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Ethics of educational research: An agenda for discussion

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Abstract
When most people think of ethics (or morals), they think of rules for distinguishing between right and wrong, such as the Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"), a code of professional conduct like the Hippocratic Oath ("First of all, do no harm"), a religious creed like the Ten Commandments ("Thou Shalt not kill..."), or a wise aphorisms like the sayings of Confucius. This is the most common way of defining "ethics": norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior [1, 2].

Keywords: Ethics of education, Hippocratic Oath, govern behavior

Introduction

Most societies also have legal rules that govern behavior, but ethical norms tend to be broader and more informal than laws. Although most societies use laws to enforce widely accepted moral standards and ethical and legal rules use similar concepts, ethics and law are not the same. An action may be legal but unethical or illegal but ethical. We can also use ethical concepts and principles to criticize, evaluate, propose, or interpret laws. Indeed, in the last century, many social reformers have urged citizens to disobey laws they regarded as immoral or unjust laws. Peaceful civil disobedience is an ethical way of protesting laws or expressing political viewpoints.

The following is a rough and general summary of some ethical principles

Honesty

Strive for honesty in all scientific communications. Honestly report data, results, methods and procedures, and publication status. Do not fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent data. Do not deceive colleagues, research sponsors, or the public.

Objectivity

Strive to avoid bias in experimental design, data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, personnel decisions, grant writing, expert testimony, and other aspects of research where objectivity is expected or required. Avoid or minimize bias or self-deception. Disclose personal or financial interests that may affect research.

Integrity

Keep your promises and agreements; act with sincerity; strive for consistency of thought and action.

Carefulness

Avoid careless errors and negligence; carefully and critically examine your own work and the work of your peers. Keep good records of research activities, such as data collection, research design, and correspondence with agencies or journals.

Openness

Share data, results, ideas, tools, resources. Be open to criticism and new ideas.

Respect for Intellectual Property

Honor patents, copyrights, and other forms of intellectual property. Do not use unpublished data, methods, or results without permission. Give proper acknowledgement or credit for all contributions to research. Never plagiarize.

Confidentiality

Protect confidential communications, such as papers or grants submitted for publication, personnel records, trade or military secrets, and patient records.

Responsible Publication

Publish in order to advance research and scholarship, not to advance just your own career. Avoid wasteful and duplicative publication.

Responsible Mentoring

Help to educate, mentor, and advise students. Promote their welfare and allow them to make their own decisions.

Respect for colleagues

Respect your colleagues and treat them fairly.

Social Responsibility

Strive to promote social good and prevent or mitigate social harms through research, public education, and advocacy.

Non-Discrimination

Avoid discrimination against colleagues or students on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, or other factors not related to scientific competence and integrity.

Competence
Maintain and improve your own professional competence and expertise through lifelong education and learning; take steps to promote competence in science as a whole.

Legality
Know and obey relevant laws and institutional and governmental policies.

Animal Care
Show proper respect and care for animals when using them in research. Do not conduct unnecessary or poorly designed animal experiments.

Human Subjects Protection
When conducting research on human subjects minimize harms and risks and maximize benefits; respect human dignity, privacy, and autonomy; take special precautions with vulnerable populations; and strive to distribute the benefits and burdens of research fairly [3].

Definitions
'Research' is defined as any form of disciplined inquiry that aims to contribute to a body of knowledge or theory 'Research ethics' refers to the moral principles guiding research, from its inception through to its completion and publication of results and beyond – for example the curation of data and physical samples after the research has been published [4].
'Ethics embody individual and communal codes of conduct based upon adherence to a set of principles which may be explicit and codified or implicit, and which may be abstract and impersonal or concrete and personal' [5].
'Risk' to participants in research: The potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort or stress to human participants that a research project might generate. In social science research this includes risks to a subject's:
Personal social standing, privacy, personal values and beliefs, including the adverse effects (to them) of revealing information that relates to illegal, sexual, or deviant behaviour.

