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The teacher's paradigm in building relationships with students and their parents

Paradygmat nauczyciela w budowaniu relacji z uczniem i jego rodzicami

Abstract: It is inherent in the job of a teacher that he or she establishes a relationship with students and their parents. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine how the paradigm that a teacher adopts modifies these relationship.

Qualitative research using the concept of three-layer data analysis was used to identify the nuances of the studied issue. Analysis and interpretation of the statements of the participating Polish students of pedagogy became the starting point for showing the qualities of the teacher's reflective approach to building relationships with students and their parents.

The analysis revealed the complexity of shaping a teacher's competence for building positive relationships with students and their parents. There are a number of activities that the surveyed teacher trainees undertake, which indicate an out-of-the-box, innovative and creative approach to working with students and their parents. Moreover, the respondents pointed out the benefits of constructivist-interpretive paradigms such as child-centered education, support for students' spontaneous activity and interests, intrinsic motivation, adapting the content of lessons to students' lives and needs, dialogue, respect, and reflexivity in thinking and acting, all of which facilitate building positive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships.

Keywords: paradigm, teacher, student, parents, cooperation with parents.
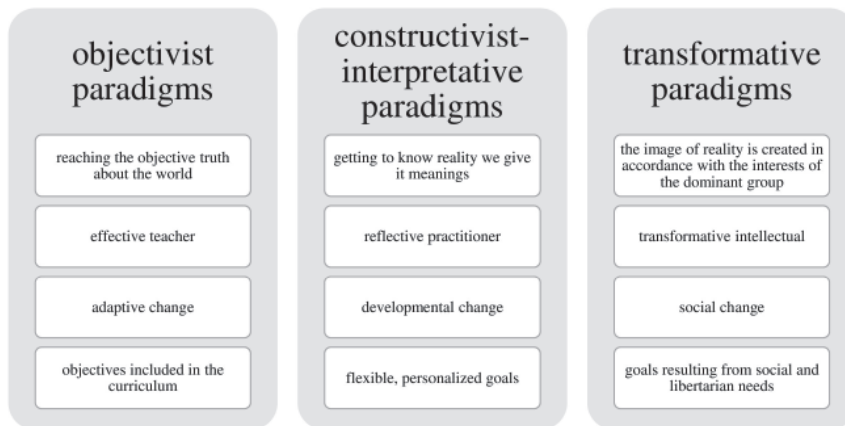
Introduction

Working in the profession of a teacher amidst the multiplicity of paradigms in didactics is one of the factors that complicates the situation in which the present-day teacher finds him/herself. This is because the teacher faces the need to choose a way of thinking and acting that is acceptable to him or her. This choice, according to Dorota Klus-Stańska, should take into account the many paradigms of didactics, the essence of which, "is the possibility of making different assumptions that lead to completely different theoretical and practical consequences" (2018, p. 8).

One factor that determines how well a teacher fulfills his or her professional duties is no doubt the unpredictability and complexity of educational situations. As Brookfield writes, the classroom is characterized by *endemic unpredictability* (2006, p. 8), which means that the teacher must be ready to make decisions under time pressure. He or she must learn to cope with "reality shock" (Caspersen and Raaen, 2014), wanting to build positive relationships with students and their parents. Another prerequisite for fulfilling the role of a teacher seems to be understanding the educational activities mentioned by Kemmis, Mc Taggart & Nixon and the situations in which these activities can be carried out (2014). Hence, it is key that teachers develop reflective competence, keeping in mind its three dimensions: reflection before action, reflection in action and reflection on action. Reflection before action allows the teacher to think carefully about the planned classroom activities and to prepare for different scenarios in dealing with the student or his/her parents. Reflection-in-action, according to Agnieszka Nowak-Łojewska, concerns the essence of the teacher's work "here and now," during his/her classes with students and conversations with parents, when he/she is obliged to react appropriately to the circumstances. Reflection-on-action, on the other hand, is a critical look at one's practice: this type of reflection is done from a time distance. Reflection does not happen under the pressure of an ongoing event, but after the event has occurred, which means that it is more profound, more multifaceted" (2021, p. 8). This has to do with the notion that there is no such thing as ultimate qualifications (Kwiatkowska, 2008), and, as Lucjan Turos argues, the teacher, as it were, "transcends him/herself" (1999), so the distinguishing feature of this profession is the process of *becoming* a teacher. Therefore, the cognitive-theoretical goal of this study is to seek to identify, describe and explain how the paradigm that a teacher adopts modifies his or her relationship with students and their parents. The achievement of this goal is important in the context of a deeper understanding of the process of *becoming* a teacher.

