

EAEE5001 – Research Ethics: A guide to
ethics, procedures and policies
guidebook

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Introduction

This 'Research Ethics: A guide to ethics, procedures and policies guidebook' has been created to provide Early Years practitioners and researchers with guidance on ethics, policies and procedures when carrying out research on children and their families in the Early Years sector. The aim of this guidebook is to provide researchers with the necessary information needed, to make considerations and changes to research being carried out, in relation to the ethics that may cause disruption to research on children and their families.

This guidebook acknowledges outdoor organisations and associations such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011), the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2014) and provides links to organisations such as the NSPCC and relevant research ethics guidance and guidelines.

Responsibilities

As researchers of early years education, they have a responsibility to ensure that the health and welfare of participants is taken into consideration. Researchers need to ensure they build mutual relationships with their participants, that is built on respect and trust.

Researchers should ensure that they respect the privacy of other researchers and should ensure they are aware of the responsibilities they have towards other research members. They need to consider possible harmful consequences that could arise if responsibilities are not shared equally.

A researcher that has looked at the ethical considerations of research is Dr. Rosie Flewitt (2005) who looks at different ethical principles that need considering when carrying out research on and with humans. Dr. Flewitt looks at the following principles as a guideline to considering research; these include informed voluntary consent, do no harm, rights of participants and the right to withdraw. Following on, below are the principles looked at in more depth.

Informed consent in terms of research and participation

Informed consent is an 'ethical and legal requirement in which participants are informed about all aspects of the research, to make decisions regarding the research, giving his/her willing consent to participation', (Nijhawan et al., 2013).

Informed consent can only be given if participants fully understand what the research study is about and what it wishes to find out. Gaining informed consent can be done through the following:

Written Consent - Participants sign a consent form to indicate that they agree to participate in a study.

Short Form Written Consent - Participant signs a shortened, non-English consent document in a language the participant understands.

Waiver of Documentation of Consent (aka "Verbal" or "Online" consent) - Participants consent to be in the study, but do not sign a consent form.

Waiver or Alteration of the Requirements for Informed Consent - The research is conducted without obtaining consent from the participant.

(NorthWestern University, 2015).

The researcher has the responsibility of ensuring that each of these methods for obtaining consent should be suited to each individual involved. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that participants fully understand what the research study is about before consenting to taking part.

Participants under 18 - Child assent

If researchers wish to conduct research with persons under the age of 18, researchers should ensure the participants fully understand the research study and that additional consent is obtained from the parents or carers. The researchers should ensure the research study has in place procedures to minimize risk and potential harm and should ensure they observe children's emotions throughout the study.

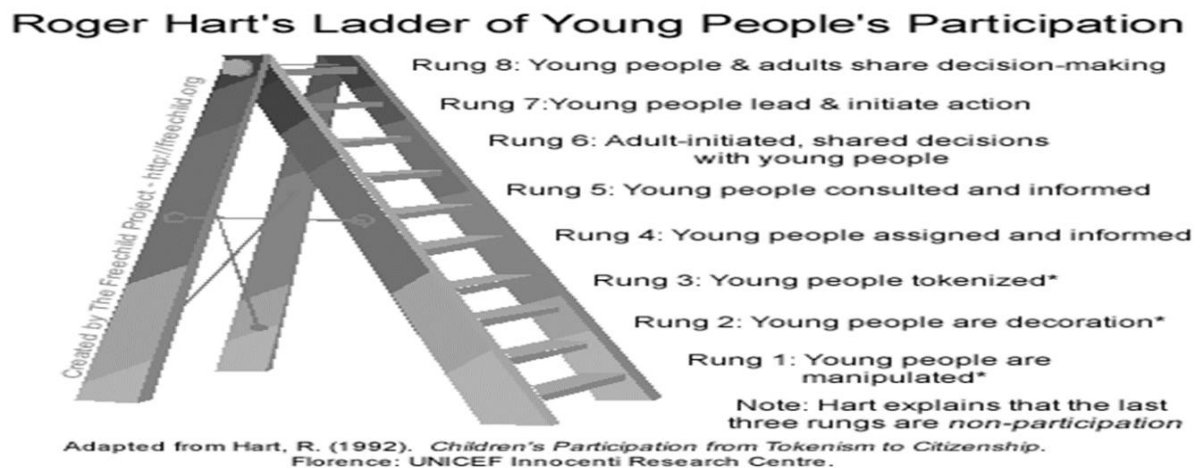
According to UCLA Office of Human Research Protection Program (2016), Child assent should be obtained in a way which is suitable to the age and ability of the child. Child assent may be obtained through a verbal 'yes' or 'no' after an explanation of the study is given to them, or with older children, an assent form, which explains the purpose of the research. Any child consenting to participation, must be informed that they have the option to withdraw at any time, if they wish to do so.

Participatory research

Participatory research is when children or participants take control and responsibility for collecting information to do with a research study. Two approaches that look at participatory research include the Hart's ladder of participation (Hart, 1992) and the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001).

Hart's ladder of participation (1992)

Hart's ladder of participation looks at children's participation in research studies. The rungs of the ladder are used to highlight research studies and the participation of its participants. As you go higher up the ladder, Hart (1992) discusses the steps in which participants become more involved in the research and their voices and opinions are heard and listened to. Below is an image of the ladder so that you can visualize the importance of participatory research.



