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## The Subject-Participatory Paradigm in Correlation with the Constitutive Features of Pedagogical Qualitative Research: A Personalistic Perspective

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### **Abstract:**

The aim of the article is to show the correlation between the subject-participatory paradigm and the basic features of qualitative pedagogical research in practical terms. The choice of this research topic can be justified by the insufficient range of literature in the field. Therefore, the subject-participatory paradigm will be explored from the personalistic perspective, with reference to the constitutive features of pedagogical qualitative research in order to address the research problem while taking into account the above-mentioned correlation. The starting point is the concept of the subject-participatory paradigm grounded in the thought of Karol Wojtyła. Then, in conducting a hermeneutic analysis, the author refers to the concepts of scientists such as Dariusz Kubinowski, Krzysztof Szmidt, Marcella Kelly, Maura Dowling, Michelle Millar, Matthew de Carlo, and others. Also, references are made to the research stages, mainly embedded in the creative methodology, which can facilitate the emergence of the correlation between the aforementioned paradigm and the constitutive features of pedagogical qualitative research.

*Keywords:* paradigm, subject-participatory paradigm, qualitative research, the constitutive features, personalistic perspective

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## **Introduction**

The issues related to the application of paradigms in research raise many questions, discussions from various points of view, and approaches to research, whether quantitative, qualitative, or mixed (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2015; Rubacha, 2011). The role and importance of paradigms is emerging as an important aspect in areas such as pedagogy, education, methodology, philosophy, psychology, and culture. Thus, the author's intention to concentrate on the subject-participatory paradigm for empirical purposes can be justified, as can the use of the following research questions: What is the role and significance of research paradigms in general? What might the dimensions of the subject-participatory paradigm look like? What is the correlation between the constitutive features of qualitative pedagogical research and the subject-participatory paradigm used in pedagogy? To answer these questions, it is necessary to consider a few points of view regarding the implementation of paradigms in research practice, then to present the subject-participatory paradigm in relation to the constitutive features of qualitative pedagogical research and extract the benefits of implementing this paradigm in a practical pedagogical context. The author hopes that the discussion of the topic presented herein may be worth considering for researchers, especially beginners, pedagogues, and teachers who are deeply involved in the field of pedagogy and education.

## **The Role and Significance of Scientific Research Paradigms in the View of Selected Authors**

There are often discussions about paradigms in the social sciences, especially in pedagogy. Many scientists consider the application of paradigms to research practice to be a fundamental factor in shaping the research process. Kelly, Dowling, and Millar state that research has given nurse researchers

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the opportunity for methodological openness with regards to the myriad of research approaches, methods and designs that they may choose to answer their research question. However, in guiding the search for understanding, it is imperative that the researcher consider their ontological stance and the nature of the research question. (Kelly et al., 2018, p. 9)

These researchers analyzed different perspectives of the concept of paradigms, referring to the definitions provided by Khun (2012) and Morgan (2007). According to them, a paradigm may be seen as a worldview that includes values, morals, beliefs, and attitudes influencing and examining the way in which research questions are posed. Moreover, they understand a paradigm as a community-reflecting practice that covers the adjustment and agreement that takes place in methodological procedures and a research discipline. Also, they see a pragmatic side of paradigms that can help researchers solve research problems (Kelly et al., 2018).

Another researcher, Matthew de Carlo (2018), states that “paradigms are a way of framing what we know, what we can know, and how we can know it” (p. 145). He underscores the fact that each paradigm possesses its own specific ontological and epistemological perspective. John W. Creswell understands a paradigm as one of three components of a research project. He claims that it impacts and gives direction to research design. In his concept, a paradigm is seen as a researcher’s general worldview and type of scientific research (Creswell, 2014). Burke R. Johnson, Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, and Lisa Turner define a paradigm as “a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research” (Johnson et al., 2007, pp. 129–130).

