The Person-Centered Approach in Research

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1 Introduction

For Carl Rogers, research enables the researcher to clarify personal thought or experience: "It seems to me that in the best of science, the primary purpose is to provide a more satisfactory and dependable hypothesis, belief, faith, for the investigator himself" (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 219). It is a way to gain insight into phenomena we perceive as relevant to ourselves. In his article "Toward a More Human Science of the Person," published in 1985, Rogers outlines several models of science that differ from reductionist scientific viewpoints. More and more, a person-centered approach to research appears to be required. Various researchers such as Wolter-Gustafson (1990), Ulph (1998), or Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams (2002) express an experienced need for person-centered attitudes in search for a scientific perspective that allows for holistic involvement of the researcher and that is in tune with a desire to be "respectful to the data" (Wilkins 2010, p. 219). If researchers live authentically in their research endeavor, try to empathically grasp patterns in their research field not illuminated or appreciated before and encounter their environment with an attitude of unconditional positive regard, this can hardly be casted in a concrete method, but rather appears to be a personal approach to scientific research. Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams (2002) argue that the effectiveness of a person-centered approach to research depends on the communication of the necessary and sufficient conditions (Rogers 1957). While not explicitly elaborated here, this aspect is interwoven in our considerations.

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In this chapter, we are interested in whether characteristics of researching can be discerned that are closely related to attitudes and ideas that form core concepts of the person-centered approach. By means of a review of selected articles written by researchers reflecting on research in the context of the person-centered approach, we try to characterize key aspects of a person-centered approach to research. We found it valuable to summarize and organize commonalities in approaching research by person-centered researchers to reflect upon our own ways of researching. The characteristics we gathered can be seen as a collection of expressions of experiences open for supplement and rearrangement. They are primarily intended to support questions such as "What does research mean to me?" "What is my personal way of researching?" "How do I want to encounter my field of research?"

In the first part, we list and discuss six principles fostering ways of researching closely related to essential concepts in the person-centered approach that could be deduced from a literature review of selected articles. In the second part, examples of contemporary research methods in tune with person-centered principles in the fields of social sciences and educational technology are portrayed. We first depict personal conversation as research instrument enabling insight into personal life experiences as elaborated by Inghard Langer (2000). Then, action research is presented as a set of tools to evaluate and change educational settings as applied in courses at the University of Vienna by Motschnig-Pitrik (2006). In the conclusion, main characteristics of a person-centered approach to research are summarized and an outlook on research processes sustained by person-centered values is given.

2 Characteristics of a Person-Centered Approach to Research

Many researchers who explore the person-centered approach in fields such as psychotherapy, education, or organizational development have implicitly or explicitly written about their way of researching. In order to find out what is essential to person-centered approaches to research, we reviewed literature, especially the following:

- "Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question" by Rogers (1955) and (1961/1995), a pivotal contribution to a person-centered perspective on research,
- "Researching in a Person-centered Way" by Wilkins (2010), an exploration of connections between person-centered attitudes and ways of researching, and
- "Authentic Science" by Hutterer (1990), an elaboration of implications of person-centered values and attitudes on science.

We summarize and organize vital statements on research and the person-centered approach that may support the reflection on personal ways of researching. Findings comprise key assumptions on relations between primary concepts in the

person-centered approach and how research is put to action. They were arranged in seemingly separate subsections to provide for structure and clarity. In a more encompassing view, they appear highly interdependent and interwoven. Yet, the structure of the characteristics is rather a proposition to be experimented with in personal reflection and dialog.

2.1 Persons as Originators of Research

"Science exists only in people. Each scientific project has its creative inception, its process, and its tentative conclusion, in a person or persons" (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 216). This is an inherent characteristic of authentic scientific research. "Accordingly, to be engaged in authentic science means that investigators are involved as subjective human beings, committed to their values and intrinsically motivated to investigate a specific area of interest" (Hutterer 1990, p. 60). Authentic research is first of all about authentic persons, it is about what understanding of science is authentic for a person in contact to research.

