

Ethical Guidelines for Early Year's Education and Care Researchers/Practitioners

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Introduction

This handbook is a set of ethical guidelines an early year's practitioner must follow to support their research activities. In this handbook it is explained what ethics is, what rights children have, what voluntary informed consent is and children having the right to withdraw, it talks about confidentiality and disclosure, and will be talking about the mosaic approach.

What is meant by ethics?

Mukherji and Albon (2010) describes ethics as when a person acts in a moral way, doing the right thing. But this handbook is explaining ethics in research for early years, they go on to say, in research for early years, ethics is thinking about the vulnerability of the children involved, doing no harm. A book written by Lankshear and Knobel (2004) would agree with this as it states that when undertaking research in early years, ethics makes sure that the well-being of the children involved is not harmed as a result of the research, they also give examples of what harm is. According to Lankshear and Knobel (2004) harm can be hurting the dignity of the person, if the person's reputation is damaged as a result of the information going out, or if they feel embarrassed about the way they are portrayed in the research, they may feel that the wrong impression is given about them. Harm could affect them socially, and if the person is identified in the research, there may be consequences.

Children's rights

When it comes to children's rights, according to Harcourt et al (2011) says The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989, is an agreement that children and young people are entitled to have as much human rights as an adult and deserves to be treated equally. The UNCRC is internationally accepted and lists all the rights children have, there is fifty-four articles. The fifty-four articles are divided into three sections. The first is Provision rights, this is the right to health, the right to an education, social security, physical care and play. The second, is Protection rights, the right to be protected against abuse, discrimination and injustice. The third is Participation rights. This can be backed up by UNICEF (no date) but however, states that the UNCRC protects all aspects of children's lives, and every child in the world is entitled to this.

The reason the UNCRC is important in this handbook is privacy right to participate as there are articles that link with undertaking research with children that the researcher would have to consider. UNICEF (no date) has listed each article from the UNCRC and the articles that link to researching with children are article two, to not be discriminated against because of their ethnicity, gender, religion or family background. Article sixteen, giving the children the right to privacy, by not disclosing any information about their family life. UNICEF (no date) also includes articles twelve and thirteen, that says children should be allowed to express their thoughts and feelings and should be taken seriously, however, OHCHR (no date) describes Article twelve as a child being able to form their own views opinions and thirteen as the freedom to express their opinions and says their opinions should always be taken seriously but their age and maturity must be considered when making important decisions.

BERA (2011) states that children have the right to privacy and must be made aware of confidentiality and anonymity. This is also backed up by UNICEF (no date) as Article sixteen in the UNCRC is giving the children right to privacy. On the subject of privacy researchers must stick to the guidelines of The Data Protection Act 1998 when storing information gathered, as Gov.uk (no date) states that everyone is responsible. Gov.org (no date) says that The Data Protection Act 1998 controls how people's personal information is used, and there are rules called Data Protection Principles. It is said that the Data Protection Principles are, to use information fairly and lawfully, used for a specific purpose for a limited time, used in a way that is relevant, information is accurate and kept no longer than it is needed.

Voluntary informed consent

Mukherji and Albon (2010) describes voluntary informed consent as, the participants who take part in the research give consent to take part and are given the right information fully understand. They say that the participant must understand the purpose of the research, and how their involvement in the research fits in. The participant must understand what they are being asked to do, for example, if they are being interviewed, how long will the research take, or if it will affect them in their day to day lives. They must understand that they can be kept anonymous if they wish. Mukherji and Albon (2010) also say they have the right to know how the data will be recorded and who will see it. They also say participants have the right to withdraw.

The problem with this as Mukherji and Albon (2010) point out is that children may not fully understand the information given to them, and while children can be very competent, especially if researchers and parents explain things clearly so they can understand, very young children and babies cannot sign a consent form. For that reason, parents and guardians are asked to sign for them. However, Mukherji and Albon (2010) point out that although babies and young children cannot sign a consent form they can still give consent. For example, they may refuse to engage with the researcher, become quiet, or start to get distressed.

However, in an article by Cottle and Alexander (2012) it is proved that informed consent is not always given from children. They carried out a research project to find out if early year's practitioners values and methods of teaching affects children's outcomes in education. In this research they randomly selected seventy participants, and individually observed each of them for half an hour to an hour. They stated that informed consent was given from parents but not the children themselves, instead they watched out for body language and facial expressions and claimed that if at any point the child did not look like they wanted to participate they would stop immediately. The problem with this is that children may not show when they are feeling uncomfortable. It also does not stick to articles twelve and thirteen, in the UNCRC, which UNICEF (no date) and OHCHR (no date) explain that children have the right to the freedom of expressing their opinions.