According to the above points of view, we can imply that a paradigm can shape and frame the perspective for one’s understanding of the world (research reality); influence the process of obtaining and exploring the knowledge of reality; affect the trajectory of the research process; and deepen and form the researcher’s everyday view of the world (de Carlo, 2018). A researcher’s choice of paradigms is specific and shows their

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approaches (deductive/inductive, qualitative/quantitative, etc.) not only to life, but also to the research they conduct (de Carlo, 2018). Moreover, it appears to correspond with the researchers' personal needs and their attitudes toward life. Such deduction can justify the fact that the wide diversity of paradigms seen in the different paradigmatic perspectives can reflect the researchers' psychologically, socially, culturally, and philosophically determined orientation to the research area. These perspectives do not have to completely exclude each other, but they can evoke further incentives for reflection on using paradigms in various areas of life. They can also foster the use of divergent styles of searching for answers to research problems, which corresponds with another statement by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner:

Today's research world is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, complex, and dynamic; therefore, many researchers need to complement one method with another, and all researchers need a solid understanding of multiple methods used by other scholars to facilitate communication, to promote collaboration, and to provide superior research. (Johnson, et al., 2004, p. 15)

This point of view corresponds to Bogusław Śliwerski's claim that the variety of paradigms does not necessarily mean that there is no way to find something in common with each of them (Śliwerski, 2017). In this context, it can be worth recalling the meaning of plurality in the use of paradigms provided by Dawn Freshwater and Jane Cahill (2013), which may help explain their functions in the formation of both a human being and a community in the sense of unity. Considering the above, the need to examine the paradigmatic perspectives that influence daily activities while focusing on the meaning of paradigms for scientific inquiry as being the most important in research (Kelly et al., 2018) poses a challenge. It also turns out to be crucial for shaping the identity of a scientific discipline (Klus-Stańska, 2018), which might induce many discussions, particularly because paradigms raise many doubts concerning their accuracy and reliability in the course of research (Rolfe, 2006) that is embedded

in a concrete philosophical perspective. Nevertheless, debates on paradigm divisions, shifts, etc. do not ignore the meaning of paradigms (Creswell, 2014; Kuhn, 2012; Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddie, 2010); they rather pose questions about its application in an exploration of a particular discipline. Moreover, there are doubts concerning the aspect of narrowing down or broadening the researcher's perspective to the research goal. Answers to these questions may lie in the researchers' point of view, beliefs, approach to methodology, methodological awareness, and competences that develop over time (Szwabowski, 2014).

### **The Subject-Participatory Paradigm as One of Many Paradigms Functioning in Pedagogy**

The subject-participatory paradigm, rooted in personalism – especially Karol Wojtyła's personalism (Bartnik, 2000; Szymańska, 2018) – will be explained in two dimensions: subjective and participatory.

The first dimension of the paradigm, called the subjective one, should be perceived as the internal, homogeneous quality of a person participating in the co-existence and co-creation of a community, particularly the pedagogical research community. This community enables its members to exist and act with a sense of integrity toward themselves and others, which can allow them to reach the state of mature self-realization. This activity is also a part of the formation of a postconventional identity (Witkowski, 1988; Wojtyła, 2000), determined by the sense of personal dignity and confirmed in correlation with the sense of dignity affirmed by the whole community. This can take place in a space that creates conditions for building relationships based on a pedagogical/educational dialogue, requiring respect for freedom and different points of view on the issues discussed by the community. Each member should feel that they are an important, unique subject, not an object. This approach imposes the need to conduct research in accordance with the principles of the subject-participatory paradigm: humility, equity, equality, solidarity, responsibility, freedom, truth, subsidiarity, sublimation, prevention, integration, practice,

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safe space, responsibility, creativity, and a sense of non-interference in the trajectory of any elements of the pedagogical research process (Szymańska, 2018). These principles should be respected not only by the researcher, who is personally obliged to ensure the optimal circumstances for other members of the scientific community, but also by all participants. Here, the researcher performs the role of a leader, due to the assumptions of this paradigm, that should be reflected in their pedagogical and axiological/ethical approach to the research space, creatively shaped by the personalistic perspective (Szymańska, 2018). This is aligned with leadership, understood as a “responsibility of the many, not a privilege of the few ... [and] collective pursuit of delivering on purpose ... guided by internal goods” (By, 2021, pp. 34–35) and perceived through the lenses of dignity, which is assumed to be a fundamental value shaping the subject approach to oneself and other members of a research community.