Paradigm as the theory of the praxis of the teacher in his/her relations with the student and his/her parents

The literature on teaching offers many classifications of paradigms. It is worth mentioning the typology by B. Joyce, E. Calhoun and D. Hopkins (1999), B. D. Gołębniak (2019) and Klus-Stańska. Klus-Stanska distinguishes objectivist paradigms (normative didactics, instructional didactics, and neurodidactics), constructivist-interpretive paradigms, which include humanistic didactics and constructivist paradigms, e.g. developmental constructivism, cultural constructivism and constructivism, as well as transformative paradigms, such as critical didactics and libertarian didactics (Klus-Stanska, 2018).

objectivist paradigms	constructivist-interpretative paradigms	transformative paradigms
reaching the objective truth about the world	getting to know reality we give it meanings	the image of reality is created in accordance with the interests of the dominant group
effective teacher	reflective practitioner	transformative intellectual
adaptive change	developmental change	social change
objectives included in the curriculum	flexible, personalized goals	goals resulting from social and libertarian needs

Figure 1. Typology of didactic paradigms by D. Klus-Stańska and the categories describing them. Own elaboration based on Klus-Stańska 2018, p. 52-57.

As Anna Sajdak writes, "each paradigm has its own and distinctive set of concepts that distinguishes it from the others. Each paradigm makes certain ontological, anthropological, epistemological, methodological, axiological assumptions at its root, as well as identifies with a specific psychological theory of learning and a specific educational ideology" (2013, p. 304). Therefore, when a teacher chooses any of the paradigms, it becomes his or her value base. As Kelchtermans says, it is what the teacher represents, because "it matters who the teacher is" (2009, p. 258). By taking conscious actions in relation to students and their parents, which Carr and Kemmis define as engaged actions, in opposition to habitual practice and actions (1986), the teacher can be creative and committed to change, can introduce innovations which are inspired by the challenges of the times, by novel concepts and by

the students' interests and potential, which is a type of search that carries cognitive values and social functions. (Nowak -Łojewska, 2021)

In order to maintain high efficiency and agency, a teacher, according to Steffy and Wolfe's (2001) research on veteran teachers, should engage in transformative reflection, and when a problem occurs in educational practice, he or she should stop and think about further actions or make decisions and modify his or her actions in the process (Gołębniak, 1998). Knowledge created in action (Kwiatkowska, 2008) and general pedagogical knowledge (GPK) is useful to the teacher. According to the findings of Äli Leijen, Liina Malva, Margus Pedaste and Rain Mikser, general pedagogical knowledge is defined through student-related, teaching-related and contextual features. Definitions whose authors have focused on learner-related characteristics mainly concentrate on the learning process, development process and student motivation. In turn, the emphasis on teaching-related features emphasizes classroom management and the teaching process in the GPK definitions. Finally, definitions on contextual features highlight the curriculum and philosophy of education (2022).

Methodology

Qualitative research was used with the goal of exploring the issue at hand and carrying out *thick description* as defined by Clifford Geertz (2005). Statements from twelve students of education studies in the specialisation of school pedagogy with social prevention at the Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland, were collected during the 2022/2023 academic year. The students, who were training to work in school, talked about the experiences and thoughts they had while planning their lessons. During the survey, the students recognized that being a teacher involves difficult didactic and educational situations and therefore requires reflection on the methods and ways of work as well as didactic resources, as well as on problems in dealing with students and in relations with their parents. This attitude represents an example of reflective competence in action and on action, as defined by Donald A. Schon (1983), as well as reflection before action, as described by Maria Szymańska (2019). The study used purposive sampling, in which, according to Uwe Flick, we try to collect only a few cases, but ones that are as diverse as possible, in order to capture the range of variability and diversity within our research field (2012, p. 59). Intensive cases were selected for the study (Flick, 2012), i.e., individuals who gave extensive responses to the questions and have experience in conducting classes at school acquired during internships.

