

# Chapter 3: Case Studies

## **Case Study – Deceiving Participants in the Name of Research**

In 1963 an American social scientist, Milgram, wanted to discover how obedient people were to authority. Participants were asked to deliver a series of electric shocks to 'volunteers' out of sight in an adjacent room whenever they answered a question incorrectly. Those on the receiving end of the shocks were in fact role playing and were only pretending to feel the intense pain. However, the research participants did not know that these people were acting. Milgram encouraged the participants to administer increasingly powerful shocks despite the ever more agonized cries coming from the other room. Milgram's work certainly demonstrated how a high proportion of otherwise mild-mannered and decent people could be induced to behave in cruel and inhuman ways by authority figures. He had clearly deceived the participants because he wanted them to behave naturally and had he informed them about what was really going on the validity of the investigation would have been completely undermined. He also felt that by creating these conditions he would be setting up a mirror reflection of the kinds of practices that had produced the concentration camps of the 1930s and 1940s. However, it could be argued that the benefits of the work did not outweigh the costs because the participants were subjected to acute anxiety and stress by having to administer these shocks and were therefore harmed psychologically by the process (Silverman, 2014; Bryman, 2015).

## **Case Study – The Absence of Informed Consent and Participant Autonomy**

The case of 'Little Albert' in the 1920s demonstrates unethical practice in relation to an absence of informed consent and harm to a research participant, although research 'subject' might be a more appropriate description of Albert's status. John Watson was the researcher leading an investigation into how *early experiences affect the kinds of people we become* (Burkeman, 2007, p. 30). Albert was nine months old and the investigation involved him being introduced to furry animals and objects accompanied by loud noises which caused him, by association, to become afraid. Albert's mother, as the obvious gatekeeper in this particular case had not given her consent for him to take part. The experiment was conducted in a hospital environment without his mother's knowledge and Albert left without these newly acquired fears being addressed. Clearly, he had been emotionally and psychologically harmed and an informed decision by his gatekeeper had been neither sought nor secured (Burkeman, 2007).

# Chapter 3: Checklists

## **Checklist – Ethical Approval Questionnaire**

1. Describe your arrangements for selecting/sampling and briefing potential participants. This should include copies of any advertisements for volunteers or letters to individuals/organizations inviting participation.
2. Describe any possible negative consequences of participation in the research along with the ways in which these consequences will be limited. This should include details, where appropriate, of any withholding of information or misleading of participants along with a justification of why this is necessary.
3. Describe how participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw from the research. This should also include information about participants' right to withhold information.
4. Describe the arrangements for obtaining participants' consent. This should include copies of the information that they will receive and written consent forms where appropriate. If children or vulnerable people are to be participants in the study, details of the arrangements for obtaining consent from those acting in loco parentis or as advocates should be provided.
5. If you intend to undertake research with children or other vulnerable participants does the data collection involve you being alone with the participant(s)? Please provide details.
6. If your data collection requires that you work alone with children or other vulnerable participants, have you undergone Criminal Records Bureau screening? Please supply details.
7. Describe the arrangements for debriefing the participants. This should include copies of information that participants will receive where appropriate.
8. Describe the arrangements for ensuring participant confidentiality. This should include details of how data will be stored and how results will be presented.
9. Are there any conflicts of interest in you undertaking this research; for example, are you undertaking research on work colleagues? Please supply details.

*Source:* SHU, 2009b

## **Checklist – Informed Consent**

- Provide sufficient details of the research (verbal and written)
- Participation must be voluntary
- Check understanding and do not make assumptions
- Allow time for reflection
- Ensure no element of coercion is present
- Obtain written permission from participants or gatekeepers
- Submit an ethical approval form to the relevant ethics committee or supervising tutor
- Remind participants that they can withdraw at any point during the research process and the data will be destroyed.

*Source:* Adapted from Bryman, 2008.

## **Checklist – Ethical Issues to Consider When Researching with Children and/or Potentially Vulnerable Groups**

1. Provide a clear explanation of the research at an appropriate level/using appropriate language.
2. Check participants' understanding of your research and their involvement in it.
3. Make certain you have permission/informed consent to carry out your research from any gatekeepers involved, for example parents and guardians both verbally and (where appropriate) in writing.
4. Remember that informed consent may well need to be renegotiated at various points throughout the process of research.
5. Carry out a pilot investigation.
6. Arrange appropriate times to interview, observe or visit your participants.
7. Consider the health and safety of those involved including yourself.
8. Be considerate of your participants' needs to stop and take a break, for example if a child is fidgety and restless; young children's attention spans can vary.
9. Conduct your research in an appropriate, familiar or otherwise safe environment so that participants feel more comfortable and at ease.
1. Look for ways to overcome or at least diminish the concept of the researcher being in a position of power, for example getting down to children's height when talking to them.
2. Find ways to reduce the likelihood that participants are simply saying what they think you want them to say, rather than what they truly feel.
3. Use appropriate language that participants will understand.
4. Use open-ended questions to encourage participants to express themselves.
5. Use projection techniques where appropriate, for example pictures, dolls, photographs or puppets to encourage participants to talk/open up.