The second dimension of the subject-participatory paradigm can be seen from an individual and social perspective, described in brief above, in the subject-personalistic view. As for the former, it could be a trait of a person who not only exists and works with others, but also a unique trait that indicates their ability to build relationships with others. The latter shows the ability of the community to enable a person to act with others in such a way that they reveal themselves in their actions (Wojtyła, 2000). This type of participation faces many challenges, and its quality requires high personal and social reflective competences from the research practitioners (Raelin, 2002) respecting the principles of the paradigm, as mentioned in the Introduction. Following these principles while grounded in a personalistic-participatory activity matches with the principles of pedagogical participatory research, such as the democratic ones, safe space comprising the inclusion, control, and intimacy phase, and defining the level of participation of the research community members (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). This dimension of the subject-participatory paradigm indicates the meaning of the research community for appropriately conducting the research process. It leads to the conclusion that preparing this community for participatory research is necessary. Finally, it can be stated that the subject-participatory paradigm in the

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personalistic perspective supports the integral development and up-bringing of the whole research community.

All in all, the subject-participatory paradigm fits with the concept of building professional learning communities, with features that are strongly connected with qualitative research (Wołodźko, 2013): shared values and vision amid the members of community, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, and collaboration concerning the individual and group attendance in the education process (Stoll et al., 2006).

### **The Subject-Participatory Paradigm in Relation to the Basic Constitutive Features of Pedagogical Qualitative Research**

Referring the subject-participatory paradigm to the constitutive features of qualitative research entails a brief presentation of them in connection with certain aspects of this paradigm's application in research practice.

The constitutive features of qualitative research include the personalitivity connected with the holistic approach, interactivity, discursiveness, idiomaticity, emergency, synergy, the researcher following participants in the research, and contextuality (Ciechowska, 2018; Kubinowski, 2013; Szmidt, 2018). It is worth noting that co-existence and co-creation stimulate and strengthen the motivation and curiosity of the researcher and participants of the research (Ciechowska, 2020; Clark, 2010). Thus, curiosity should be present at every stage of research, as emphasized by Szmidt (2018), who treats methodological creativity as a component of scientific creativity. This feature is also supposed to integrate both the research community and the empirical process. Integration seems to be conditioned by the personalistic approach of the participants toward the research (Ciechowska, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to focus on personality as the first constitutive feature of qualitative research conducted in the subject-participatory paradigm.

*Personality*, pointing to an ontological/personalistic basis, is visible in two dimensions of the perception of personalism. One of them

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brings out the Christian perspective of perceiving the world. The second relates to the anthropocentric view of the world. As a consequence of these dimensions, a wide range of personalistic approaches to education emerges, explained by many authors, such as Czesław Bartnik (2000), Katarzyna Olbrycht (2018), Wojciech Chudy (2006), Zbigniew Marek (2017), Marian Nowak (2008), Dorota Thiel-Bieleńska (2011). This variety cannot be seen as an obstacle for a researcher representing one of the personalist trends, but as a benefit enriching one's own point of view, which can foster one's sense of identity. In any case, this approach must not influence the beliefs, attitudes, etc. of other members of the research community. Different views on research topics expressed by other research participants may positively influence the trajectory of the entire research process, which is creatively shaped and sometimes requires a reformulation of the research problems (Szmidt, 2018), which in turn requires the pedagogical/creative openness to self and others. In order to understand the relationship between personalitivity and the subject-participatory paradigm, it is necessary to respect personal dignity and its indicators – such as responsible freedom, reason, and truth – that are revealed by a person in their activities as determined by the personalistic norm: love (Wojtyła, 2001).

