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The Application of Problem-Centered Interview as a Method of Pedagogical Research

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Abstract:

The purpose of the article is to present the qualitative research method known as Problem-Centered Interview and its potential application in pedagogical research. The author demonstrates the main assumptions and stages of the method, simultaneously analyzing the possible benefits and limitations of its use. The originality of the method is confronted with other types of interviews, i.e.: active, in-depth and classical narrative interview. The application of unique qualities of the method, such as: administering three types of reasoning (deductive, inductive and abductive), addressing the prior knowledge bias of the researcher and taking into account falsification in the validation process, all of which increase the credibility of research conclusions. The Problem-Centered Interview which is placed between the objectivist Grounded Theory and constructionism is able to provide a new insight into education and upbringing. The application of the method makes it possible for the research itself to become an educational situation.

Keywords: problem-centered interview, qualitative interview, pedagogical research methodology, qualitative pedagogical research.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, Polish pedagogical research methodology has been dominated by the positivist paradigm. Difficult access to global research trends contributed

to the fact that it was not until the 1990s that an increasing interest in qualitative research could be observed in Poland (Jagiela, 2013, pp. 651–659). According to the British sociologist, J.H. Goldthorpe, on the western side of the Iron Curtain, it was in those years that a renaissance of qualitative methods called “paradigm shift” was taking place. It was associated with opening up to the interpretive trend in research (Goldthorpe, 1973, p. 449). That revolution was the background for the development by A. Witzel, a German researcher, of the *Problem-Centered Interview*¹ (further PCI), which the author himself defines as “a qualitative, discursive-dialogical method of reconstructing knowledge about significant issues” (Witzel, 2012, p.15). The PCI method quickly gained popularity in the West, becoming one of the best developed methods of qualitative interviewing (Scheibelhofer, 2005, p. 10). The aim of this article is to familiarize Polish readers with this, obscure in our country, method of research, which can be a complement to the research repertoire in pedagogy, as well as other disciplines of social sciences.

Problem-Centered Interviewing (PCI) addresses the issue of the lack of methodologically structured qualitative interviews. The PCI is situated between the objectivist Grounded Theory developed by B. G. Glasser and its constructivist variant proposed by K. Charmaz. The method has its roots in symbolic interactionism of H. Blumer and ethnomethodology of H. Garfinkel. It uses *the dialogical consolidation of the pre-interpretation* as a meaning-making process in conversational interactions with the respondent. Thus, it provides an opportunity for the interactive meaning analysis and revisions of the researcher’s pre-interpretations in the process of continual verification of concepts. This method draws from ethnomethodology on the concepts such as *contextuality and indexicality of expressions used in the step-by-step interpretation of documentary evidence* (Witzel, 2012, p. 22). The researcher, together with the respondent, try to arrive gradually at the meanings given to behavioral patterns resulting from participation in social life, and the way they are generated and overlap with the ambiguity of this life.

The presented method is directed to “investigate actions and experiences, their justification and evaluation, as well as individual opinions. It is directed towards topics, objects and their interrelations, which are little explored” (Witzel, 2012, p. 9). What the PCI has in common with active interview is the research-

¹ Although some authors (Maszke p. 220, Pilch p. 82) consider interviewing as a technique, PCI is referred to as a method because it has its own assumptions, rules, application procedures, and techniques. More on this in the book of the author of the method (Witzel, 2012, p.4).