The students' statements were collected and organized using the QDA Miner qualitative data software. The data were anonymized. Cases were given names that do not match the names of the students taking part in the study.

Data analysis was computer-assisted. The QDA Miner software was used for coding, which Iwona Olejnik defines as "creating certain categories (codes) and assigning the collected data to these categories. These categories are created only during the coding process and are gradually developed and refined during the process. A given piece of text can be assigned to several codes" (Olejnik et al., 2021, p. 22). According to Kathy Charmaz and Richard Mitchell, this procedure provides the author with a useful synthesis (2001).

One of the software's features that was used was data management, which was made possible by easy access to each text passage, and allowed searching the text by word sequence, conducting thematic analysis of text passages that were coded within the same category, evaluating relationships between codes, and creating a visual representation of the coded text as a matrix of codes (Olejnik et al., 2021).

Szymańska's concept of three-layer data analysis was used to analyze the collected data. In the first layer of analysis, I looked for a point in the collected material that "can be defined in terms of formative central consistency" (Szymanska, 2019, p. 198). In the second layer of analysis, data were merged into categories. In turn, in the third layer of analysis, I treated the data holistically, which integrates the collected material in a new perspective on the research topic and the object of study (Szymanska, 2019), and, according to Matthew B. Miles A. and Michael Huberman, provides a reflexive view of the reality under study, revealing previously invisible dimensions of that reality (2000).

As Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba have argued that the most important components of the research process include finding the focus of research interests and matching the paradigm to those interests (1985), the study was conducted according to the tenets of the subject-participatory paradigm, according to which "the researcher approaches the research process more or less personally, with his or her own research experience and the conclusion that follows from it .... therefore, it can also be assumed that this approach imparts an axiological and ethical dimension to the reality under study" (Szymańska, 2018, p. 44).

The subject-participatory paradigm allowed the subjects of the study to deepen their awareness in terms of authentic self-knowledge and the studied issue (Szymańska, 2018). The research perspective inspired the study participants to "creatively transcend the status of their past achievements"

(Ostrowska, 2009, p. 30), which helped to answer the question of how the paradigm that the teacher adopted translates into his or her relationship with students and their parents. Moreover, the chosen paradigm helped the teachers pursue the principle of openness, and, as a result, to be insightful in observing the students' actions, as well as provided an opportunity to interpret the students' statements taking into account Hubert Blumer's redefined category of *sensitizing concepts* (2007)

Research results - teachers thinking and acting outside the box

What is notable about the research findings is the out-of-the-box thinking of the students. The surveyed students used creative thinking, went beyond obvious and banal strategies in their projects, and distanced themselves from routine teaching methods through reflection. They pointed out that it is necessary to use a variety of strategies (for example Cubing, orbital research, complex instruction), attractive methods (by applying to the project feeding methods, problem-based methods, exposing methods and practical methods) and didactic tools in order to keep the student interested in the tasks, as well as improve the atmosphere during classes, boost self-reflection and cooperation between the teacher and the student as well as between the teacher and the parent.

It is significant that respondents singled out such social and educational objectives of the lesson as forming self-esteem, acquiring the ability to recognize one's strengths and weaknesses, encouraging students to work together with peers and teachers, building a sense of group community, developing an attitude of respect for others, building trust in others, as well as such practical goals as forming the ability to think creatively, improving the ability to speak one's mind, developing the ability to draw conclusions, which suggest that they want to base the educational process on respect for students' personal knowledge and views, as well as the right to ask questions and express critical opinions.

The observations of the students surveyed were characterized by *effective surprise* as described by Jerome S. Bruner (1971). Bruner, who combined conscious readiness with the work of the intellect and of the imagination, claimed that when we say "now I understand what I'm actually doing" or *right, so that's it*, we can create newer and newer models of the world, thanks to an evolving system of world representation (1971, pp. 45–46). The following observations of the surveyed students fit into the category of *effective surprise*:

"it only makes sense if I know how the student thinks and feels" (Maria).