Thus, *personalitivity* can be perceived as an a priori feature in qualitative research. It seems to correlate closely with the use of the subjective-participatory paradigm at all stages of accurate and reliable research (Silverman, 2007). In the first stage, the researcher tries to focus on finding, formulating, and identifying the problem, as well as asking questions and setting goals, which should be accompanied by a challenge factor (Szmidt, 2018). This stage can enlighten the pre-projected solutions. Open observation, analysis, and diagnosis of the theoretical, practical, and methodological area of one's interest make it possible to find, define, explain, and describe an initial problem that can be discussed with others, respecting the ethical approach that determines the personalistic attitude. Assuming at this stage the subjective/objective paradigm, the researcher should always be aware of the whole, complex being of the person who, in action, reveals themselves as an integral self. It helps



to look at participants' attitudes to life from a reflective, holistic perspective in later stages of research. This requires meeting with them, recognizing their interests and needs, etc. in order to constructively discuss the research goal and learn about their point of view and willingness to participate in the research. This may later help the researcher choose the right criteria for selecting a research sample, which is part of the second stage of the creative methodology, in which the research procedures and concept are designed (Szmids, 2018). This requires the involvement of axiological/pedagogical awareness, in line with the principles of the subject-participatory paradigm, even determining the choice of research methods or techniques that can be creatively constructed in order to collect and analyze data from different sources and perspectives.

Among the ways of gathering information as a part of a qualitative strategy, narrative ones may satisfy research needs (Czarniawska, 1998). It is worth noting that "in a dynamically changing, inconsistent, demanding reality, wisely used narrative – both as a metaphor and a carrier of concepts – offers educators a number of interesting possibilities" (Rostek, 2019, p. 47). It is assumed that a well-crafted narrative can provide the researcher with data that is also important for the study, although at first glance it does not seem in line with the purpose of the study. In fact, narratives can build a new reflective space for all research participants. Therefore, there is a need to apply various narrative methods or data collection techniques in empirical practice, especially those which enhance the reflective skills. They can comprise narrative interview, various types of essays (reflective, reflective–digressive, counter-argument with reflection, etc.), reflective journal, or metaphor story building (Szymańska, 2017). In accordance with the principles of qualitative research, information obtained from the participants must be coded with their first names only (not surnames or numbers), changing them if they wish. The next stage entails the need to analyze and interpret the data and to transfer the results (Szmids, 2018) – to the participants as well, in accordance with the principles of the subject-participant. The selection of the analysis should be appropriate for the methods of data collection and adjusted to the relevant pedagogical qualitative or mixed strategy. For narrative

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methods of collecting information, the choice of narrative analysis emerges as a consequence of the design and implementation of the research project. Various types of narrative analysis, such as kerygmatic (Walulik & Marek, 2019) hermeneutic (Vieira & de Queiroz, 2017), or layered analysis (Szymańska, 2019) allow for better data interpretation and a more complex picture of the research phenomenon. It can lead to new perspectives for further research and theory, fostering the development of disciplines such as pedagogy.

Another feature of qualitative research – *interactivity* – enables research participants to deepen their understanding of the world and to explore the research space by building closer and more open relationships with one another. This should be done through the interaction of various analyses and interpretations shared during the research process (Kubinowski, 2010). This feature of qualitative pedagogical research is also related to the subject-participatory paradigm. It reveals an intractable and transactive, personalistic relationship that may result in building a more mature community who are aware of the research goals. It also indicates the need for the valuable coexistence and co-creation of the participants (Ciechowska, 2020) in a friendly, safe atmosphere. Here, the researcher takes up the challenge of becoming a reflective leader, expert, consultant, or manager who accompanies and helps them, encourages them to share opinions throughout the process, explains the principles of the research method or data collection techniques, etc. Therefore, collaboration and learning through experience take place. The quality of interactivity requires, first of all, the respect of personal dignity and an open, safe space for sharing ideas and reflections coming from a changing reality. The mature interactivity can be perceived not only as a qualitative feature, but also as one of the conditions that enable the subject-participatory paradigm to work in the process of research. It reveals that the relationships between the research participants go properly according to the personalistic assumptions shaped by the personalistic norm. All participants should feel comfortable in their activities, regardless of the trajectory of the research process and its results, which requires an objective, unbiased approach to it.