er's involvement in the meaning-making process (mainly through *how? what?* questions); however, on the other hand, it also emphasizes the motives and reasons (*why?*) for the prevalence of certain actions, meanings, and opinions of respondents (Holstein & Gubrium, 2016, p. 69). The subjective treatment of respondents, the flexibility of the interview guide, and the ability to revise interpretations also draw the open-ended in-depth interview close to PCI (Pilch, 2018, pp. 64–67). The main difference, however, consist in the explication of prior knowledge that accompanies the researcher when creating the Sensitizing Framework of the study. Problem-Centered Interview is used in social research, including pedagogy. Among other things, the following issues have been explored using it: the challenges of teaching in epidemic conditions (Bagoly-Simo et al., 2020), the self-perceptions of youth migrating to the capital in search of a luxurious lifestyle (Caminero, 2020), the life experiences of childless men in the perspective of hegemonic masculinity (Marikova, 2020), and the decision-making processes of dropouts (Geisler et al., 2019). In Polish research, PCI has been applied while exploring the importance of the social role of professionals and their perspectives on comatose children (Kochanowicz, 2016), studying decision-making processes related to deferring parenthood (Mynarska, 2011) or the perception of violent situations in social welfare homes (Szafranek, 2016). This method was also presented at the 11th International Congress of Educational Research “Research, Innovation and Reform in Education” (Madalińska-Michalak, 2018), unfortunately, it still remains unknown among many Polish researchers.

The key to understanding this method and the initial point of inquiry is to become familiar with its **three basic principles** (Witzel, 2012, pp. 25–30): (1) **problem centering**, (2) **process orientation**, (3) **object orientation**. The main purpose of the first principle is the facilitation of the interview structure to discover the respondents' current perspectives in a systematic and dialogical way. Problem Centering refers to the unavoidable influence of the researcher at all stages of the study. It addresses both the burden of empiricist-normative approaches and the radical openness of their critics. When researching educational processes and pedagogical issues, it is impossible to avoid previously internalized views and values and knowledge postulating certain ideals, or practice and everyday experiences related to these processes. In order to solve the methodological dilemma, called *Dr. Jekyll – Mr. Hyde syndrome* (Witzel, 2012, p. 100), in which the researcher is torn between neutrality and the use of prior knowledge, it has been proposed by H. Blumer to use a flexible and open to revision *sensitizing framework* in social research (Witzel, 2012, p. 26). This solution was

adopted in PCI method and is used in its first stage. The anticipated attention focused on the key contexts helps to understand the social realities assimilated by the respondents. In the practical dimension of interviewing, it also facilitates the selection of an appropriate strategy for generating narratives or specifying meanings.

Another principle concerns the research process, understood as the successive and flexible collection and analysis of data. However, as stated earlier, prior knowledge cannot be completely overlooked in conducting the research. Therefore, moments in which deduction is used should be incorporated into the research procedure, making it possible to overcome probable biases. To do this, pre-interpretations are used in PCI. Pre-interpretations represent the researcher's subjective level of knowledge and understanding, which evolves during the conversation, through development, verification and continuous systematization in the process of analysis and interpretation. It can also lead to alternative interpretations of the same topic, as well as to revisions of previous statements and to *redundancy* and *contradictions*. Redundancy is valuable because it can lead to reformulated perspectives and interpretations. Contradictory statements express individual ambivalence and indicate passages that should be revisited due to misunderstanding on the part of the researcher, or error or lack of recollection on the part of the respondent. They are clarified in the interview process through strategies that generate understanding such as follow-up questions, probes and confrontations. The narrative orientation of PCI makes it possible to reconstruct the historical relevance of a certain topic to the respondent, thus overcoming the barrier of the ahistorical nature of structured interviews. The above principle is particularly important in the context of the temporal dimension of parenting and its reconstruction in respondents' narratives.

Object orientation, which is the third principle of PCI, stands in opposition to the normative-deductive approaches in social research. It moves away from a focus on methods that examine social phenomena without explaining how respondents perceive them. It is also a criticism of methodological orthodoxy. This principle warns against the automatic application of popular methods without thinking through the legitimacy of their choice. It also applies to the techniques used in PCI; depending on the purpose and focus of the research, one should think about using techniques that facilitate the best access to the respondent's behavior and reflections. For example, when analyzing the life course of gifted students using PCI, a researcher should focus on the biographical aspects and give priority to narrative elements (while reducing the role of the researcher in structuring the interview, as allowed by the narrative generat-

ing strategies). When analyzing patterns of interpretation according to a social or biographical issue (e.g. coping with school requirements), a more dialogical way of interviewing should be applied. It is then possible to focus on relational self-reflection (alumni-institution) or to apply the ARB (*Actions-Realizations-Balancing*) model described later in this text. In either case, the PCI process needs to be relevant to the research objective and research problem (Witzel, 2012, p. 30).

