context, and discreet decoding and comprehension skills and benchmarks are sought to assess and teach children. Brian Street’s (1984) work on literacy defined the autonomous model in opposition to what he termed an “ideological” model of literacy that emphasizes a critical and cultural investigation of texts and how they relate to a reader’s background and experience. The autonomous approach leads to overemphasis on assessment and makes individualized assessment and learning difficult. The autonomous model was emphasized in the National Reading Panels report of 2002 as it aligned with efforts to standardized testing and pressure from the movement against whole language teaching (Botzakis, Burns, Hall, 2014), and this led to a change in teacher perception of how to teach and assess for literacy:

Instead of being concerned primarily about student learning, educators working with autonomous models and standards become more concerned about "dips in test scores" (Collier, 2012, p. 22) that may result from variations in how different skills are taught in different classrooms. (Botzakis, Burns, Hall 226)

The increase in emphasis on the autonomous model of literacy has the effect of isolating texts from the context of classroom discussions and leaving ideological implications uncovered and unexamined. The role of classroom discourse around literacy is an important one, and when

student experience of texts is isolated from contexts of meaning provided by classroom discourse or when they do not have the opportunity to explore connections between texts and their own experience, then an important communicative element of their experience of the classroom is neglected. Graff (1987) states that how students acquire literacy, whether textual context is uncovered or ignored in the teaching of literacy, has implications for how students use literacy. Students are less likely to question texts and make connections to their own experience when literacy is taught in discreet, isolated comprehension exercises that are most easily assessed through testing. Graf considers the ideological function of literacy this ability to see and make connections in texts and an individual's experience of the world, which connects back to the dialogic picture of literacy in Freire's work. The autonomous model of literacy teaching, with its more easily assessed skills and decoding strategies, has, somewhat predictably, come to dominate literacy teaching in high stakes testing jurisdictions. As a result, student experience of literacy learning is de-contextualized and the opportunity to engage student voice and critical thinking through literacy is missed.

The transformation of literacy teaching in high stakes testing jurisdiction has also led to a narrowing of practice in teachers attitudes towards literacy, as the performance of their students on the test can have personal financial and institutional consequences. In their recent study of the transition between two different literacy testing regimes in Texas, Davis and Wilson (2015) discuss what they term "transfer avoidance" in literacy teaching that results with an increased reliance on standardized tests. The teachers they interviewed did not want their students to face the need to transfer skills or knowledge from one type of learning experience to the kind of assessment of that skill that would appear on a high stakes test. There is a perceived risk of students being unsure of what the tests are asking and the avoidance of this risk determines how

literacy is taught in those classrooms. Rarely do students move beyond tasks that directly prepare them for the assessments. For example, the writing portion of the new “State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STARR) for seventh graders (which replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)) requires students to write twenty-six line essays given various prompts as an assessment of their grammar and writing skills. Teachers report that they would limit all marked writing in their class to twenty-six lines so that students would get used to expressing themselves in any written work in class in the same format that they would experience in the standardized assessment. Another example of transfer avoidance that they cite is the teaching of particular comprehension strategies which must then be applied in all reading in the grade, with written evidence of their application. The limited scope of literacy education under this kind of assessment points to a transformation of this crucial communicative aspect of the educational lifeworld in the very structure of how students create and engage in texts. Davis and Wilson conclude with this observation on the tendency of standardized testing to determine teaching and learning in high stakes contexts:

Our findings solidify our concern that test preparation is becoming so deeply ingrained in the fabric of education that it often goes unnoticed. Our participants described a learning culture in which teaching to the test extends much deeper than the narrowing of curricular objectives and prioritization of the assessed curriculum. Instead of instructional practices bending to align with a test, we see the test being allowed to enlarge and encircle all aspects of instructional practice. (Davis and Wilson 374)

The evidence of study after study that the learning culture of school has been transferred by the increase in accountability due to standardized testing is overwhelming, and clearly points to a systemic distortion of crucial lifeworld learning processes.

The recent parent and student movement against standardized testing is what we would expect to see when lifeworld colonization has reached an untenable point in the lives of students and their families. The “opt out” movement is in response to high stakes testing associated with the introduction of the Common Core, but it is also indicative of parents and families reaching a breaking point in the experience of testing in their children’s lives. The New York Times estimates that in 2014, one in six students opt to not sit for at least one standardized test in New York State as a protest<sup>11</sup>. Similar movements are happening across the United States. Parents cite the pressure and anxiety of test taking on children as their primary reason, though some parents want to support teachers who they feel are being unfairly penalized by the new standards. The debate is evidence that there is a disconnect between the experience of standardized testing in the classroom and the systemic role government has created for these types of assessments.

