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'Is that OK?' Conundrums of developing as an ethical researcher

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#### Ethical research is bigger than a completed ethics form...

- A pervasive consideration of ethical issues is a fundamental part of research integrity (Fishman, 2012)
- Ethical research takes place through the skills and considerations of researchers, the large and small decisions made and the principles that guide their work (Sachs, 2007).
- Ethical practice is ensured through constant awareness of our own approach as researchers (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004)
- and, like all ways of working, is shaped by the advice and guidance we get from others (Gray & Jordan, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2007): Researchers working alone have an even greater need for review precisely because they are not surrounded by other researchers who can give guidance or ask probing questions.
- *Ethical review* in the UK often takes place within a well-developed framework: <u>British Psychological</u> <u>Society</u> (2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct,* and (2014) *Code of Human Research Ethics* or

British Educational Research Association (2011) Ethical Guidelines or

British Sociological Association (2002) Statement of Ethical Practice

### Standard ethical issues



- Researcher capability and 'trustworthiness', DBS
- Basis for research: often, public benefit. No net harm to participants and preferably, benefit (cost/benefit ratio)
- It is beneficial for students to reflect on how they learn (Coulson and Harvey, 2012) and to know their voice is heard (Cook-Sather, 2006);
- It is also anticipated that teachers who participate will gain from deep reflection on their practice with an experienced other (Baker and Johnson 1998) and that the department, as a professional community, will develop from conversations around teachers' practice (Peng 2007).
- (Appropriately) informed, competent voluntary consent, including from gatekeepers
- Anonymity/pseudonymity
- Confidentiality and limits to that
- Right to withdraw without prejudice
- Duty of care to participants, particularly more vulnerable, including power imbalances
- Data handling and storage: GDPR

# Beyond that



- Responsibility to one's profession and to the research community
- Continuing quality of the research enactment, analysis, interpretation: validity, reliability, trustworthiness... participant validation? (Anfara et al., 2002; Brocke-Utne, 1996)
- Ongoing consideration of equity, diversity and inclusion
- Issues related to being an insider/outsider (Mercer, 2007), e.g....
- Issues related to sponsors, e.g....
- Issues related to reporting and publication, including benefits to participants
- Issues arising from (moves to/from) online research
- Continual sensitivity to ethical implications of choices made and changing situations
- Preparedness to stop research (which has its own ethical implications)
- An ethical approach is about values: the needs of participants and others 'trump' the needs of the researcher and the research
- I'll situate these challenges in real 'classroom-close' contexts in England.....

But what do I do if in observation....

- The teacher makes a procedural or factual mathematical error?
- There is wider mis-teaching ('any straight line graph tells you they are proportional', followed by a variety of linear and non-linear graphs that class are asked to identify as representing proportional or non-proportional relationships)?
- There is very serious teacher weakness, or bullying, or homophobic or racist language, or....?



#### What if...

 You're planning action research in your own classroom, and it's taken about six weeks to arrange for particular technical support and equipment to be available so as to run an intervention. Two girls arrive at the lesson clearly distraught after a break 'incident' when their friend was injured and is now awaiting an ambulance.



#### E-surveys



- My participants have already agreed to take part in an e-survey, as part of a longitudinal study. I sent out the url and a fortnight later, sent a politely-phrased reminder. Is it ethical to send a further reminder? And another?
- How would your answers change if your were 'cold-calling' colleagues for participation in a survey? How many follow-up requests would be reasonable?
- Is it ever ethical to use e-surveys with school-age students? If so, what ages, and under what conditions?

## What if....





A class teacher in a longitudinal classroom-based study involving two classes, and their teachers, is taken seriously and chronically ill. Is it ethical to ask the substitute teacher to take part, so as to give continuity to the study?



Should you continue to attempt email communication with the teacher who is ill?

#### What if....



- You've been welcomed into a primary school to do some fieldwork, and at the end of the day you go to the Head's office to thank her for the school's hospitality. You find she's very much the worse for alcoholic wear. What should you do?
- Would your response change if that were a secondary school? A university or another employer?