*Source:* Adapted from Liamputtong, 2007 and Cohen et al., 2007.

# Chapter 3: Ideas to Use

## Ideas to Use – Sample Consent Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian,

A final year student from \_\_\_\_\_ University will be carrying out observations in school during the winter and spring terms as part of her studies. Her research is on boys and girls play in the outdoor area. The student will be working with Mrs Jones, the nursery teacher.

The student will make notes during her observations in the same way that nursery staff normally use for recording children's learning. In addition, some of the activities may be recorded using photographs, audio tape or video recording. All such images will be kept confidential and will not be used for any purposes other than the student's research. The university's ethical guidelines forbid any photograph to be taken of a child without parental permission. We would be grateful, therefore, if you could complete the reply slip below and return it to your child's class teacher. If we do not receive a reply we will assume that you do not wish to give your consent and no picture or video footage will be taken in which your child appears.

Thank you for your help and cooperation.

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Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ (*Please write full name*)

*(Please tick the appropriate box below)*

I am willing to give consent

I am not willing to give consent

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ (*Parent/Guardian*)

Date \_\_ / \_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

## Ideas to Use – Consent Request Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am currently on the final year of my degree in education studies at \_\_\_\_\_ University and I am carrying out research into the transition between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. As part of my research I would like to gather data from some of the practitioners and parents at your school using questionnaires and some follow-up interviews.

I would like to emphasize that

any participation by practitioners or parents would be entirely voluntary;  
participants would be free to refuse to answer any questions;  
participants would be free to withdraw at any time.

In addition, I would like to assure you that any data gathered would only be used for this project and would be kept confidential throughout, unless information was disclosed which would impact on child safety and welfare in which case I would inform you immediately.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

If you are willing to allow me to carry out my research in your school I would be grateful if you could sign below.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

## **Ideas to Think About – Seeking Consent to Use Audio-visual Materials**

If you plan to use digital images and/or audio-visual materials (e.g. photographs, video cameras, Dictaphones) as part of your research project, you should discuss this intention with the setting where you intend to collect your data. They may already have a policy or set of guidelines that relate to this. If they do, you must respect this and follow their advice. Usually, you would be asked to obtain consent to use such materials. If you are working with children who are under 16 years, then consent also needs to be obtained from gatekeepers/legal guardians. Written consent should be obtained from legal guardians, inviting them to return the form with or without their signed consent. Only when you have this specific written permission should you use any audio-visual materials. If you do not have this then you should not use the material. Any letter that you write to children's legal guardians should be checked with your supervisor(s) and your setting before it is sent out. It would also be good practice to discuss who the letters will be sent to because there may be some individuals that could be put at risk if you were to use materials that included them.



# Chapter 3: Points to Think About

## **Points to Think About – Different Scenarios**

### **Scenario A**

You are interested in the issues facing education, health and social-care practitioners involved in multidisciplinary working and the implementation of inclusion policies and practices. You are focusing on the experiences of staff located in an emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) unit within a primary school. You want to interview the staff to get their impressions and opinions.

### **Scenario B**

You want to find out about the opportunities for, and the incidence of, outdoor play for nursery and reception children in your placement school. You decide you want to interview the children to get their perspectives.

## **Points to Think About – Ethical Issues in Literature-based Dissertations**

Even document- and literature-based dissertations can have an ethical dimension:

- 'Portrayals and accounts of child abuse in popular literature'
- 'Clause 28 and the treatment of gay and lesbian teachers in the British education system'
- 'Representations of black and Asian peoples in education'

## **Points to Think About – Seeking Informed Consent Is not Always Straightforward**

Imagine you want to conduct a series of observations of teachers in the classroom followed up by some short interviews:

- How could you communicate your intentions to prospective participants so that they are clear what they would be consenting to?
- How could consent be given and recorded?
- How could you ensure that the teachers feel able to withdraw at any time?
- It's clear what you get out of this process but what would the teachers get out of it?

Now imagine that the participants you wish to observe are not adult teachers but are instead 4-year-old children. How would this change your answers to the questions above?

## **Points to Think About – Safeguarding Children and/or Vulnerable Groups**

Issues relating to the safety and well-being of vulnerable groups and individuals (safeguarding) may arise in any research context, not just when working with children. This may involve reporting harm or the risk of harm to other professionals which raises issues of the limits of confidentiality in research. These limits should be agreed by you with participants and gatekeepers before embarking on any research. Before starting the research it is good practice to explain to the participant that should you become aware of the risk of harm to a child you will need to pass on relevant information.

The main categories of abuse are physical injury, sexual abuse and exploitation, emotional abuse and neglect. If you see or hear anything that worries you in relation to these categories while conducting your research you should follow the procedures below.

### **Research with children or young people in a formal setting, for example nursery, school or college**

Follow the safeguarding child-protection procedures for that setting.