Supporters of the increased testing regime in the United States believe that standardized testing increases equity and fairness among African American and Hispanic populations not only because it holds lower performing schools more accountable but it provides data that is necessary for determining the areas in which various groups of students need more support. Skirla and Scheurisch (2003) argue that the issue is one of increasing complexity that political sides are too eager to decide in one way or the other. If we rely solely on the results of these tests as a measurement of whether accountability legislation has improved the quality of education for historically under achieving groups of students, we run the risk of not taking into account how teaching and learning has been transformed by the tests themselves. Other standards of success, such as long term outcomes for students must be included in the measurement by which we deem

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<sup>11</sup> Harris, Elizabeth and Fessenden Ford, “Opt-out Becomes Anti-test Rallying Cry in New York” *The New York Times*, May 20, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/21/nyregion/opt-out-movement-against-common-core-testing-grows-in-new-york-state.html>

the accountability regimes successful. Furthermore, even where achievement gains in equity for African American and Hispanic students can be shown in certain high stakes testing instituted by No Child Left Behind, there is evidence that suggests that those gains are only to be found within the statistics of those tests and do not correspond with findings from other academic measurements, for example, low stakes testing that might be connected to university applications. In a review of the research on high stakes testing in Texas, Heilig and Darling-Hammond (2008) found that performance on one particular state mandated high stakes test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test, which showed increased achievement for black and Hispanic students in Texas did not correspond with the results of SAT tests on the same cohort of students. Some other measurements of the same group showed that the gap actually increased. This suggests that not only are the tests failing to give accurate assessment of student achievement, but that preparation for specific tests could actually be a detriment to student learning overall. The same study found high discrepancy between reported grade retentions and graduations and the actual number of students who dropped out or were removed from the cohort that provided data for testing, again mostly involving African American and Hispanic students. The number of retentions and dropouts used to manipulate the data for high stakes accountability testing were high above the official reported rates which guaranteed funding for individual schools and school districts in Texas.

I believe that given the complexity of issues of measurement in education, we must be clear about how standardized testing distorts the lifeworld teaching and learning process. My research has shown that these distortions happen at two levels: at the administrative level, through the control and manipulation of the grouping of students who take the test through things like retention, suspension, and re-classifying of students as special education needs, and, perhaps

more importantly, through the pedagogical intent of individual teachers. The issue of the dual purposes of the tests, as a measurement intended for teacher accountability and as assessment data to improve student performance, are in conflict when approached from the standpoint of pedagogical intent. Individual teachers are forced to approach their job strategically with regards to test results to secure their positions and salaries. At the same time, teaching to the test also involves narrowing the scope of pedagogy for student success which can be measured in a limited and specific way. Both of these goals are at odds with what I have determined are the crucial communicative structures of the educational lifeworld which should remain the focus of teaching and learning in the classroom. Tying accountability to job security and performance distorts both the assessment function of the testing and the teachers approach to their job.

In this brief look at standardized testing, we can see that the desire for scientific accountability which we noted at the outset of the development of standardized testing has caused a specific kind of abstraction of the measurement of student learning, which then turns back on the lifeworld in reified form through the approach of teachers to the content and delivery of curriculum. What is lost is the nuance of human learning, the critical thinking skills, ability to engage in forms of argumentative and normative reasoning, and holistic approaches to reading and comprehension. These areas suffer from the inability to be simply abstracted in terms that can be read by the steering mechanism of testing, which in turn transforms the experience of learning in the classroom. The dual impact of both bureaucratic power and money as steering media in combination which have overcome the resources of the educational lifeworld have the effect of shifting the balance of approach from a teacher's perspective towards the strategic action of systems and away from the communicative action which I believe is at the heart of individual and societal learning processes.

## Reflection and Conclusion

The majority of my own teaching practice has been in a private elementary school in downtown Toronto that serves families of a high socio-economic class. The school is small in comparison to other private schools in the area, and it offers the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP) which is an international curriculum model centered around concept based education and student inquiry. My school does not strictly follow the Ontario government curriculum, but we are overseen by the IB through their accreditation program. As such, we have a lot of freedom in the planning and delivery of curriculum, much more than public schools in our area. Like private schools throughout the U.S. and Canada, our students are not required to take part in Ontario standardized testing<sup>12</sup>, though many of them write SAT test in grade six when they are applying to schools for grade seven. Our school is also not unionized and is run as a small business by the owner, so as teachers we do not have the benefit of job security or access to benefits common to public teachers like seniority, contractual pay scales, or grievance mechanisms. We are answerable to our employers and our parents in the context of the market for private education in the city of Toronto. The freedom we have as educators is, ironically, bordered by a market economy and only tangentially connected to the bureaucracy of public education.