Their links to family and the wider community,
Their position in occupational settings,

Research which carries no physical risk can be disruptive and damaging to research subjects either as individuals or as whole communities or categories of people,
Risks for participants: Ethical issues can arise at any stage of a research project-

The nature of the project itself;
The context of the research;
Procedures adopted;
Methods of data collection;
Nature of the participants;
The type of data collected;

What is done with the data and how it is disseminated [6].

When there is more than minimal risk to participants
Research involving
Vulnerable groups – e.g. children and young people, those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment, or individuals in a dependent relationship
Sensitive topics – e.g. participants' illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, their gender or ethnic status
where permission of a gatekeeper is normally required for initial access to members – e.g. ethnic or cultural groups, members of the armed forces or inmates and other members of custodial or health and welfare institutions
Deception or research conducted without participants' full and informed consent at the time the study is started
Access to records of personal or confidential information, including genetic or other biological information
Inducing psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation or causing more than minimal pain
Intrusive interventions – e.g. the administration of drugs or other substances, vigorous physical exercise, that participants would not normally encounter in their everyday life

Creation ethical frameworks for educational research
Ethical approaches to research do not reduce the validity and reliability of it but highlight the contextual complexities within which it is carried out.
To be ethical, a research project needs to be designed to create trustworthy (valid) outcomes if it is to be believed to be pursuing truth.
The generalisability of findings from one situation to another is dependent on research being carried out ethically. Trying to answer questions from an inappropriate sample or data set, or choosing an inappropriate unit of analysis, may lead to misleading findings, undermining their transferability [7].

Key Principles for Ethical research
Research should be designed, reviewed, and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality
Research staff and subjects must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved, including any risks or threats to anonymity that might arise during and beyond the project itself and how these might be minimised or avoided.. Gaining participants' informed consent to participation means researchers giving prospective participants as much information as possible about the project so that they can make an informed decision on their possible involvement.
The confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected
Research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion. They should be informed of their right to refuse to participate or withdraw from an investigation. In cases where research involves vulnerable groups such as children or adults with learning difficulties, the issue of informed consent may need to be managed through proxies who should be either those with a duty of care or who can provide disinterested independent approval. In the case of children, researchers cannot expect parents alone to provide disinterested approval on their children's behalf
Harm to research participants must be avoided, including their wider family, kin and community. Research designs should consider potential harm to respondent's organisations or businesses.
There is no simple rule for getting right the balance between potential risks to participants and benefits of the research to a wider community.

There may be exceptional circumstances in some fields of research when, with the consent of the participants, some short-term and minimal degree of harm which causes no lasting effects or prolonged personal discomfort might be acceptable
The independence and impartiality of researchers must be clear and any conflicts of interest must be explicit.
Research should be conducted so as to ensure the professional integrity of its design, the generation and analysis of data, and the publication of results, while the direct and indirect contributions of colleagues, collaborators and others should also be acknowledged.
Codifying Ethical principles and moral practices for educational research
Definitions of professional ethical practice are often enshrined in codes to guide the decisions of researchers. Codes have been developed by the British Psychological Society (1993), the British Sociological Association (1992), the British Educational Research Association (2004), the British Association for Applied Linguistics (1994). Moral and ethical codes apply equally to quantitative research methods as to research based on qualitative data. Jones (2000) points out the importance of the code devised by the American Statistical Association (1998).
University ethics committees police such codes to ensure that research carried out under their auspices does not breach them.

To implement these principle
The responsibility for the conduct of the research in line with the relevant principles rests with the principle investigator (PI) The responsibility for ensuring that research is subject to appropriate ethical review, approval and monitoring lies with the institution which employs the researchers Institutions should have clear transparent, appropriate and effective procedures in place for ethical approval whenever it is necessary Once risks have been identified, researchers should discuss these with research participants in order to secure proper informed consent. However informed consent may be impracticable or meaningless in some research, such as research on crowd behaviour; or may be contrary to the research design, as is often the case in psychological experiments where consent would compromise the objective of the research. In some circumstances – such as users of illegal drugs – written consent might also create unnecessary risks for the research subjects.