If you have any concerns speak to the setting's designated person for child protection.

If you need advice or support or in the absence of a designated person for the setting then contact the relevant Child Protection Group via your research supervisor(s).

### **Research with children or young people outside of an educational or related setting: for example family home; sports or youth club**

Do not ask leading questions but allow the child to tell you their concerns and to talk freely.

Do not promise confidentiality as you may need to pass on the information.

Contact the relevant Child Protection Group via your research supervisor(s)

(Kay et al., 2009).

## Points to Think About – Ethical Issues and Putting Appropriate Measures into Action

### Scenario A

You are interested in the issues facing education, health and social-care practitioners involved in multidisciplinary working and the implementation of inclusion policies and practices. You are focusing on the experiences of staff located in an emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) unit within a primary school. You want to interview the staff to get their impressions and opinions.

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| <b>Ethical issue</b>  | <b>Measures</b>  |
|---|--|
| Gaining access to the primary school  | Discussion with the head teacher accompanied by a written letter to be signed  |
| Gaining informed consent from the participants  | Explanation accompanied by a written letter to be signed   |
| Making sure that the school and participants remain anonymous                             | Use of pseudonyms  |
| Making sure that the information given remains confidential                               | Keep data secure and destroy on completion of the project  |
| Think carefully about how to report back to the school (some material could be sensitive) | Decide before the project how you will report back, for example an A4 sized report and select just two or three areas for comment that will not threaten the anonymity of participants |

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## Points to Think About – Cont'd

### Scenario B

You want to find out about the opportunities for, and the incidence of, outdoor play for nursery and reception children in your placement school. You decide you want to interview the children to get their perspectives.

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| <b>Ethical issue</b>  | <b>Measures</b>  |
|---|--|
| Gaining access and permission from gatekeepers                | Discussion with the head teacher/parents/carers accompanied by a written letters to be signed  |
| Gaining informed consent from the children                    | Discussion with the children at their level and use a pictorial leaflet to accompany this. Ask the children each time you work with them if they still want to participate |
| Making sure that the school and participants remain anonymous | Use of pseudonyms  |
| Making sure that the information given remains confidential   | Keep data secure and destroy on completion of the project  |
| Allow children to stop at any point during the interview      | Tune into the children during the interview. Note non-verbal cues and signals, for example their body language   |
| Think about how you will feed back to the children            | Perhaps photographs could be used to summarize what they have said and check that is what they meant   |
| Dealing with possible disclosures from children               | Make it clear to gatekeepers that if safeguarding issues are raised during data collection then these will need to be shared with the relevant staff                       |

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# Chapter 3: Recommended Reading and Further Sources of Information

- Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011, 2nd edition), *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People*. London: SAGE.
- British Psychological Society (BPS), <http://www.bps.org.uk/>
- British Sociological Association (BSA), <https://www.britisoc.co.uk/>
- Grieg, A., Taylor, J. and Mackay, T. (2013, 3rd edition), *Doing Research with Children: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.
- Harcourt, D., Perry, B. and Waller, T. (2011). *Researching Young Children's Perspectives: Debating the Ethics and Dilemmas of Educational Research with Children*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- MacNaughton, G., Rolfe, S. A. and Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Doing Early Childhood Research: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Moss, P. and Dahlberg, G. (2005). *Ethics and Politics in Early Childhood Education*. London: Routledge.
- Oliver, P. (2010). *The Student's Guide to Research Ethics*. 2nd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Sargeant, J. and Harcourt, D. (2012). *Doing Ethical Research with Children*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Social Research Association (SRA), <http://the-sra.org.uk/>
- Takacs, D. (2003), 'How does Your Positionality Bias Your Epistemology?' *The NEA Higher Education Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 27–39.

# Chapter 3: Reflective Tasks

- Think about your own potential research project and what ethical issues may arise?
- Consider the following questions and write down your thoughts to share with your tutor.
- Who will be your participants?
- What type of sampling will you be using?
- How will you get informed consent from your participants?
- How will you ensure individuals cannot be identified and will remain anonymous?
- How will you respect participants rights to privacy and confidentiality?
- Will there be any potential negative consequences to individuals who participate?
- If you are working with children, how will you introduce yourself?
- How will you establish a professional rapport with the children?



# Chapter 3: Summary of Key Points

- Ethical issues need to be considered throughout your research project, not just initially at the design stage.
- Familiarize yourself with the relevant ethical guidelines for your discipline/course.
- Submit a research proposal to your supervisor or ethical committee to safeguard yourself and your participants.
- If your research involves human participants do not approach people or begin to collect data until your work has been given ethical approval.
- Gatekeeper permission is required when working with children and other potentially vulnerable participants.
- Treat all participants in your research with respect and honesty.
- When ensuring anonymity and confidentiality make sure that you have a clear and shared understanding about what has been agreed. Summarize what has been said and do not take anything for granted.
- Make sure that no element of your practice could be seen as deceptive.
- Conducting internet research needs particular consideration in relation to informed consent, privacy, deception and confidentiality.