Familiarity with the principles outlined above is essential to apply the problem-centered interviewing as a research method because each of them connects the with the stages of PCI. **These stages can be divided into three main phases: (1) preparation, (2) conducting interviews, and (3) data analysis.**

Stage 1. Preparation of the Sensitization Framework and the Interview Guidelines

Every social study is based on everyday knowledge that the researcher has about the topic, as he/she uses his/her previous observations and thoughts about the research problem (Witzel, 2012, p. 40). The reason why it should be included in the research is that everyday knowledge is ubiquitous and usually subtly hidden, thus there is a risk that unconscious knowledge may influence the research process and become a shadow methodology (Kelle, 2006, p. 296). Values, beliefs, dislikes, even the very reason for choosing certain priority issues in a study, may bias the researcher's attention. If the researcher decides that PCI is the appropriate method for his/her research project and optimal for his/her research problem, he/she should proceed to create a *Sensitizing Framework*. This is particularly important because the way we perceive problems and issues that we consider important usually depends on what we know about them. The Sensitizing Framework contains the researcher's explicit prior knowledge and experiences on the topic, which are pre-interpretations of the problem under investigation. **The researcher's pre-interpretations included in the Sensitizing Framework consist of the following: (1) everyday knowledge, (2) contextual knowledge, (3) research knowledge, and (4) sensitizing knowledge.**

When conducting PCI, it is necessary to gather basic information about the context of the research question. This form of prior knowledge is the minimum requirement for the presented method. It includes information about aspects that influence the response options. Prior exploration of the facts and their multiple determinants makes it possible to understand the respondent's statements during the interviews, to uncover and clarify superficial or contradictory opinions,

provides the interviewer with a better chance to be perceived by the respondents as competent. It also helps to distinguish social facts from the interpretations of their participants. Due to language issues (for example, in research on subcultures or youth cyberactivity), it is often a prerequisite for understanding the interviewee. Even in interviews where expert knowledge does not seem necessary, context awareness helps to connect respondent's statements with relevant information that emerged during the interview. The amount of contextual information needed depends on the complexity of the research question and the characteristics of the respondent group. In pedagogical research, such factors as: family background, living environment, legal basis of upbringing, educational reforms, statutes of the institutions to which the respondent belongs, informal rules of participation in youth groups and subcultures, or the knowledge of the cyber-environment in which the respondent lives, may be worth investigating.

Due to conceptual tools as well as heuristic processes, contextual knowledge also serves as a filter when reviewing the literature and acquiring the third type of knowledge, i.e. research knowledge. Its acquisition focuses on the review of available studies and literature. Research knowledge both supports and biases the researcher's perception, influencing the preparation of the interview guidelines as well as the establishment of pre-interpretation. Prior research knowledge may result in a focus on specific details as well as overlooking new perspectives on the research problem. For example, a study of the "hidden curriculum" in schools will be both prepared and conducted differently by political scientists, sociologists, and educators. Presumably, they will also arrive at other answers to similar questions. Research traditions, paradigms, and approaches will not only shape the research plan, but also determine what empirical evidence will be considered as the basis for analysis and theory building in the discipline. In keeping with the principle of openness, a researcher may choose not to review the literature in order to reduce bias, or when exploring a previously unexplored topic. Therefore, in order not to violate the basic principles of qualitative research, it is important to identify how prior knowledge in PCI becomes relevant to the topic and what it means in the course of interviews and analysis. This provides a basis for other researchers to assess the relevance of the literature choice, or its significant deficiencies in the theoretical part of the research, which may impinge on the quality of the analyses conducted.