Organismic experiencing such as intuition, feelings, and intellect is equally momentous in the creative process of scientific exploration. "Authentic research is based on increased self-awareness and acceptance of all facets of the researchers' unique experience: motivational, sensory, emotional, and cognitive" (Hutterer 1990, p. 70). Researchers follow a personal vision encountering the phenomena that are most intriguing for them. "Authentic science … seeks to discover a hidden reality and unrealized potentials in human nature by virtue of a personal vision. Scientists' involvement in this endeavor implies commitment, self-discovery and self-transcendence in order to arrive at a new intellectual identity in accordance with new perspectives of reality" (Hutterer 1990, p. 71). Kriz (2000) shares his impressions on the reflection of the personal disposition to science. In his view, one's decision to be either a biochemist or a molecular biologist is not solely based on rational quantitative analyses of the question, what scientific paradigm could help solve problems most effectively, but rather on personal preferences, competencies, interests, life experience.

For McLeod (2001), the plausibility and trustworthiness of the researcher are the key factors constituting validity of scientific results. "If a piece of research is carried out with integrity, then there is almost certainly something of value in it, there is some truth in it" (McLeod 2001, p. 188). Being conscious of personal values and understanding their influence on perception, being aware of personal bias, is for Maslow (1954) the only way to provide for trustworthy, valid scientific research. "Granted that the ideal of science is to reduce to a minimum these human determinants of theory, this will never be achieved by denying their influence, but only by knowing them well" (Maslow 1954, p. 7). Polanyi states that personal and passionate involvement of the researcher makes research "objective in the sense of establishing contact with a hidden reality" (Polanyi 1962, p. vii).

The use of research outcomes and results is dependent on their relevance for persons involved in the research endeavor. "What I will do with the knowledge gained through scientific method—whether I will use it to understand, enhance, enrich, or use it to control, manipulate and destroy—is a matter of subjective choice dependent upon the values which have personal meaning for me (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 223)."

2.1.1 Individuality as Resource

Individuals can draw from their personal experience to shape creative research questions they perceive as significant for themselves and their environment. "Every researcher/scientist is an individual with a special learning and growth process. Living in a particular cultural setting, during a particular historical period, the scientist′s values, convictions, and aims are part of his or her individuality. Additionally, the cultivation of certain ways of perceiving, along with the researcher′s theoretical orientation, makes him or her a distinct individual. … Authentic scientists are committed to this individuality. They acknowledge the problems they study as a discovery in its own right that is personally relevant to them. In developing a personal vision they seek to fulfill what is appropriate to their deeper selves" (Hutterer 1990, p. 73). The consideration of individuality is vital in modern standpoint theory (Harding 2004; Hartsock 1983; Smith 1974). Jürgen Kriz, who experienced postwar confusion as son of a mother that had to care for three children alone, later in his life explored systems theory in psychotherapy. He (2008) states that part of his life was always characterized by a "deep fascination for 'chaos'" (p. 21).

2.1.2 Research is an Endeavor in Networks with Others

Not only does research commence in a creative effort of an individual or group of people, but it involves subjects with their interests and interpretations as respected partners in the research process (Hutterer 1990, p. 60/61). Kriz (1999) explains that since Popper, Kuhn, and Feyerabend the truth step by step had to give way to intersubjective acceptance in the context of given valid paradigms or disciplinary matrices. Rogers states: "It is important that scientists agree upon certain ways as good means to prevent self-deception" (Rogers, 1961/1995, p. 220). For Rogers, trustworthiness of a theory does not derive from applied methods, but from the open communication among (co-)researchers sharing their experiences and perspectives (Hutterer 1990, p. 65). Transparent discussion of methodological and methodic premises may increase validity (Kriz 2000). Reflection of personal values, being open to new findings, sentiments, experiences, and rather unconditional respect for others′ views and attitudes, discovering parallels and distinguishing differences in perception and understanding, can be seen as basic to the movement of scientific dialog. To engage in scientific exchange, it is necessary to

be familiar with terminologies, values, and basic beliefs in the respective scientific communities. "No theory can be adequately understood without some knowledge of the cultural and personal soil, from which it springs (Rogers 1959, p. 185)."

Living and experiencing person-centered dispositions can be seen as contributing to the trustworthiness of person-centered research for they establish a highly threat-free environment and may minimize distortion of co-researchers′ perceptions (Mearns and McLeod 1984, p. 385).

Authentic involvement with (co-)researchers can facilitate reflection on personal bias (Reason and Heron 1986). If research participants are seen as co-researchers supporting discovery and construction of meaning and "value is placed on the wealth of experience and views of all concerned and products of the research are co-constructed and co-owned, the experience of co-researchers is of empowerment" (Wilkins 2010, p. 221). Collaborative power can be perceived as enhancing personal power by co-researchers (Natiello 1990, p. 272). Because of this, Wilkins and Mitchell-Williams (2002) argue that collaborative research methodologies are closest to person-centered dispositions and values. "Also collaborative effort (because it involves the statement of personal views which are then refined in the light of the views of others) results in the co-construction of meaning. Because it evolves from a consensus, this increases the trustworthiness of findings" (Wilkins 2010, p. 222).