"knowing the student's strengths and weaknesses is important for lesson planning" (Martyna)

"I need to consider not only the skills that the student is learning, but also how the student perceives him or herself, especially in relation to the group" (Magdalena).

By analyzing the above statements, we can link the value of the educational process to the mental readiness to construct knowledge (Bruner, 1971).

Moreover, the interviewed students appreciated the importance of a reflective approach in structuring the educational process. They noted that reflection opens space for improving the quality of teaching practices. This insight coincides with the view of Margaret J. Johnson and Kathryn Button, who linked reflection on action with making changes with the intention of improving the educational process, as well as the professional development of the teacher. (2000).

At this point, it is worth noting that the students' understanding of teacher professionalism remains in line with humanistic didactics. The students who participated in the study emphasized the importance of the teacher's ability to step inside the child's world, understand the child, identify the child's needs and respond to these needs by being supportive, which, in their view, was related to the teacher's observation of students:

During class time, the teacher gets a chance to observe how the student feels in the group and how he or she copes with group work. Is he or she withdrawn? Does he or she get just as involved in playing as the other students? Does he or she like to speak up in the classroom? The teacher can also observe how the group treats the student. Does the group work together with him or her? This way, the teacher gets a picture of the situation in the class, especially of the relationships between students. (Maria)

Respondents also noted the importance of identifying areas that need to be modified in lesson planning and of introducing innovative activities. They also indicated that they should base their actions and decisions not only on their own observations and experiences, but also on collaboration and exchange of ideas with other teachers, which is a reference to the concept of extended teaching professionalism as described by Eric Hoyle, whereby teachers constantly seek understanding of their actions (1974). Lawrence

Stenhouse called extended professionalism a form of regular questioning of one's teaching (1975), since this is a broader notion of professionalism that contrasts with Hoyle's idea of limited professionalism, used to describe teachers who base their professional actions only on their own experiences (1974).

Thus, the underlying assumptions of the students' decisions on teaching methods fall into the group of constructivist-interpretive paradigms identified by Klus-Stańska, (2018). This group of paradigms include the vision of the teacher as a reflective practitioner who, bearing in mind the guidelines of child-centered education, wants to support the spontaneous activity and interests of his or her students, focuses on their intrinsic motivation, i.e. curiosity, the joy of creative activity, or the drive to work together with others, and links the content of lessons to the lives and needs of the students (Klus-Stanska, 2018).

The preferred paradigm of the respondents was also relevant to how they valued cooperating with students' parents. Taking as the starting point the individual perspective, which is grounded in the perception of one's own functioning in the profession within intuitively set boundaries, the students considered parents to be allies in the realization of the common goal of taking care to ensure adequate conditions for children to succeed academically to the best of their abilities. The respondents were convinced that the teacher should benefit from the parents' insights and ideas when making decisions about, for example, how to overcome the difficulties the child encounters in class, or assist teachers in implementing methods of social integration of the student with his or her peers. Parents' comments can be helpful, especially when dealing with controversial issues. According to Wellington, controversial issues are considered important by a considerable number of people and involve value judgments, so they cannot be resolved by facts, evidence or experiment alone (1986). In an educational perspective, the definition of a controversial issue was attempted by Claire and Holden (2007), who list the following characteristics of a controversial issue in the classroom: a topic of current interest to the teacher, students and parents, conflicting values and opinions, conflicting priorities and material interests, intense emotions, and a complex subject area (2007). As Charlot Cassar and Ida Oosterheert et al. point out, issues that are not necessarily controversial may become controversial in the face-to-face context of the classroom because of the way issues are addressed by the teacher and experienced by the students … Consequently, controversy may not be strictly related to content as such, but to specific content in a specific context (2021, p. 658). A good

relationship with students' parents can be an answer to controversies that teachers have initiated, which are defined as *sensitive issues*, embedded in cultural and historical settings, often dominated by prejudices and stereotypes (Alexakos et al., 2016).