According to the principle of problem orientation, prior knowledge must not hinder the respondent from entering into a dialogical reconstruction of the issue. For this reason, a fourth type of prior knowledge, referred to by H. Blumer as sensitizing knowledge, is used in PCI (Witzel, 2012, p. 44). It

gives the researcher a general frame of reference and guidance on empirical issues. While definitive concepts provide recommendations on **what to see**, sensitizing concepts merely suggest **a direction to look in**. Hundreds of concepts such as culture, institutions, structure, personality, customs, are not definitive but sensitizing. Sensitizing knowledge, on the one hand, provides general meanings of the issue in question and contains more abstract ideas available in the theoretical background of the field. It has less empirical content and is therefore open to being filled with empirical substance when exploring respondents' perspectives. Second, it sets the flow of the study and encourages the ongoing revision of the issue understanding and pre-interpretation, based on interviews with respondents. It defines the initial contours of the issue in question without determining its content and provides direction for the evolution of the study. The goal of the PCI interview preparation stage is to transform every-day, contextual, and research knowledge into sensitizing knowledge. The synthesis of these four types of knowledge is also needed to create interview guidelines.

Once the research direction has been chosen, the research questions have been set and when the Sensitizing Framework has been created, the design of the interview guidelines can begin. The method described is neither a semi-structured interview nor a questionnaire interview. The interview guidelines do not serve to establish a question-answer scheme, but only a thematic guide for the researcher that may evolve as the pre-interview develops. The main function of the interview guidelines is to ensure that the principle of the problem focus is maintained and that individual interviews can be compared with each other. It is intended to serve the thematic organization of the research issue in question and to balance narrative development with the facilitation of the interview toward the research problem. It should contain pre-established pre-interpretations and sensitizing concepts, in the form of single thematic boxes. However, the guidelines should also be flexible. This gives the respondent the opportunity to direct the conversation and the researcher the opportunity to better understand the problem and, to revise continually the concepts in the guidelines as a result of the abductive insight.

Stage 2. Conducting interviews

Once the respondent has been introduced to the interview situation, one can move on to the actual part, i.e. the *Opening Question*, whose main function is to break the stereotypical question-answer structure. It is also meant to establish a narrative conversational style producing material that is the onset for further explanations. This question should be general and non-directive enough

to provide the respondent with a space to fill in with narrative. For example, in examining the relationship of probation officers with their wards, the following Opening Question could be asked: "As I mentioned earlier, I would like to talk to you about relationships with your wards. Please go back in your mind and tell me step by step, all the important things for you in establishing these relationships. There are no right or wrong answers here, and anything I can learn will be valuable to me. Please tell me what your daily work with your wards looks like?" The initial narrative in the question, in a clear yet concise manner, addresses the main topic of the study, i.e. the relationship with the wards, but it does not lock the respondent into a strict framework. It emphasizes the importance of the respondent's subjective meanings and experiences in his or her expert knowledge and professional practice as a probation officer. The advantage of the broader Opening Question, is that it allows for reference points, for questions that generate understanding, which can be referred to later in the interview e.g.: "At the beginning, I also mentioned. Could you please tell me about it?". A longer Opening Question also allows the respondent to review and structure his/her statement.

Such a question is followed by the *Opening Account* of the respondent. It is methodologically important for two reasons, it provides a base of topics to be explored, and "anchors" to use subsequent follow-up questions. It is the respondent's initial view of the problem. The Opening Account (narrative) is followed by a moment of interactive and dialogical process of the problem and meaning reconstruction through two communication strategies. The respondent's statements are *indexes of meaning*², which should not be analyzed outside the context of their origin. The study of meaning structure, combines deductive as well as inductive elements. The former by attributing particular aspects of the interview to prior sensitizing knowledge, complemented by an inductive search for new patterns in the respondent's utterances. To achieve this, in the PCI, depending on the natural flow of the interview, two types of communication strategies are used: generating material and specifying understanding. The interviewer stimulates the production of the material at the beginning of the interview and later on, according to the thematic areas of inquiry. Depending

² The indexicality of meaning implies that any transmission of information during an interaction, has meaning only within a given context. Analyzing it out of context, can lead to misinformation. (Krzychała, 2010, p. 14). The documentary method of interpretation allows us to understand and interpret indexes of meaning by gaining access to the meaningful context in which the utterances are placed. (Examples of analysis, in the context of teacher research, can be seen in Krzychała, 2010).

on the respondent's answer, the interviewer chooses whether to ask a question generating an interview or a narrative.

