Acceptance speech on the occasion of the presentation of the Ruth Cohn Foundation's 2025 Science Prize on 16 May 2026

Title of the **award-winning thesis:** Theme-Centred Interaction (TCI) in Family Education – A Form of Educational Support Against the Backdrop of Contemporary Modernisation Processes

By: Anna Isabelle Heyer

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for the award of this Science Prize!

My special thanks go to the Ruth Cohn Foundation and Mr Schrade for awarding this prize and for the opportunity to contribute to the further development of the TZI concept through my work.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the jury – comprising Prof. Dr Brigitte Mazohl, Prof. Dr Margitta Holler and Prof. Dr Matthias Scharer – for having examined my work so thoroughly and for their assessment of it. Thank you very much, Ms Mazohl, for your lovely speech and your precise summary of my work. It is a wonderful feeling to have the work I have spent so long writing on presented once again and recognised in this way.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my special thanks to Prof. Dr Welter and to Merve Klapper from Kiel University for supervising my thesis. Merve Klapper in particular – many of you will probably know her – plays a special role here, as it was through her and the opportunities she offered at the university that I was able to get to know and grow to love the TZI over many semesters, and ultimately arrive at this wonderful topic. Thank you very much for that!

I would like to say a few more words about why this Bachelor's thesis is so important to me:

Through my in-depth study of the consequences of modernisation, I have come to realise that both family life and child-rearing can be very challenging for parents today. I would like to highlight the diversity of these challenges once again here, as it is very important to me to raise awareness of the situation facing families.

Families must reorganise themselves internally in response to trends towards pluralisation, individualisation and the blurring of boundaries; work, family and relationships must be balanced; a new approach to diverse family constellations must be found; and parents face the challenge of meeting societal expectations. On the one hand, by fulfilling numerous family responsibilities: caring for the child, providing emotional stability for the family, offering financial and emotional support, managing the household, planning leisure time, taking steps to promote health, and coordinating family life; on the other hand, by fulfilling the normative expectations of parenting on an equal footing, which require a calm, reasonable and patient approach to the child, the joint negotiation of decisions and the constant consideration of the child's needs. Similarly, parents are increasingly acting as counsellors, tasked with recognising their children's problems, skills and abilities at an early stage so that they can support them through their constant presence and willingness to help.

Whilst writing my thesis, I asked myself: how are parents supposed to manage all this? It is hardly surprising that this sheer volume of demands can lead to pressure to perform, insecurity and dissatisfaction, feeling overwhelmed and overburdened, family conflicts and the fear of parental failure. The core problem is that high-quality, successful parenting is equated exclusively with the child's well-being, thereby sidelining the needs and feelings of parents. In this context, I found the accounts of educational scientists Ronnie Oliveras and Michael Winkler particularly important; they explicitly point out that parental wellbeing has a major influence on the child's wellbeing and thus also on the quality of upbringing. In order for TZI to function as a tool for high-quality upbringing, it must therefore contribute not only to the child's wellbeing but also to the wellbeing of the entire family.

The application of the individual TZI components in Matzdorf has shown that TZI is capable of doing this in many respects. Adherence to axioms, postulates, interaction methods and guidelines can help parents to become aware of their own values, improve their communication skills and sharpen their perception of family dynamics and external influences. As a result, not only are the child's needs, interests and boundaries better recognised, but so too are their own and those of their partner; conflicts can be avoided and an appreciative and respectful approach fostered. Similarly, TZI can help parents to better recognise their own autonomy, dependencies, strengths, weaknesses and scope for decision-making, so that they feel less helpless in the face of challenges. They can learn to recognise external influences and potential disruptions at an early stage and find appropriate ways of dealing with them. In this way, TZI contributes to strengthening the parent-child relationship, to self-satisfaction and self-determination, to an awareness of one's own capacity for action and autonomy, to personal development and to the health of all family members, thereby fulfilling the conditions for holistic family wellbeing.

If, in conclusion, I could appeal to all those parents who feel overwhelmed or insecure, I would say to them: Dear parents, you are not alone in facing these challenges. You do not have to manage everything, because you are not all-powerful. However, you are not powerless either; rather, as Ruth Cohn said, you are 'partially powerful'. You may not be able to influence societal developments, but you can influence your own attitude and your family life. You are autonomous, valuable and have the right to pay attention to your own needs, wishes, feelings and boundaries.

The fact that I am able to stand here today is thanks above all to two very special people: my mum, who proofread every single piece of work I produced during my studies and always supported and encouraged me, and my partner Kai, who has shown me support and patience and motivated me on those days when my writing didn't quite go as hoped. Thank you both for always believing in me and standing by my side! I love you both very much!

Thank you very much for your attention!