(Hart, 1992).

Mosaic Approach by Clark and Moss (2001)

The Mosaic Approach sets out a multi-method framework for listening to children during research studies. Clark and Moss (2001) explored the framework as a way of finding out how children think and are listened to. According to the Nursery World website (2001), the approach used research methods such as interviews, photography, mapping, and tours as just some of the ways to explore the ways in which children think.

Researchers have the responsibility of ensuring each of these participatory research methods are embedded into research studies and use a variety of research methods suited to the age and abilities of those involved.

Confidentiality and anonymity

When carrying out research, it is important to respect the privacy and anonymity of participants involved. Researchers have the responsibility of ensuring personal information of participants is confidential and secure. Researchers have the responsibility of ensuring they abide by the Data Protection Act 1998, which states that data is 'kept safe and secure and is not kept for longer than is necessary' (Data Protection Act 1998).

Researchers should do their best to protect the identity of participants and should consider using pseudonyms or code names to protect those involved. Prior to the research study, researchers should inform participants of the length of the study to which they wish to use the information provided by those involved.

Right to withdraw

Researchers should inform participants that they have the right to withdraw their consent if they wish to do so. They also have the right to leave research questions unanswered if they choose to do so.

According to Skanfors, (2009), cited on the NSPCC (2017) website, researchers should be aware of the signs that a child does not want to participate in research. These signs may range from 'say no or show no through non-response, pulling away or ignoring' (Skanfors, 2009).

Being aware of these signs is crucial for ensuring the children feel safe and secure during the research study and allows the researchers the opportunity to give participants the chance to withdraw if they wish to do so.

Researchers must be aware of the participants choice to withdraw from the research study and must take care when persuading them to re-engage with the study. According to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011:6), 'researchers must not use coercion or duress of any form to persuade participants to re-engage with the work'.

The use of coercion and incentives

According to Singer and Couper, (2009), incentives are increasingly used to help motivate participation, particularly when carrying out surveys. Throughout their research, Singer and

Couper (2009), state that money incentives are ‘more effective than non-cash incentives, and that pre-payment is more effective than a promised incentive’ (2009: 50).

Researchers have the responsibility of understanding that the use of incentives may be problematic, in that they could encourage bias data from participants. BERA (2011:7) advises that incentives used to encourage participation must be used appropriately with good sense and must avoid choices that have undesirable affects and cause harm.

Do no harm

According to the American Anthropological Association (2012), a primary ethical obligation to consider when carrying out research is the ‘do no harm’ principle. Do no harm is an important principle to consider ensuring that all research methods and data involved in the study has been thought about and risks to harm have been minimized.

According to the Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) (2013),

‘the most fundamental consideration when undertaking research involving children is deciding whether the research actually needs to be done, if children need to be involved in it, and in what capacity’

(ERIC, 2013:29)

Practitioners have the responsibility of ensuring all participants are kept safe and that all risks are managed and kept to a minimum. The do no harm principle is important for practitioners to consider when carrying out research studies. Practitioners need to consider the benefits of carrying out the research study and assess whether the benefits outweigh the possible risks and challenges that could arise.

Practitioners have the responsibility of assessing the benefits of continuing the study to the risks that arise. If the risks outweigh the benefits, the practitioners may consider stopping the study.

Openness and disclosure

Researchers have the responsibility of being open with the participants about what the research study involves and changes that may occur. Once the research study has ended, researchers

have the responsibility of ensuring the results and data from the study are available to participants if they wish to see it.

If at any time, participants disclose information to the researcher which could result in harm to themselves or others, the researcher has the responsibility to disclose of this information to those that need to know; in research studies with children, the people who may need to know may include the teacher, headteacher, the safeguarding officer and outdoor agencies such as social services.

Researchers should ensure participants are aware of when such information should be disclosed.

Participants rights during research

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) sets out 54 articles that focus on children's rights and aspects of children's lives that highlight what children are entitled to.

Article 3 of the UNCRC (1989), focuses on the '(best interests of the child). The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children' (UNCRC, 1989).

Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989), focuses on

'(respect for the views of the child). Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life'

(UNCRC, 1989).

Researchers have the responsibility of ensuring they are aware of these articles for ensuring research studies are child friendly, allow the child to express themselves freely, allows the child to speak out and be heard and informs the researchers of the rights that children have.

Conclusion

If you require more information on the ethical considerations of research, there is a wide variety of sources available, including those previously mentioned. The British Psychological Society (2017) provides a detailed explanation of the Code of Ethics on the website (www.BPS.org.uk).

Researchers will ensure they follow the guidance set throughout this guidebook to protect the health and wellbeing of the participants involved throughout the research study.

In relation to participants, researchers have the responsibility of respecting the views and opinions and listening to what participants have to say, as laid out in the UNCRC (2001). Researchers have the responsibility of providing participants with the information and data collected from the research study, if participants wish to see.

In relation to the families, researchers have the responsibility of ensuring they develop trusting relationships, which respect the wishes of the family. Researchers have the responsibility of ensuring they follow the BERA, BPS and NSPCC guidelines on research, in terms of collecting data, gaining trust and consent, and understanding the preferences of all individuals.

In relation to communities and outdoor agencies, researchers have the responsibility of following the guidelines set out by BERA, the BPS and should ensure they follow these guidelines, taking into consideration the ethical dilemmas and challenges that could arise as part of the study.

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