Table 1. Communication strategies that generate material (narratives)

General exploration:	Generating material:	Example:
The beginning of the conversation, the narrative-generating opening question (OQ)	an open invitation to explain the respondent's views while focusing on the problem	"Why did you become a teacher? Please tell me all about it."
Detailing questions	related to themes, problems, context, stimulation of memories	"Will you tell me in detail what happened then?"
Examples from experience	stimulating memories, reconstructing context and establishing a connection to the structural environment	"Could you give me an example of...?"
Ad-hoc questions	gathering information from the narrative, gaining comparability	
Repeated thematic comparison	clarification of ideas, differentiation of themes	Contrasting typical/atypical issues or past/present situations/behaviors

Source: Own elaboration, basing on Witzel, 2012, p. 75–76.

Table 2. Communication strategies that generate understanding (explorations)

Detailed exploration:	Generating comprehension:	Example:
Mirroring	giving relevance through respondent's statements (<i>communicative validation</i>)	Summarizing, rephrasing, provoking denials, asking for comments – "So far I have understood that..."
Comprehension questions	clarification of common sense structures, missing/unclear expressions and facts	Ideas based on the interview – "You were talking about... I didn't quite understand it."
Confrontations	clarification and request for specification of contradictory statements	Summarizing contradictory statements and careful requests for clarification – "Earlier you said that... ..but now you claim that... Did I misunderstand you?"

Source: Own elaboration, basing on Witzel, 2012, p. 75–76.

These strategies should help understand the contextual meaning of utterances and gradually show respondents that their descriptions convey knowledge so that they begin to explain it themselves by detailing the narratives. They should also incorporate the process of the documentary method of interpretation in which meanings are revised through reinterpretations.

In contrast to the classic narrative interview, in PCI there are no strictly defined stages of transition from the narrative to the dialogical part of the interview. Depending on the respondent's answer, the interviewer chooses whether to ask questions that generate understanding of the meaning, specify the problem or develop the narrative (Witzel, 2012, pp. 79–87). Problem-centered interviewing also differs from narrative interviewing as within its framework the ability to create extensive narratives is not a requirement, since it is possible to use the previously cited strategies. This allows for the collection of research material among children with low cultural capital or poor vocabulary, for example, socially disadvantaged youth (Zaremba, 2015, p. 18).

Once the topics and narratives have been exhausted, the interview should conclude with a metrics section. There the respondent should also be debriefed, in a short conversation to end the interview. In addition to providing an opportunity to vent emotions, this also allows the interviewee to express their views on the interview situation and provides the research participant with an opportunity to ask questions. This should also be followed by the interviewer's self-debriefing in the form of a postscript. All of the researcher's observations about both the respondent and the interview itself can contribute to a better understanding of the context as well as the meaning of the respondent's statements.

Stage 3. Analysis

Consistent with the interpretive paradigm in which the PCI is situated, there is no formal requirement to use a single method of analysis. The choice depends on the research question and study design. The basic materials of analysis in PCI are as follows: the transcribed interview, revised pre-interpretations resulting from the interview, and the postscript note. These enter into a looped (iterative) process of constitution, testing, and creation of interpretive hypotheses. As the analysis unfolds, these hypotheses are progressively confirmed, substantiated, and finally **empirically grounded** and presented as results (Witzel, 2012, p. 99).