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<sup>12</sup> A discussion on private schooling and No Child Left behind testing requirements can be found at <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/07/29/can-school-performance-be-measured-fairly/private-schools-take-a-comprehensive-view>. The fact that private schools are exempt from standardized testing can be seen as another pressure on the lifeworld of public education, as people who can afford to send their children to private schools, a socio-economic class with outsize influence and power on the media and governmental subsystems, can demand the accountability of public education without themselves having to experience the effects of that education for their own children.

The IB PYP is a transdisciplinary curriculum framework for kindergarten to grade six. Wherever possible, all social studies, science, and language content is taught through six transdisciplinary themes. In practice what this means is that for six to eight weeks, students learn about a particular social studies or science theme and all or most of their reading, writing, and classroom learning activities during that time are connected to that theme. For example, if the theme in grade six is government and revolutions, all novel studies, non-fiction research, and student writing will relate to the theme of government. The rationale behind this model is a constructivist approach to student learning: the belief that student learning relies on the ability to build on prior knowledge and make connections between learning experiences across the disciplines<sup>13</sup>. This allows for a deeper construction of knowledge and encourages student questioning and a context discussion in the classroom. It also encourages the development of transdisciplinary skills, which the IB has grouped under the headings of social skills, thinking skills, self-management skills, research skills, and communication skills. This model, then, reinforces the concepts and content of science and social studies curriculum through literacy learning and vice versa, while at the same time developing skills that can be transferred across the disciplines.

The IB PYP (and my school as an IB certified school) also delivers what it considers to be “concept based learning”. Drawing on the work of Lynne Erickson (2008), universal concepts are identified to drive the curriculum rather than the prescribed specific content of government curriculum. For example, in the unit of government instead of a factual focus on the history of a particular nation, the concept of revolution is used to uncover connections between historical periods and national histories. Transfer of understanding through conceptual learning is the goal

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<sup>13</sup> The IB cites the work of Ernest Boyer (1995) as a rationale for their transdisciplinary curriculum model.

of the PYP framework. Applying conceptual understanding, developing critical thinking skills, learning to work collaboratively, engaging in authentic inquiry, and developing an understanding of connections between their knowledge and the world around them are key goals of the PYP and are explicit pedagogical goals in my own school. The IB PYP model, while by no means perfect, is I believe, a good reflection of current best practice in education.

When I first began teaching in the IB having just completed my preservice training at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto, I was struck by how well the framework corresponded with the pedagogical training at OISE. The emphasis on inquiry, cooperative learning, dialogic theory, and constructivism which had been part of my OISE experience transferred easily onto the IB curriculum. I had the sense that the “best practice” which was stressed in my learning at OISE would fit in well with my new work in the IB. In addition to my classroom teaching, I have also been trained by the IB as a workshop leader for conferences in which teachers from jurisdictions all over the world, both public and private, are trained to deliver the IB PYP program. I believe my experience in this school and as a teacher trainer for the IB has given me a unique perspective on what I have described as the educational lifeworld in a school setting largely determined by a small group of teachers and administrators outside the restrictions (and protections) of a regulated public schooling system. The discrepancy I found between my experience as a teacher and student of what I considered best practice and what my colleagues from public schools across North America described was pronounced and troubling.

As an IB workshop leader, I have had the opportunity to conduct workshop training for teachers in the U.S. and Canada. Mostly, these workshops are for teachers from public schools in the States who are seeking accreditation as IB schools and need an introduction to the framework. Through these workshops I have met with many educators who describe the process

of introducing the IB framework into a large public school context. I have also served as a accreditation visitor to IB schools which involves meeting with trustees and elected officials and hearing their impressions and concerns about how the IB fits into their state education systems. It has struck me on many occasions as a workshop leader and site visitor how difficult it is to implement a transdisciplinary, concept based curriculum in the context of the American public education debates. Teachers have told me of how stringent the state standards are and how hard it would be to adapt those standards to the IB model. They also worry about how the standardized testing regimes their school are under will work within the IB PYP. Teachers have personally described to me how limited and restricted their literacy teaching is because of the tests and I have often wondered how it is possible that those schools could teach anything like the way we implement the program. One teacher from Florida proudly told me that his classes always have the highest scores in his district because he does nothing but prepare them for the tests. It would be impossible to implement IB in this context and I have often heard the frustration of teachers who believe that student learning would be better served by the kind of curriculum model offered by the IB but that the requirements of their States would make that impossible.