2.2 Primacy of Experience

"Science, as well as therapy, as well as all other aspects of living, is rooted in and based upon the immediate, subjective experience of a person. It springs from the inner, total, organismic experiencing which is only partially and imperfectly communicable. It is one phase of subjective living" (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 222). In his research, Carl Rogers was attentive to his experiences in practice. In his view, science is based on the recognition of a dimly sensed gestalt—a hidden reality. "This gestalt or pattern appears to give meaning to disconnected phenomena. The more that this total apprehension of a pattern is free from cultural values and is free from past scientific values, the more adequate it is likely to be" (Rogers 1968). Creating theories can be described as a process of symbolizing experiences, so that previously isolated phenomena appear related and show an inner order. Thus, theorizing adds (inter)subjective meaning, integration and order to otherwise disparate facts (Hutterer 1990, p. 65).

A person-centered approach to research is an approximation to an inclusive, authentic science. "In this context, 'inclusion' means a science which is attentive to a broad range of realities: cognitive processes, as well as personal and emotional meanings; and the phenomenological world, as well as outward appearances, behavior and reactions. It means a science … which goes beyond the narrow concepts of traditional scientific approaches" (Hutterer 1990, p. 60). Experience is related to the perception of prevailing circumstances. In a person-centered approach to research, attention is given to personal, subjective experiences, the

context of the research, and the frames of reference of involved co-researchers. "Some very fruitful discoveries have grown out of the persistent disbelief, by a scientist, in his own findings or other. In the last analysis he may place more trust in his total organismic reactions than in the methods of science. There is no doubt that this can result in serious error as well as in scientific discoveries, but it indicates again the leading place of the subjective in the use of science" (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 219).

Hutterer (1990) highlights that "passion (orig.: Passion, ed.) and involvement are necessary to realize hidden and deeper structures of reality" (p. 70).

2.3 Acknowledgment of Early Phases of Research

From a person-centered perspective, research starts already before the formulation and testing of hypotheses. The researcher "senses the field in which he is interested, he lives it. He does more than 'think' about it—he lets his organism take over and react to it, both on a knowing and on an unknowing level. … Out of this complete subjective immersion comes a creative forming, a sense of direction, a vague formulation of relationships hitherto unrecognized. Whittled down, sharpened, formulated in clearer terms, this creative forming becomes a hypothesis—a statement of a tentative, personal, subjective faith" (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 216/217).

Research starting as personal endeavor is guided by an intuitive vision and is based on aims and values that are meaningful to the researcher (Rogers 1961/1995).

In the first phases of a scientific endeavor, a researcher may ask himself[1]: "Can I approach my field of interest with a well-informed, but open mind?" "What is my heart truly burning for?" "Can I immerse myself in all the observations I have collected, live with them until patterns begin to emerge, themes and concepts begin to be evident?"

Empathy can help to identify or clarify relevant research questions. Deep understanding of people′s needs, even on a level maybe just dimly aware, can bring forth significant research endeavors (Rogers 1985). Langer et al. (1981), for example, developed a concept of understandable expression in texts on the basis of empathic indwelling in the joys and frustrations of people trying to comprehend the contents of books.

2.4 Extensional Relationship to Reality

A person engaged in scientific exploration lives in relationship to him- or herself, his or her field of interest and (co-)researchers. The quality of these relationships

[1] These questions are primarily adapted from Rogers (1985), except for "What is my heart truly burning for?" which was adapted from a question Jürgen Kriz asked doctorate students in a course on scientific methods at the University of Vienna in the summer term 2012.

has tremendous impact on conduct, trustworthiness, and validity, lastly the whole process of research. Being acceptant of all sorts of findings, intuitive directions, contradictory information and associated feelings, open to holistic organismic experience, the scientist lives extensional in the relationship to his or her field. "It is when people approach phenomena with an openness to their experience … that they are most likely to discover significant meaning" (Wilkins 2010, p. 220). Additionally to an extensional relationship to the field, constructive, empathic, caring inner communication of different aspects of self involved in the research endeavor may lead to deeper, clearer understanding of the investigated events (Rogers 1961/1995). Empathy enables deep sensing of diverse mental models of aspects to explore (Senge 2006, p. 401). Active, empathic listening can be considered a core skill of scientific interviewers (Wilkins 2010, p. 218).