This part of the research can use, for example, the popular thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) or the **steps** of the Grounded Theory: **(1) open (coding and indexing)**, **(2) axial (vertical analysis; single cases)** and **(3) selective (horizontal; cases in depth)**. Coding is understood as the process of analyzing data by indexing and labeling phenomena in the transcript. The basic step of open coding is the process of decomposing interview structures, examin-

ing, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing the data. Next in line is axial (vertical) analysis, where one begins to make connections between categories. During this stage, assumptions of relationships between respondents' opinions and actions, and their relevant context, conditions and consequences are established and verified. The third step involves a selective (horizontal) analysis, in which the related interpretations are deepened according to *core categories*. This is the process of selecting core themes, systematically linking them with other categories, verifying these connections, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development. During this stage, assumptions of relationships between respondents' opinions and actions, and their relevant context, conditions and consequences are established and verified. The third step involves a selective (horizontal) analysis, in which related interpretations are deepened according to core categories. This is the process of selecting core themes, systematically linking them with other categories, verifying these connections, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development.

When coding and indexing meanings, categories from the interview guidelines should be taken into account, including concepts that the respondent himself or herself considers important (following the principle of openness). This is a process that sorts the data thematically and makes them easy to find. It is useful to include the main categories from the interview guidelines on the one side of the transcript, and the *in-vivo codes* and preliminary interpretations on the other side. For the ease of processing and retrieval, it is recommended that *Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)* be used.

Coding and indexing are followed by the next step, vertical analysis. This consists of a brief summary and description of the characteristics of the individual interviews and a thematic sorting of the interview data. The description also includes the respondent's interpretations and motives for taking different actions according to the context. If the study focuses on micro relationships, the biography of the respondent is reconstructed and events are sorted chronologically. Then, the ARB (*Aspirations – Realizations – Balancing*) model can be used as a simple tool to organize and interpret the material. In this model, each of the stages is analyzed in the context of other options, in relation to specific endeavors and their realizations, and with associated evaluations of choices.

It should also be noted that there is an important issue of the validity of test results. In PCI, at least two validation strategies should be employed, the first one, regarding the text (case) as a source of control, and the second one, regarding the opinions of other knowledgeable persons. The first strategy involves testing, selecting, modifying, or rejecting various interpretive hypoth-

eses based on the interview data. In short, they can be accepted if they are *empirically saturated* when there is no evidence proving of the falsification of a particular hypothesis in the text. This method of validation, is related with the communicative strategies cited earlier for exploring specific themes. The second form of validation is other researchers' evaluations and interpretations. They should discuss pre-interpretations and peer reviews to establish theoretical assumptions and distinguish possible interpretations of the data. These discussions should build on the evidence and counter-evidence from the transcript. In this way, empirically grounded hypotheses are progressively eliminated using two validation strategies.

The third, selective (horizontal) stage of analysis involves the process of comparing cases with one another. Openness to new information enters into a dialogical relationship with the knowledge resulting from previous analyses, which is gradually consolidated. In order to avoid the enormous amount of time required for *iterative (looping) interpretation* of cases, it is necessary to use the process of *systematic contrasting of cases* (Witzel, 2012, p. 109). It involves comparing cases sorted by key themes, cases or by other important (to the research question) variables such as gender or occupation. This form of horizontal analysis enables the development of empirically grounded typologies in the process of consolidating and synthesizing research findings. Through the strategies cited, empirically grounded hypotheses can be subjected to a process of falsification and results can be synthesized and presented as typologies. The value to the presented methods of analysis in PCI could be added by using Popperian critical rationalism in attempts to falsify hypotheses and theories, which, according to D. Urbaniak-Zajac is extremely rare in pedagogical research (Urbaniak-Zajac, 2017, p. 110).

Summary

Despite the global "explosion" of interest in qualitative research, in Poland there is some reservation regarding its acceptance, due to the dominant, devoid of philosophical reflection, "technical and workshop" approach to pedagogical research methodology (Urbaniak-Zajac, 2013, p. 10). However, the relative delay in the adoption of the latest developments in qualitative research methodology (Kubinowski, 2010, p. 124) does not mean that there is little interest in them, on the contrary. This interest is increasingly accompanied by caution, but also reflexivity towards the assumptions and foundations of the given methods (Urbaniak-Zajac, 2013, p. 7; Pryszynt-Ciesielska, 2014, p. 27). Problem-centered inter-