#### What if....



• In a year 12 focus group in an 11-18 school, GCSE resit students allege that they were given teacher assistance (beyond SEN support) during year 11 GCSE examinations?

• Ethical issues are often grey, rather than black and white, and the balance of ethical solution is contextual- and culturally- dependent

# Modifying research in CV-19 times



- Moving online, pausing or re-starting research
- The balance of ethical considerations has changed
- CV-19 considerations re the risks to researcher and researched
- Issues around collecting data at a distance, including audit trail
- Advice and possibilities are changing, and decisions need frequent review. Support available from institutions, e.g.
- <u>https://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/integrity/ethics/research-human-participants/guidance-research-and-ethical-approval-light-covid-19-pandemic</u>

#### References

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- Brock-Utne, B. (1996) Reliability and validity in qualitative research within education in Africa. *International Review of Education*, 42 (6), 6-5-621.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006) Sound, Presence, and Power: "Student Voice" in Educational Research and Reform *Curriculum Inquiry*, *36*(4), 359–390.
- Fishman, T. (ed.) (2012). *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity*. International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI). <u>https://www.academicintegrity.org/wp-</u> content/uploads/2017/12/Fundamental-Values-2014.pdf
- Mercer, J. (2007) The Challenges of insider research in educational institutions: wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas Oxford Review of Education, 33(1), 1-17, at <u>https://lra.le.ac.uk/bitstream/2381/4677/1/Justine Mercer Final Draft Insider Research Paper.pdf</u>
- Peng, A. (2007) Knowledge growth of mathematics teachers during professional activity based on the task of lesson explaining *J Math Teacher Educ 10*, 289–299

Thank you for listening



# Questions??

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Towards trustworthiness: Authenticity	<ul> <li>Subject- and phase-specific expertise of the external researchers, together with E&amp;R team, revisiting design, approach and emerging data and analysis at least termly.</li> <li>All research questions, approaches to data collection and tools developed, evaluated and probed by the research team in conjunction with the funder's product leads, and reported in funder publications.</li> <li>Deliberate cultivation of reflexivity in research team.</li> <li>Shared approaches to data collection established across research team by at least termly meetings and training, by shared evaluation of a small number of emergent interview recordings in each phase, and by 'shadowing' of about 10% of school visits by either the external lead researcher or the funder Research lead.</li> <li>Curriculum and assessment material developments emerging as valued, either adopted by product teams, or edited with reasons. Such responses communicated to participants.</li> <li>Policy-level, or policy-dependent findings communicated to appropriate national curriculum and assessment authorities.</li> </ul>
Credibility	<ul> <li>Prolonged engagement with participant centres (at least termly over at least two years)</li> <li>Methodological triangulation across observations/interviews/focus groups. Cross-researcher triangulation of coding and emergent interpretations</li> <li>Importantly for audit and research integrity purposes, all data were available to external research lead no later than to Pearson team members.</li> <li>(Anonymised) accounts usually offered to teacher participants to validate; proactive seeking out of participants where interpretation was problematic</li> </ul>
Transferability	<ul> <li>Purposive sampling as analysed, with 'thick description' provided in full reports.</li> <li>Limits to transferability as identified, though sample was representative as described.</li> <li>Arguments about transferability on a wider scale rest on pervasiveness of use of Pearson materials and assessments, and communicated within those parameters.</li> </ul>
Dependability	<ul> <li>All data coded, then at least 10% of all data re-coded independently.</li> <li>Cross-researcher triangulation of coding and emergent interpretations at multiple scales.</li> </ul>
Confirmability	<ul> <li>Methodology, including interpretation, validated at a high level by lead researcher's institutional research group, and with interested others in a variety of conference fora.</li> <li>Lead researcher audit of ~10% sample of transcription and initial coding. Funder audit of subset of whole data trail and curation of study data.</li> </ul>