Extensional differentiation and assessment of various approaches to view the research field helps finding suitable models of aspects of reality the researcher wants to explore. Each model is a representation of a perspective on the field of interest and therefore, even if it is contradictory to other models, associated with a part of the researched reality. When evaluating various ways of getting in contact with significant aspects of the research field, it may be valuable to reflect upon the particular ways chosen, the motives behind these choices, the bumps encountered and promising tracks to clarify the personal research process and to make this process comprehensible for others. Concerning results and findings of scientific investigations, Rogers framed his personal maxim that the facts are always friendly (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 25).

2.5 Methodological Openness

"The methodology chosen must be appropriate to the question being asked. This is very important, because, if taken seriously, it will prevent new rigidities from developing" (Rogers 1985). To "check with reality" and to avoid self-deception, Rogers utilized empirical experimental research.

According to Hutterer (1990) "The application of methods and methodological rules to the conduct of authentic research is important, but only in an auxiliary way" (p. 61). Scientific methods are employed to prevent self-deception and to create a basis for reciprocal understanding of findings and conclusions with colleagues. Scientific methods standardize and simplify scientific discourse among participants of scientific communities (Kriz 1999).

Hutterer (1990) and Kriz (2000) argue that combining a plurality of perspectives and forms of discovery enables the exploration of a vast number of puzzling questions and makes research a comprehensible personal and social process. Applying a variety of methods, naturalistic and experimental, and cooperating with other scientists could offer deeper insights through the tension between different, maybe contradictory, perspectives on the researched phenomena (Hutterer 1990, p. 68).

2.6 Research is Process

> It is my opinion that the type of understanding which we call science can begin anywhere, at any level of sophistication…. A closely related belief is that there is a natural history of science—that science, in any given field, goes through a patterned course of growth and development. … Science is a developing mode of inquiry, or it is of no particular importance (Rogers 1959, p. 189).

If science is perceived as existent in persons and in the relationships between persons process characteristics of scientific research become evident. In this sense, an objective body of knowledge equally understood by everyone is not plausible. "There are only tentative beliefs, existing subjectively, in a number of different persons. If these beliefs are not tentative, then what exists is dogma, not science" (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 219). Theories, in that sense, are not rock-solid concepts of truth, but rather changing, provisional attempts to design and refine maps of some aspect of perceived reality. They become "a stimulus to further creative thinking" (Rogers 1959, p. 191), a "springboard for further investigation" (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 218).

3 Examples of Research in Tune with the Person-Centered Approach

The person-centered approach evolved closely connected to scientific research. Rogers states:

> …client-centered therapy has always existed in the context of a university setting. This means a continual process of sifting and winnowing of the truth form the staff, in a situation of fundamental personal security. It means being exposed to the friendly criticism of colleagues,… This has helped greatly to keep the client-centered orientation an open and self-critical, rather than a dogmatic, point of view (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 246/247).

Person-centered ways of researching emphasize collaboration, holism, openness to the total experience of all concerned and they are permissive and elective (Wilkins 2010, p. 236). Subsequently, two examples of researching attuned to a person-centered approach to research are portrayed.

3.1 The Personal Conversation as Way of Researching

Langer (1985) elaborated the personal conversation as research instrument. Personal conversations are opportunities to gather, process, and give insight into life experiments people engage in every day. Generated knowledge can be offered to concerned people. Though, personal conversations differ from interviews. Personal

conversation is a reciprocal human encounter, a deep sharing between people to a common issue. Bias through the researcher is minimized if personal conversation works out. Through a nonjudgemental attitude of the researcher, the partner is enabled to freely express his/her individuality, which can be completely different from the researchers′. Though there appear to be overlaps with dialog by Bohm and Nichol (1996), the research method of personal conversations differs slightly as it is a primary concern of the researcher to provide for a maximum of free development of the conversation partner, whereas in dialog personal articulation is equally valuable. Due to new impressions and insights gathered in conversation, the research process needs to be flexible and can hardly be planned in advance. The researcher describes his/her learning process in relation to the research topic and the conversations and structures his/her reflection.

3.1.1 Preparation

In advance to the conversation, the researcher may talk to somebody about his/her personal concern, how the research topic relates to his/her life and focal points of the topic.