viewing is a method that can serve as a response to the demand for broadening the spectrum of research methods in pedagogy (Gerlach, 2015, pp. 14–15), while remaining reflexive about its philosophical foundations. The objection raised against qualitative methods in the interpretative paradigm, results from their low precision and the vagueness of their methodology (Jagiela, 2013, p. 653). The method presented in this article, is thoroughly refined and embedded in terms of philosophical foundations, terminological apparatus and technical application. The principles of PCI organize the knowledge in an accessible way for aspiring researchers. In fact, they agree with basic distinctions of qualitative research by M.Q. Patton³. It should be mentioned that apart from some minor flaws (such as lack of clear explanation of what the probes in interviews are supposed to be), the method manual prepared by A. Witzel, clearly and systematically illustrates the preparation of interviews using the PCI method, its application, analysis, and the most frequently made mistakes. The method, which is additionally located on the epistemological level and, thanks to the application of three types of inference, finds its unique place in the methodology of social research. This is extremely important due to the previously cited non-reflective technicalization of pedagogical research methodology (Malewski, 2012, p. 34).

The possibilities of applying the PCI method in pedagogical research are vast. Often issues related to upbringing and education will not come to light without in-depth, casual, yet dialogical contact in which a layer of declarative obviousness is peeled away. The study of affluent adolescents migrating to the Portuguese capital serves as an example. Despite the declarative motivation to lead a highline lifestyle, deeper factors related to labor market access and earnings came to light (Caminero, 2020, pp. 76–81). With a view of tearing down superficiality, it is also important to quote the words of D. Urbaniak-Zajac on removing the spell on teachers' relationships with their pupils "The lack of understanding may result from the lack of knowledge of the interpretative patterns that young people follow, which are diametrically different from those of model educators" (Urbaniak-Zajac, 2004, p. 147). What distinguishes PCI from other interview methods is the continuous production and verification of (pre-) interpretations in a dialogical interaction with the respondent. This increases the credibility and validity (Kubinowski, 2010, p. 304) of the hypotheses because,

³ Listed by M.Q. Patton, the basic distinguishing features of qualitative research are: the naturalistic nature of inquiry, the use of inductive analysis, a holistic perspective, authentic and sparse qualitative material, the researcher's "immersion" in the material, a dynamic grasp of social reality, an orientation to the unique case, contextual sensitivity, empathic neutrality, flexibility of the research design (Kubinowski, 2016, pp. 7–10).

in accordance with the principle of openness, the respondent, through the use of meaning-generating strategies, takes an active part in the meaning-making process. Dialogical reconstruction of (pre-)interpretations also avoids a non-reflective analysis of isolated, out-of-context variables based on questionable correlations. Following the principle of problem-centeredness, the respondent has the opportunity for relational self-reflection on the multiple connections of aspects of life with other people and institutions related to the research issue under investigation. This establishes a semantic network of relationships according to the criteria and priorities of the respondent, while “giving them a voice” in the research findings. In qualitative pedagogical research we study phenomena that are complex in content and meaning. As T. Bauman states “In the process of upbringing and education, emotions, feelings, values are present and can hardly be omitted as less significant” (Pilch, 2018, p. 64). Extremely helpful in segregating the vast quantity of data, related to the broad topic of upbringing, becomes the aforementioned model of ARB analysis. T. Pilch notes that there is a tendency in modern pedagogy to base interviews on categorized questionnaires. However, such a tendency misses the point of comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the essence of upbringing phenomena in a given environment. Therefore, “for this purpose it is better to conduct free-flowing conversations according to the instructions (open questions), which can be directed. It is also possible to develop incidental issues, if they seem important, and obtain a more comprehensive overview of them” (Pilch, 2018, p. 92). The use of PCI is consistent with the above comment about the educational context.