According to the respondents, the teacher, as part of working together with parents, should also take steps to support parents in their child-care and upbringing roles. Examples of such activities, according to the respondents, include encouraging consultation with specialists who work at the school, informing parents about the existence of institutions to which they can go for help and reliable information, as well as providing guidance on dealing with the child at home. The benefits of such collaboration are demonstrated, for example, in a study by Eleni Damianidou and Andri Georgiadou, in which parents pointed out the shortcomings of remote education, such as the lack of equal access to learning opportunities, with content that in not adjusted to the respective needs of children, unfavorable home conditions, parents' financial difficulties preventing the purchase of equipment for remote education, and parents' low level of education, which was a significant barrier to learning during school closures, as parents did not feel competent to help their children understand lessons (2022).

Students also emphasized that it is important to build a platform of cooperation between parents and teachers. They expressed the opinion that how this cooperation develops depends on the analysis of the teacher's professional experience in working closely with parents, as well as the teacher's approach to establishing and maintaining positive relations with parents. Such teachers usually believe in the importance of scheduling meetings that are convenient for parents and having conversations that support parents in overcoming everyday difficulties in meeting their children's needs (Kaczor 2022). Such attitudes of the study participants allow us to understand teacher-parent cooperation as an added value in education, which is in line with the tenets of constructivist-interpretivist paradigms. By cooperating with parents, the teacher is able to get to know the students better and understand their problems; this is experiential cognition, which Karol Wojtyła described with the following words "man is the closest object of such experiential cognition and, moreover, the object that is relatively best known" (2003, p. 18). According to the respondents, when a child has difficulties in school, this cognition is a factor that facilitates choosing the rules of organization of social space, as well as effectively adapting the curriculum, teaching methods and didactic aids to the child's needs and capabilities. This view corresponds with that of Happo and Määttä (2011), who, when discussing the importance

of supportive interaction with children and their parents, pointed out that it is essential to focus on the student and to adopt principles that are beneficial to good cooperation, principles that will respond to the moral, social and emotional dilemmas surrounding the interactions of teachers and parents, as well as those with students (Beijaard et al., 2000). These principles are related to Maria Mendel's understanding of teacher-parent cooperation, which she described as a covenant – cooperation in which they strive to be on the same side together – on the side of the student, rather than against each other or in coalition with the child only (2007).

Discussion and conclusion

Using qualitative data analysis, which is based on multiple references to data (Miles and Huberman, 2000) followed by stages of data analysis, helped to identify the role of paradigm in shaping the relationship between the teacher and students and their parents. Although the study was modest in size and does not allow for generalizations, the findings shed more light on the importance of the teacher's paradigm in building his/her relationship with students and their parents. Supplementing the discourse with the viewpoint of trainee teachers, provides a deeper understanding of the studied aspect of education.

The students who participated in the study were willing to seek change and were proactive in their relationships with students and their parents. They saw unplanned incidents in the classroom and in relations with parents as manageable with the help of self-reflection. The study shows how important the development of reflective competence in pedagogy students is in preparing them for their profession. Therefore, participation in a research project can be considered as one of the forms of preparing students to become committed teachers in the future, to be creative in their daily duties, and not to be at the *mercy of yesterday's ideas* (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), as well as allowing them to learn how to combine reflection, theory and practice. This is consistent with the social functions of the teacher's professional role, such as bettering one's teaching practice, improving working conditions, understanding teaching and educational problems better and striving for professional development (Nowak -Łojewska, 2021).

Training for a professional role, the beginning of which is a watershed event in the lives of teachers, is the starting point for adult learning in work situations, referred to in the literature as learning in working life or work-based learning (Engerstrom 2001). As Marcin Rojek writes, "working life is the dominant adult activity that requires and encourages learning.

Professional work is the most common motive for learning" (2018, p. 110). Thus, the teacher's relationship with both students and their parents is the source of the teacher's growth through gaining knowledge and developing skills, which allows him or her to feel comfortable in his/her professional role. Being comfortable in one's job involves feeling empowered, professionally competent and in control of the classroom (Day & Gu, 2007). These teachers are known to be confident, effective and calm (Huberman 1989). R. Cohen argues that their specific needs and personalities simply overlap naturally with the teaching culture (2009, p. 475). It is therefore interesting to debate which paradigm helps teachers to build satisfying relationships with students and their parents, as well as to understand the complexity of these relationships, while accounting for the different perspectives of the actors in education. This issue is part of the wider questions in pedeutological literature that are relevant to the current problems not only of the Polish school, but also of the school worldwide.

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