3.1.2 The Conversation

- Clarity and contact

At the beginning of the conversation, personal exchange that is not related with the research topic may help to decrease feelings of strangeness in the situation.

- Understanding resonance

Central to understanding conversation in the context of research is that people are understood in their inner world, their very own values, attitudes, feelings, and thoughts, to establish an empathic relationship in which the essence of their experiencing and behavior may be grasped.

- Questions

After the free disclosure of the conversation partner, the researcher may pose questions that go beyond direct understanding which are relevant for the research as well.

- First record of the conversation

Both research partners may accentuate at the end of the conversation what were main results and what was specifically relevant or touching.

- Fade away of conversation

It is important to stay in contact with the conversation partner, as conversations about personal topics can bring about new memories, experiences, points of view that clarify and get communicable in the following days, such that follow-up contact may be worthwhile.

3.1.3 Evaluation of Conversations

- Every conversation is a single case study

As a lot of information can be gathered by one conversation, every conversation may be evaluated separately at first.

- Condensed report

Keywords of essential contents of the conversation and literal statements related to the keywords can be arranged to accentuate the substance of the conversation in a comprehensive form. The conversation partner may be asked whether he/she finds him-/herself in the summary of a conversation.

- Informing the conversation partner of the results

In the process of communicative validation, both conversation partners can check whether the publication accommodates the need for personal security.

- The overall result

In the condensed report of the first conversation, the researcher can consider whether essential contents concerning the research topic were touched upon. The condensed reports of the following conversations can be summarized paying attention to what main issues are explored and how often certain keywords are stated.

A detailed description of this way of researching can be found in Langer (2000). Projects working with this research method are listed at: http://www.inghard-langer.de/PDF/Dipl-dr.pdf

3.2 Action Research to Improve Person-Centered Technology Enhanced Learning

Action research is an aggregate of research methods from social sciences to facilitate social change (Wilkins 2010, p. 234). Many contemporaneous action research approaches can be traced back to research methods of Kurt (Baskerville 1999). In action research, aims of researchers and co-researchers are considered. “Any meaningful investigation must consider the frame of reference and underlying social values of the subjects” (Baskerville 1999, p. 4). Ideally, the researcher

is actively involved, generated knowledge can be directly applied, and the research process integrates theory and practice.

In participatory action research, researchers and co-researchers synergistically work together to produce knowledge and action directly applicable in the community (Wilkins 2010, p. 235). Responsibility for the research process is shared among all involved in the research endeavor. Co-researchers collaboratively shape ideas that influence their future action. In the following, one research cycle of participatory action research is illustrated by tracking its 5 phases aiming to improve educational settings in a course in "Project Management Soft Skills" at the University of Vienna (Motschnig-Pitrik 2006).

3.2.1 Participatory Action Research in a Course on "Soft Skills" at the University

- Investigating

The development of soft skills beside intellectual knowledge is highly appreciated in industry and educational contexts. Thus, it is an aim of the course on "Project Management Soft Skills" at the Faculty of Computer Science at the University of Vienna that students have the opportunity to learn as whole persons, on an intellectual, a skill, and a personal level.

A key question was how development at the skills and personal levels can be achieved and evaluated (Motschnig-Pitrik 2006).

- Action Planning

"The course is aimed at addressing students at all three levels of competence or learning: knowledge, skills, and attitudes with a clear emphasis on experientially developing soft skills such as active listening, effective communication and negotiation, moderation, team competencies, etc." (Motschnig-Pitrik 2006, p. 2). The course design integrates face-to-face meetings and eLearning. Through the synergy of present meetings and web-supported learning, students can benefit from the advantages this blend offers.

- Action Taking

Students can find material concerning the course for self-appropriated learning online. In the beginning of the course, requirements and learning methods in the course are discussed. Further, students assign themselves to teams. Ten moderated face-to-face workshops enable the exploration of individual interests in the framework of "soft skills project management" in a highly interactive work environment. After each workshop, students submit an online reflection that provides manifold perspectives on the workshop for the participants. At the end of the course, students evaluate themselves online. They conduct peer-reviews of the

topics elaborated by other student teams, and they fill out a questionnaire to evaluate the course (Motschnig-Pitrik 2006, p. 3).

- Evaluation

In the evaluation stage, questionnaires were statistically assessed. Results were complemented by analyses of feedback and self-evaluations students wrote during the course.

