

Conducting Research with Children and Adolescents

2

Design, Methods and Empirical Cases

Julie Tinson

Contents

Introduction	2
Informed Consent	4
(Legal) Requirements	4
Informed Assent or Informed Consent?	5
Informed Dissent	7
Anonymity and Confidentiality	9
Research Ethics Committees	10
Covert Research	13
Power and Moral Obligation	14
Role of Gatekeepers	17
Role of Researcher	18
Disclosure	20
Completing the Ethical Research Process	21
Reflective Questions	22
Checklist	22
References	23



Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

Copyright © Julie Tinson 2009

All rights reserved by Goodfellow Publishers Limited. The text of this publication, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, storage in an information retrieval system, or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.



Design and setting by P.K. McBride

2 Ethical Practice with Children And Adolescents: An Overview And Practical Application

Objectives

- To establish why it is imperative to employ an ethical approach when researching with children
- To identify the key characteristics of an ethical approach including informed consent, assent and dissent
- To consider best practice when employing an ethical approach and to identify the role of those assisting with the research
- To explore the policies and practices of an ethical approach when researching with children
- To summarise the role of the researcher in an ethical project with children.

Introduction

An ethical approach to research conducted with young people is essential given that 'children are particularly susceptible to intrusions of private space and behaviour by researchers' (Homan, 2001). An ethical approach to research design should not be considered retrospectively when the findings are being interpreted or when the study is being written up. The ethical implications of a study with children should be considered before any research is conducted and an ethical approach should be employed throughout the fieldwork and dissemination stages.

This chapter will explore what is meant by an ethical approach and will establish and discuss the key issues including consent, legal requirements, confidentiality, the role of the gatekeeper (those who control access to children) and the role of the researcher. The issues raised here should be carefully deliberated by the researcher whilst preparing for and designing a research project and should be re-examined throughout the duration of the study. An ethical approach to conducting research with young people is complex as 'it is important to recognise that childhood is diverse, with different children and their childhood experiences requiring unique approaches' (Young and Barrett, 2001). Not all young people will have the same lived experience and their understanding of what research is may be varied or non-existent. This chapter considers the ethical implications of researching with a variety of young people at different stages of their social development and the practical application of an ethical approach.

It is important to note at this early stage that research cultures across disciplines are not evenly developed (Munro *et al.*, 2005). It has been recognised by the Department of Health in *The Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care* (2003) that in social care, for example, the arrangements for managing research and the associated ethical issues are not as consistent as those practised in the NHS. University research ethics committees have increasing authority (Scott *et al.*, 2006) although this typically applies to health related proposals. Consultation with respondents (young people) is often bypassed in educational research and it is frequently the case that consent is obtained not from the respondents (children) but those who are taking the decision on their behalf (teachers). As such, 'consent is assumed rather than informed' (Homan, 2001). In other subject areas (e.g. business) ethics committees in universities are still being formed and their role established with the majority of undergraduate and postgraduate dissertation research proposals not being subject to specific consideration by an ethics committee. Whilst guidelines are provided by the research industry bodies (e.g. the Market Research Society) the implementation of these procedures are not necessarily well practised (or indeed well known) amongst students and novices conducting work in this field. This chapter however does not seek to compare and contrast the differences between disciplines and their governance of research. Indeed as Soobrayan (2003: 107) suggests 'there is no single set of rules or practices that govern ethics, truth and politics of a research project'. Where appropriate, references will be made to subject groups but this chapter is specifically designed to illustrate best practice across disciplines and does not purport to be subject or discipline specific.

Ethical research with children in many respects is the same as ethical research conducted with adults (see '*Researching with children*', Chapter 1). It is important to gain respondent consent to research with adults, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, to be sensitive to cultural issues and to be aware of how your research may impact on the respondents. Society, however, continues to see children as vulnerable, incompetent and in need of protection (Christensen, 1998) and this is where ethical research with children differs. This vulnerability could be developmental (and as such is equally applicable to groups who may have learning difficulties), social (e.g. lack of awareness of what should be disclosed), power related (e.g. children are typically expected to conform in a child–adult relationship) or comprehension of what is being expected

Chapter extract

**To buy the full chapter, and for copyright
information, click here**

[http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com/academic-publishing.php?promoCode=&partnerID=&content=story&st](http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com/academic-publishing.php?promoCode=&partnerID=&content=story&storyID=205)

[oryID=205](http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com/academic-publishing.php?promoCode=&partnerID=&content=story&storyID=205)



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recorded or otherwise, without the written permission of Goodfellow Publishers Ltd

All requests should be sent in the first instance to

rights@goodfellowpublishers.com

www.goodfellowpublishers.com