*Discursiveness*, as another feature of qualitative research, coincides with the interactivity presented above. Its dialogical and dialectical nature allows members of the scientific community to learn about various interpretations and points of view, including the attitudes of the researcher. It should be added that the researcher does not have to give up their own views on the specific issues that are the subject of research (Jagięła, 2015). In order to understand the term discursivity, we must refer to the concept of pedagogical/educational dialogue, which builds a space for better understanding something new, explaining something incomprehensible, checking something uncertain, assessing something that raises doubts, discovering something hidden, or creating something new and useful – in a mutual atmosphere full of kindness, respect, and love (Kujawiński, 2010). Conducting pedagogical/educational dialogue in the field of qualitative research demands a wise selection of participants. The selection criterion seems to be fundamental, according to Patton (1990), for instance. This should correlate with the nature of paradigm, also shaping the method for data analysis and interpretation, in a concrete philosophical perspective. Thus, discursiveness requires high interpersonal and intrapersonal competences, as well as methodological ones, from the participants of the research process. It demands that a safe space be built for the beneficial pedagogical existence of each person participating in the research. The principles of the subject-participatory paradigm can prove useful in this area, as they can help form the personalistic approach to a constructive discourse in the area of research, strategies, data collection methods, and methods of analysis and interpretation that should be geared toward discovering the truth about the research reality, even if it can appear completely different from one's expectations. The subject-participatory paradigm imposes the need to be honest, objective, just, reflective, critically thoughtful, and respectful.

*Idiomatycity* is critical to obtaining results. It means appropriately adjusting the research strategies, methods, and techniques for learning about the research subjects. It also refers to the proper formulation of research goals, questions, etc. It should be tailored with gathering data and their analysis (Ciechowska, 2018; Jagięła, 2015; Kubinowski, 2010). This

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feature also combines with the qualities of research briefly described above – particularly with discursiveness, which fosters a personalistic approach to the results, regardless of one's own preferences. Respecting the principles of the subject-participatory paradigm can positively affect the deployment of idiomaticity in the research process at all stages connected with its qualitative dimension, which sometimes requires certain changes that may prove more appropriate for the trajectory of the research process. The flexibility of this qualitative feature of research, rooted in the objective mindset of the research participants, may appear very crucial for all of them, provided that the whole process follows its own path with no tendency to adjust the results to one's expectations. Observing the principles of the subject-participatory paradigm in this case can prevent its overuse.

Therefore, a personalistic, qualitative approach to research seems to be extremely important here, especially for a researcher of pedagogy who intends to act in accordance with the principles of the subject-participatory paradigm. A properly built connection between individual elements of the research process at each stage requires the continual awareness of the researcher, who should creatively and responsibly continue their work, taking into account a specific research perspective. This correlation indicates the need for the respondents to build a fruitful synergy.

*Synergy*, often understood as an epistemological premise, enables the interaction and consolidation of many elements, including cognitive forms, into one integral entity in order to obtain a true, complete picture of the research reality (Ciechowska, 2018; Jagieła, 2015; Kubinowski, 2013), where the research participants constructively open up to each other, share their thoughts, beliefs, experiences, knowledge, etc., and consciously improve their personal and professional abilities and skills. In this way, they collectively work out a synergy effect that emerges from a research process that begins with inductive assumptions. They share their reflections and the outcomes of their work, not only with the researcher, but also with society. They become witnesses of their own participatory approaches, what can broaden their thinking horizons and initiate positive environmental changes concerning both pedagogy and education.