- Specifying learning

If the first face-to-face meetings are facilitated in a person-centered way, participants seem to grow together as a group and perceive a constructive working climate (Motschnig-Pitrik 2006, p. 5).

An essential feature of the course are the units that are facilitated by student teams. "… The degree of self-initiated, experiential learning—from successful elements as much as from mistakes—is astonishing….

This course structure appears to be more stable in terms of providing learning to all participants than pure encounter groups, perhaps due to the loose but transparent course structure and the responsible activities in small teams. However, I'd be eager to compare long term effects of this setting when compared with person-centered encounter groups."[2]

Further readings concerning action research in the area of educational technology at the University of Vienna can be found in Motschnig-Pitrik (2004, 2006), Motschnig-Pitrik et al. (2007), Motschnig-Pitrik and Mallich (2004).

4 Conclusion and Outlook

In this article, we discerned characteristics of researching that are related to primary concepts in the person-centered approach. We portrayed research as a phenomenon that commences in and builds on personal experiences, involves other persons, and has meaning for persons. The research examples presented show that various methodological approaches can be attuned to person-centered principles, if the researchers live in an authentic, extensional relationship with their field of interest, reflect their personal process, their individuality, their motives in the research endeavor, consider their own vulnerabilities and biases in contact with their research field, are open for different, maybe even contradictory, viewpoints, try to co-construct the research process with co-researchers. We presented personal conversation as a way to mutually collect experiences and thus open them up for others involved (Langer 2000). Further, we depicted (participatory) action research

[2] Personal contribution by Renate Motschnig in an online conversation with the first author in 2012.

as opportunity to design and realize courses at universities with adjustments to students′ and facilitators′ needs, interests, and ideas (Motschnig-Pitrik 2006).

The fruitfulness of a person-centered approach to human science is not a self-propelling and self-explaining process. The power of mainstream research is inevitably influential and cannot be ignored, nor the temporary fashions and passing fads. To stay discerning of the literature and self-critical are ongoing challenges. An informed stance is necessary for not stepping into the common trap to criticize perspectives even the mainstream has already overcome.

There are still many open questions. In his last article on human science 1985, Rogers was aware of new movements in the field of research that fully blossom today. The first is the qualitative research movement with its many differentiations and types of inquiry. It opens a rich discussion about producing knowledge, about its validity and limitations. Today in many fields of human research and social science, there is a growing susceptibility toward methodological pluralism, which includes quantitative, as well as qualitative and mixed method research (Creswell 2009; Denzin and Lincoln 2011). There is no need to fight against old-fashioned positivism and to pronounce exclusively phenomenology or old-fashioned hermeneutics. There are fresh ways to look at and use these cognitive resources in several types of qualitative and mixed methods research. But it is a big challenge to show the fruitfulness of these transformed approaches in actual research projects. A second movement that gains influence and power of discernment over the last decades is the critical realist perspective in philosophy of social science according to Bhaskar (1998, 2008), Collier (1994) and others.

Today, it is fashionable to see the person-centered approach in line with a constructivist position, which seems to fit perfectly to social practices like counseling and psychotherapy. There are different traditions of constructivist ideas, but many seem to play down a causal dynamic in the social world. Additionally in the course of a relativizing postmodern discussion, there are interpretations of constructivism that come close to irrealism. A critical realist perspective is compatible with a mild constructivist position: The objects of social research are socially produced and concept dependent in themselves while we cannot avoid socially defining them and approaching them in a theory-dependent way in the course of inquiry. But unlike postmodern and constructivist perspectives, it holds a strong ontological realism: There is an ontological objective existence of reality, independent of our beliefs and our knowledge about it. To follow a methodological pluralism is not just a compromise or the result of human imperfection but a logical necessity to understand the complexity of social practices. It seems a promising perspective to make experiential learning in counseling, psychotherapy, and education more transparent and to come to a depth understanding of the predictable and the indeterminate personalized dimensions of social relationships as well. Rogers (1985) was close to this realistic perspective when he stated about experiential learning: “We can communicate about it, or we can create conditions that facilitates it, but it cannot be communicated directly” (p. 8).

Reflection of the personal approach to researching may help to find out about rudiments of the personal understanding of research and what it means to oneself.

As research takes place in contact with others, it appears to be necessary to reflect upon the influences of culture and social circumstances as well as the traditions and values of the scientific communities it relates to and stems from. If research is perceived as an ongoing process of development, differentiation, and refinement, a key concern may be to engage in research that can be brought in connection to further research.

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