Despite its advantages, problem-focused interviewing also has its limitations. One of the most frequent criticisms of the method presented in this article are the requirements placed on the interviewer (Scheibelhofer, 2005, p. 28). These include: explication of prior knowledge in the form of a Sensitizing Framework, self-reflection on one’s ability to influence the interview, and the ability to use three interviewing styles in one session (Witzel, 2012, p. 57). Transitioning between an open-ended narrative induction style (a material generation strategy), a structured, thematic style (a meaning generation strategy), and concluding the interview with formal socio-statistical data collection can be challenging for the researcher in terms of making these transitions efficiently. Lack of preparation may result in overly protracted adherence, or premature termination of respondent narrative generation. In order to maintain the highest possible quality of the survey, another requirement should be met, i.e. the training of the interviewer. It is recommended to read the author’s book on the method itself (which contains numerous examples of the most common mistakes

made during interviews). The researcher's training is extremely important because of the context of qualitative research as an educational situation, which is the pedagogical criterion for evaluation of qualitative research distinguished by D. Kubinowski (2010, p. 151). An intensive interview can provide a stimulus for the development of the respondent's self-awareness, possible transformations in their lives or in the functioning of the institution in which the respondents are involved. An example of this can be found in research on youth in their transition to professional roles. This research, combining quantitative methods with PCI interviews, allowed youth to gain insight and identify factors that support them in their career and professional development (Gaupp, 2013, p. 10–22).

The use of PCI method also makes it possible to create the basis for the renaissance of educational theory, which in many aspects is detached from the current cultural reality. It was based on philosophical ideas and humanist ideals, which are often (although right) are devoid of empirical research related to practice (Kubinowski, 2010, p. 181). Between the old ideas and the current praxis there is a dissonance, a gap that should be filled with knowledge about education and its conditions in a process-like or holistic context. The use of PCI in pedagogy can also meet the requirements for pedagogical research proposed by D. Kubinowski: the subject of this research includes upbringing and the pedagogical perspective of inquiry is taken into account (the study of upbringing and educational phenomena and processes, their humanistic valuation and designing which occur thanks to the results of research into pro-social changes) (Kubinowski, 2016, pp. 9–10). The current objection raised against studies in methodology of pedagogy stems from the limitation in access to different types of research methods used, their abstract nature and their “detachment from the research content”, which is a serious problem for young researchers seeking scientific advancement in the discipline of pedagogy. The method presented in this article serves to collect data, on the one hand, in a strongly inductive way, through interviews with practitioners, and on the other hand, through the deductive establishment of pre-interpretation and also provides the possibility of abductive insight in the form of their revision. The combination of these three forms of inference sheds a new light on the process of education, since it offers an in-depth vetting of the current state of knowledge, definitions, and pedagogical practices. The inductive drawing of conclusions from the subjective meanings provided by the respondents allows the evolution and refinement of the thematic areas of the interview guidelines created by the researcher, which is the deductive lens of the research. This continuous dialogue, between deductive theoretical assumptions and social reality, taken into account through inductive openness towards knowledge and the experiences

of individuals and experts, provides a better grasp of differences in the subjective meanings of the research issue in question. An example is provided by the notion of a highline lifestyle, present in the aforementioned research on the migration of adolescents to the Portugal capital. Contrary to its original comprehension, such as access to high-paying jobs with lots of days off, this meaning has evolved with the interviews, as access to work that is in line with the values, interests and individuality of young adults. The highline lifestyle appeared to be an opportunity to express one's identity and style through lucrative employment, e.g., as a surfboard designer (Caminero, 2020). The redefinition of the highline lifestyle, was made possible by an unexpected, abductive insight. Inherent in the iterative process is the tension between being open to new meanings and consolidating knowledge regarding the problem under study. This tension forces the researcher to question and temporarily suspend previous knowledge and look at the data from a new perspective, often allowing seemingly certain assumptions to be abandoned.

The application of the presented method facilitates a new perspective on the established knowledge and pedagogical practice. Its use provides an opportunity for the research itself to become an educational situation, which is particularly important because of the pedagogical context of the research situation in which the researcher and the respondent find themselves. However, one should remember and reflectively approach the epistemological and ontological location and the assumptions of the presented method and bear in mind the requirements that it places on the researcher.

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