What should be written in a consent form

<u>PARENT CONSENT FORM</u> Title of event: _____ Background: Hello! My name is I'm here on the behalf of my child who wish for studying at (Organization Name). Therefore, I would like to request approval of my child's admission on for the period of Motive: We're talking with children from (County name) to gather information about their daily activities and to find out what they think about children's rights within The information gathered will be used to create a report to be given to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. This committee wants to make sure that every child is able to live a healthy life. It will review the information and give recommendations to the government of (country name) about how children's rights can be improved. How this works: We would like to ask you some questions in an interview that will take about 15 to 30 minutes. I would like to talk to you alone, but if you would like, you can ask for a parent, guardian or friend to be present at any time. However, I would really appreciate it if you would answer the questions honestly and openly, so that we can find out what young people here in (country name) really think. Your answers are very important to us. If you are not interested in participating in the interview, we also have a workshop that you can participate in. The workshop will last for 1 hour and you will be asked to fill out some activity sheets and participate in discussions with 8 to 10 other children. Precautions: Some of these questions may talk about things that some people find quite personal, or may be difficult to answer. If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable or you don't want to answer them, you do not have to. If any of the questions upset you, or if you would like to talk to someone about the feelings you experienced during the interview, please let me know and I, or another responsible adult, will be happy to take that time with you. Advantages: If you decide to participate in this interview, you will have the chance to help make children's lives in (country name) better. Even though this isn't a quick process, your thoughts and opinions are very valuable. You will also have the opportunity to learn more about your own rights and how you can be an active member in your community. Confirmation: Remember, you do not have to talk about anything you don't want to. This will not affect your ability to receive any of the services that (organization name) provides now or in the future. Disclosure Policy: If you agree to take part in this interview, the things you tell me will be confidential. That means they will be private between you and me. I want to let you know, though, that it is my responsibility to make sure that you are safe. That means if you tell me you are being hurt by another person, you are hurting yourself, or you are planning to hurt another person, I will have to let another responsible adult know so that, depending on your situation, the right actions can be taken to make sure that you are safe.

(Source: azforms.org, no date)

The above picture is an example of the way a consent letter can be sent out to parents. Rochester Institute of Technology (no date) also says how a consent form should be laid out. It explains that in the letter the nature of the research should be stated, as you can see from the example of (Source: A-Z.org, no date) it begins the letter with a title that says motive, and says the reason for the research carried out is to find out what the children's daily activities are and to find out what they think about the children's rights in that setting. In the second paragraph in this image it explains what will happen in the research process if they agree to it, but in that paragraph talks to the children directly and explains their right to ask to be interviewed with a parent or guardians, it also gives an alternative option for children who would not like to be intervened. This is good as Rochester Institute of Technology (no date)

explains that in letters of consent it is important to include information on the children's rights. Rochester Institute of Technology (no date) also say

that there should be a clear understanding in the letter of what the risks are of participating in the research, and how participating will benefit the children.

Right to withdraw

BERA (2011) says that researchers are responsible for making the participant aware that they can withdraw from the research, at any time, whenever they wish, and do not have to give a reason. It is also said by BERA (2011) that researchers should inspect their methods in the research and consider the possibility of the withdrawal down to the methods they use in the research, and change of approach might make the child reconsider. However, researchers must not pressure or use coercion to make the child reconsider, and must accept if the child no longer wants to take part.

Confidentiality and disclosure

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) say when doing the research, the participating children must be assured that confidentiality will be kept throughout the research process. This is to keep any repercussions of the end result of the research to a minimum, to do no harm to the children although it is also said that it is not easy to keep confidentiality as for example, if they are testing the literacy skills of a class, the teacher may recognise hand writing of children, even if their real names are not given.

British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) say that if anything illegal comes to light during the time of research, the researcher will be in a position of having to disclose this while sticking to confidentiality and anonymity. If there is any behaviour that is harmful to a child, or others, the person taking the research must disclose this. Researchers must make participants, and parent or guardians aware of this. However, Roberts-Holmes (2014) says that if children or others are in significant harm then the researcher has a duty to disclose, and says there is a limit to confidentiality. For example, if a child has told the researcher difficult information, linked with abuse, bullying, the child must be told that they will have to tell another adult, usually a key worker, or teacher. Roberts-Holmes (2014) also says that children and young people must be made aware from the start if any difficult information is given, or if anyone is at risk of harm through the behaviour of them or others then confidentiality may not be kept.

This can be backed up by Welsh Government (2007) as it says that under Safeguarding children: Working together under the Children Act 2004 in Chapter fourteen, practitioners have a duty to share information when a child is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected. It states that failing to share information may have serious consequences, such as a child being harmed. In this chapter it is also said that when a practitioner shares information, if there is reason to believe that a child may be at risk of harm, they do not need to gain consent to share this information if the child is told from the start that any difficult information given may have to be disclosed. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2017) says that practitioners must listen to the child's wishes, and should take their feelings into consideration when making decisions but may have to contradict them if they have to.

The Mosaic Approach

An approach that links in with Articles twelve and thirteen of the UNCRC, which has been said the Articles are a child's right to form their own opinions and express them, is the Mosaic Approach. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) say that the Mosaic Approach was created to have a better understanding of how a child's life is through their eyes. It is an educational process between a practitioner and a child. According to Dahlberg and Moss (2005) there are two parts to the Mosaic Approach. The first part is the research process of the child, taking photographs, drawing pictures and taking video recordings. This can help the adult see the world through a child's eyes. The second part is reflecting on the research. This is a good way for teachers to listen to a child, as they are the experts in their own lives. The second part is where they share ideas and come up with an answer. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) say there are benefits to using the Mosaic Approach, such as, it helps shape the environment, for example, making streets a better place, if a child has taken a picture of where they live and is a deprived area, they can come up with new ideas to help this child.

Conclusion

As said in the handbook, there are ethical guidelines an early year's practitioner must follow when undergoing research at an early years setting. Informed consent must be taken from the children and the children's parents, but before any consent is given each person must understand the what the research is for and what is expected of them. It is also said that children have the right to confidentiality, and this must be followed unless there is definite reason to believe a child is at risk.

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