Synergy can become more fruitful if the principles of the subject-participatory paradigm are respected by the research participants – particularly by the researchers, who are mainly responsible for the trajectory of the research process. Here, it can be claimed that this feature of qualitative research properly takes place when the research team’s work goes smoothly in a deep understanding of the purposes of the research and its meaning for the individual and society. The participants build a research community in which democracy, solidarity, justice, equality, and love influence the quality of their efforts through the synergetic process that can unite them in a specific way. In this context, the meaning of the subject-participatory paradigm for the quality of the research seems important and shows the tight connection with the constitutive feature of qualitative research: synergy.

Another feature of qualitative research is *the researcher following the research participants* (Ciechowska, 2018) in order to understand them better. Here, their sense of comfort and wellbeing is key to the research trajectory. Therefore, the researcher is obliged to build a trusting upbringing atmosphere. It can be helpful to explain the principles and rules for participating in the research. In such an atmosphere, the participants provide beneficial and genuine reflection on the issues under study, being aware of their freedom from any judgment and having the right to learn the results. Nevertheless, the researcher should maintain boundaries between themselves and the participants, as this can help them maintain a “healthy” distance between themselves and remain objective about both the matters they are dealing with and the results, which may be unpredictable to all the members of the research community. The researcher also builds a safe space for other participants who have the right to be who they are (Patton, 1990), thus fostering the development of a sense of personal and social identity. Such activity correlates with the subject-participatory paradigm, which requires a safe, democratic space for all the research participants. The principles of this paradigm clearly demonstrate the need to create a personalistic, mature approach, not only to the research team, but also to the subjects. The personalistic norm becomes significant for eliciting the meaning of the key feature of qualitative

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research: *the researcher following the research participants*. It emphasizes the fact that a researcher can never treat their subjects as a means for achieving a goal, as they are the subject participating in the research, and they should be treated by a researcher as important, equal partners taking part in the research. Therefore, this feature of qualitative research appears to correlate strongly with the principles of the subject-participatory paradigm, applied particularly in the field of pedagogy.

*Contextuality* is another feature of qualitative research, in which the researcher should consider two aspects of understanding the context. The first aspect indicates facts in their natural context which influence the research participants' feelings, behavior, etc. The second is related to the wider context of the research situation (Ciechowska, 2018; Kubinowski, 2013). It is worth noting that contextuality refers to both subjective and objective issues that acquire a particular perspective of the concept of quality of life, including the space of culture, institutions, etc. (Hincks, 2014). The application of the subject-participatory paradigm requires that all aspects of this context be taken into account, in particular the participants' approach to the research and their courage and openness toward change or even transformation. *Contextuality* should be tied with *perspectivity*, one of the main principles in education. This feature also requires that the research participants be treated as unique individuals characterized by their dignity, which allows them to acknowledge their identity. Following the principles of the subject-participatory paradigm can help them shape their views on the research process, which they attend as subjects, never objects.

In light of the analysis presented above, one can conclude that there is a strong relationship between the use of the subject-participatory paradigm and the constitutive qualitative features of qualitative research. The use of this paradigm in the research process may help to maintain proper order in the research process and strengthen the sense of one's own identity built within the community identity, which seems vital in building the educational community according to the mission appointed by schools, regardless of the stage of education.

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## **Conclusion**

The diverse discussion on the use of paradigms in research makes it necessary to consider their importance for the quality of research conducted according to various strategies. The constitutive features of qualitative research in particular require an explanation of their boundaries or limitations. Building a good atmosphere is crucial for opening a safe space for the research participants, who take responsibility for the trajectory of the research process, which is conducive to forming a mature approach to life. Such an approach to research also seems to correspond to the subject-participatory paradigm. Further empirical research on the practical use of paradigms seems important, especially since it may help build a sense of personal, social, and cultural identity for the researcher, and – in the context of the content of the article – help build a narrative identity, methodological awareness, and competences that foster mature, autonomous professional learning communities.

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