It is with these questions with which I first approached the idea viewing teaching practice through the lens of Habermas' communications theory. I had completed undergraduate work on critical theory and the Frankfurt school, so I was familiar with the broad outlines of his work. I thought that a pragmatic theory of knowledge is the most useful approach for the philosophy of education and Habermas' use of that appealed to me. The theory of communicative action seemed an ideal conceptual framework with which to view pedagogical theory. My own experience in the classroom had led me to the insight that teaching is first and foremost about

communicative relationships and that external pressures on the classroom often are more to be managed than helpful in determining the quality of day-to-day learning in the classroom. When I learned more about the colonization thesis and the twofold conception of society as system and lifeworld, I was struck by how even a general understanding of that thesis applies to the experience of teaching, especially as it was described by colleagues in public schools. As limited as my teaching experience has been, I feel that my school has had the opportunity to attend in detail to the educational lifeworld considerations I have outlined, and the freedom to do so contributes, I believe, to the quality of education our students receive and the richness of learning experience the PYP framework provides. This is in stark contrast to the direction public education has taken with the new accountability regimes. My research in this thesis has confirmed my initial thoughts on how systems impede best practice pedagogy.

I have employed Habermas primarily as a diagnostic tool with which to examine both communications practice in education and the encroachment of systems on that practice. I believe the strength of Habermas' work lies in this critical diagnostic function. As a theory that provides a practical response to this diagnosis, it has a more limited application. In Habermas' broader picture of democracy and the public sphere, public education has a crucial role to play in making public deliberation in a rationalized lifeworld possible. Habermas' picture of democracy demands the communicative competency of its citizens without which political legitimacy is not possible in the face of the systems domination through market driven policies. It would follow, then, that the legitimacy and the health of western democracy is at stake in the undermining of the social learning processes that should be the purview of public education, but how we address this issue given the overwhelming force with which systems media have colonized the educational lifeworld is unclear.

Part of the issue is that Habermas' work is not a detailed theory of power. The distinctions between communicative and strategic action and lifeworld and system, while they do outline uneven power relationships, are perhaps too broad conceptual tools with which to examine power in society. Differentiating where money and power combine to make learning processes in the normative dimension untenable is a complex task. In education, the task is further complicated by the competing systems of power represented by bureaucratized control of education in opposition to union defense of the teaching profession. When these complex systems engage each other over the problem of teaching and learning in the classroom, neither has the communicative resources to adequately conceptualize what is at stake in the issues they are deciding. It is perhaps only in the public sphere of debate in which these things might have a fair hearing. As we have seen, the recent response of teachers, parents and children to standardized testing in the U.S. and the debate happening in the American media may be an indicator of a growing awareness of the issues of system colonization, though whether that debate can articulate the complexity the issues involved is an ongoing question. The more the systems media of money and power encroach on learning in public education, the less likely the citizenry is able to muster the communicative resources to push back at those media.

The main forum for this pushback still must be the classroom, and the primary agent of change and resistance is the classroom teacher. One effect of the increase in accountability systems in the US along with the failure of those systems to provide an increase in educational outcomes has been to examine in detail the question of teacher effectiveness. Study after study has tried to measure teacher effectiveness against the standards of the very tests we have looked at in our brief survey, yet finding correlations between level of teacher education, quality of

preservice schools, the effects of on the job training, or long term experience has been difficult<sup>14</sup>. Partly this may be due to the measurement criteria, i.e. the bluntness of the tests themselves, but partly it might be due to the fact that the communicative relationships that make up effective teaching are not traceable to these influences. How and why a teacher makes a connection to the students in their care that improves the educational outcome for those students is a complex question, but I suspect it has much to do with the quality of communication in their classrooms and the attention to the educational lifeworld that I have outlined. That lifeworld needs to be defended against system colonization, and the final line in that defense will be the teacher who is able to construct a community of inquirers through a pedagogy aligned with communicative action.

We need a model of education that reflects our democratic aspirations and the emancipatory potential of human communications and relationships, and I believe the communicative dimension of education when conceived as a lifeworld provides a means of unleashing that potential. Reformulating our look at public education through the conceptual lens provided by Habermas, we can state that effective education is a communicative process that resists systemic organization because systems do not have access to the resources of communicative action. Moreover, societal learning processes, both normative and scientific, are dependent on the communicative processes of education, and these need to be protected in their institutional form in both primary and higher education. Educational institutions must actualize the community of inquirers which underlies all rationalization processes, and that community is predicated on lifeworld communication processes. Without the protection of these processes, the benefits of communicative rationalization are overwhelmed and undercut by the

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Chingos and Peterson (2011).

instrumentalization of learning. Habermas provides a clear diagnostic picture of where learning processes are threatened by instrumental rationality, and the use of the concept of the lifeworld is an effective way of reimagining the classroom as a forum for the employment and nurturing of communicatively structured learning.

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