Reducing risks to participants practically
This involves protecting the rights of the participants:
Maintaining privacy,
Guaranteeing anonymity,
Guaranteeing confidentiality,
Avoiding harm, betrayal, deception.

Grounds for informed consent
Participants must be in a position or old enough to understand the choice that they are making
Disclosure of purposes of research;
Disclosure of any risks to participants;
A provision allowing participants to withdraw at any time.
Aims of the research
Scientific background of the research
Study design

Participants – who (inclusion and exclusion criteria), how many, how potential participants are identified and recruited, vulnerable groups
Methods of data collection
Methods of data analysis
Response to any conditions of use set by secondary data providers Principal investigator's summary of potential ethical issues and how they will be addressed
Benefits to research participants or third parties
Risks to participants or third parties
Risks to researchers

Procedures for informed consent – information provided and methods of documenting initial and continuing consent
Expected outcomes, impacts and benefits of research
Dissemination (and feedback to participants where appropriate) Measures take to ensure confidentiality, privacy and data protection There are many other activities that the government does not define as "misconduct" but which are still regarded by most researchers as unethical. Publishing the same paper in two different journals without telling the editors Submitting the same paper to different journals without telling the editors Not informing a collaborator of your intent to file a patent in order to make sure that you are the sole inventor Including a colleague as an author on a paper in return for a favor even though the colleague did not make a serious contribution to the paper
Discussing with your colleagues confidential data from a paper that you are reviewing for a journal Using data, ideas, or methods you learn about while reviewing a grant or a papers without permission Trimming outliers from a data set without discussing your reasons in paper Using an inappropriate statistical technique in order to enhance the significance of your research Bypassing the peer review process and announcing your results through a press conference without giving peers adequate information to review your work
Conducting a review of the literature that fails to acknowledge the contributions of other people in the field or relevant prior work Stretching the truth on a grant application in order to convince reviewers that your project will make a significant contribution to the field Stretching the truth on a job application or curriculum vita Living the same research project to two graduate students in order to see who can do it the fastest Overworking, neglecting, or exploiting graduate or post-doctoral students Failing to keep good research records
Failing to maintain research data for a reasonable period of time Making derogatory comments and personal attacks in your review of author's submission Promising a student a better grade for sexual favors Using a racist epithet in the laboratory Making significant deviations from the research protocol approved by your institution's Animal Care and Use Committee or Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research without telling the committee or the board
Not reporting an adverse event in a human research experiment

Wasting animals in research
Exposing students and staff to biological risks in violation of your institution's biosafety rules
Sabotaging someone's work
Stealing supplies, books, or data
Rigging an experiment so you know how it will turn out

Making unauthorized copies of data, papers, or computer programs
Deliberately overestimating the clinical significance of a new drug in order to obtain economic benefits

Conclusion

According to the "stressful" or "imperfect" environment theory, misconduct occurs because various institutional pressures, incentives, and constraints encourage people to commit misconduct, such as pressures to publish or obtain grants or contracts, career ambitions, the pursuit of profit or fame, poor supervision of students and trainees, and poor oversight of researchers.[8] Moreover, defenders of the stressful environment theory point out that science's peer review system is far from perfect and that it is relatively easy to cheat the system. Erroneous or fraudulent research often enters the public record without being detected for years. Misconduct probably results from environmental and individual causes, i.e. when people who are morally weak, ignorant, or insensitive are placed in stressful or imperfect environments. In any case, a course in research ethics can be useful in helping to prevent deviations from norms even if it does not prevent misconduct. Education in research ethics is can help people get a better understanding of ethical standards, policies, and issues and improve ethical judgment and decision making.

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