

# Ethics in TEL Research

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## Content of Presentation

- ☯ Educational research contexts
- ☯ Principles and guidelines
- ☯ Bureaucratic burden, intrusion, disruption, harm
- ☯ Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality
- ☯ Disclosure, collateral harm
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## Educational Research Contexts

- ☯ Diverse and complex
- ☯ Research may be conducted in any social context including formal educational settings, and industrial, commercial and professional situations or informal contexts (such as parent-child interaction, self-help groups or local communities). ESRC (2005a) F5 Education para 1.1
- ☯ Ethical considerations

# Principles and Guidelines

## ☯ Major international ethics developments:

☯ Nuremburg Code (1947)

☯ Helsinki Declaration (1964)

☯ Belmont Report (1978)

☯ [Canadian] Tri-Council Policy Statement (1998)

☯ ESRC Research Ethics Framework (2005b)

☯ Professional/Academic Associations: AERA,  
APA, BPS, BSA ...

☯ BERA ...

# BERA Guidelines

... all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for:

- ☯ The person
- ☯ Knowledge
- ☯ Democratic values
- ☯ The quality of educational research
- ☯ Academic freedom [6] (BERA, 2004)

## Bureaucratic Burden, Intrusion, Disruption, Harm

Researchers must:

- ☯ ... recognize that participants may experience distress or discomfort in the research process [18] (BERA, 2004)
- ☯ ... take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and to put them at their ease [18] (BERA, 2004)

## Bureaucratic Burden, Intrusion, Disruption, Harm

Researchers must:

- ☯ ... desist immediately from any actions, ensuing from the research process, that cause emotional or other harm [18] (BERA, 2004)
- ☯ ... seek to minimize the impact of their research on the normal working and workloads of participants. [19] (BERA, 2004)

## Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

- ☯ The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research.
- ☯ ... Researchers must ... accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, unless they or their guardians or responsible others, specifically and willingly waive that right.
- ☯ In such circumstances it is in the researchers' interests to have such a waiver in writing. [23] (BERA, 2004)



## Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity

- ☯ “In UK law, as it stands today, there exists a 'duty of confidentiality' ...” and
- ☯ “Disclosure of information subject to such confidentiality agreement would constitute a breach of confidentiality and possibly a breach of contract” (UKDA, 2009)
- ☯ Exceptions: police investigations, court proceedings
- ☯ “Personal data should never be disclosed from research information, unless a respondent has given specific consent to do so, ideally in writing”. (UKDA, 2009)



## Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

### Researchers:

☯... must comply with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data as set down by the Data Protection Act (1998) and any subsequent similar acts [24] (BERA, 2004)

☯... must have permission to disclose personal information to third parties [24] (BERA, 2004)



# Data Protection Act Principles

(UK Information Commissioner, 2005)

Data must :

- ☯ ... be fairly and lawfully processed
- ☯ ... be processed for limited purposes
- ☯ ... be adequate, relevant and not excessive
- ☯ ... be accurate
- ☯ ... not be kept for longer than is necessary
- ☯ ... be processed in line with your rights
- ☯ ... be secure
- ☯ ... not be transferred to countries without adequate protection.

## Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

- ☯ In essence, the Data Protection Act (1998) holds that people are entitled to know:
  - ☯ how and why their personal data is being stored
  - ☯ to what uses it is being put and
  - ☯ to whom it may be made available. [24] (BERA, 2004)

# Disclosure

- ☯ ... the decision to override agreements on confidentiality and anonymity must be taken after careful and thorough deliberation.
- ☯ ... it is in the researchers' interests to make contemporaneous notes on decisions and the reasoning behind them. [28] (BERA, 2004)

# Disclosure of Information from Research Processes

- ☯ Collateral harm:
  - ☯ criminal proceedings
  - ☯ disadvantage, unequal treatment
  - ☯ embarrassment, discomfort

# Disadvantage, Unequal Treatment

- ☯ A group of students is given a smart phone each - in a project designed to investigate the potential of 'anywhere, anytime' access to the internet as a means of improving learning outcomes.
- ☯ Another group of students with similar personal and ability profiles is recruited to provide a control group.
- ☯ Both groups are involved in the same teaching, learning and assessment contexts, focused on specific project work, at the same time and in the same location.

# Disadvantage, Unequal Treatment

- ☯ What are some of the common justifications offered for these quasi-experimental and similar randomized control trials?
- ☯ What design possibilities are there for reducing the perceived disadvantages?



# Consent

Voluntary informed consent:

- ☯ Is considered the norm for the conduct of research [12] (BERA, 2004)
- ☯ The condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway [10] (BERA, 2004)

# Voluntary Informed Consent

☯ No duress

☯ Incentives?

☯ Aware of right to withdraw:

☯ ... at any time

☯ ... for any reason

☯ Full agreement to participate

☯ Full understanding of implications of participation

# Voluntary Informed Consent

- ☯ School students are taking part in an on-line discussion forum as part of a collaborative citizenship project on 'child soldiers'.
- ☯ They have consented to their discourse being analysed as one aspect of the project's aspiration to identify facilitating and inhibiting factors to this form of collaborative learning.
- ☯ Consider the excerpts provided (separate handout).

# Voluntary Informed Consent

- ☯ Did the students fully appreciate that their teachers would be monitoring their discussions?
- ☯ Did they expect to get into trouble by participating in the research?
- ☯ How would the fall-out from the incident be expected to affect the data quality subsequently?

# Consent

Is required for everything:

- ☯ Participation
- ☯ Collection of data
- ☯ Use of data
- ☯ Reporting, publication, dissemination
- ☯ Second order usage

# Consent

☯ Informed active consent

☯ Opt in

☯ Written confirmation of participation

☯ Passive (Implied) 'consent'

☯ Assumed opting in

☯ by not opting out!

☯ i.e. no 'refusal' form returned

☯ Is this consent?

# Active Informed Consent

- ☯ Criticisms:
  - ☯ Can be difficult to obtain
  - ☯ Perhaps more costly
  - ☯ 'Schoolbag' phenomenon
  - ☯ Potential for biased samples through under-representation
  - ☯ Potential for smaller samples

# 'Pessimistic' Model of Informed Active Consent (Crow et al, 2006)

- ☯ Can have adverse effect on participation rates
- ☯ Process of formal 'informing' can undermine rapport
- ☯ Quality of data undermined by process of informing



# Passive 'Consent'

## - Participation is Assumed

For example: Non-return of Opt-Out Reply

☯ Criticism: it is not consent

☯ The advantages:

- ☯ More convenient!

- ☯ Larger samples

- ☯ Wider representativeness

☯ But ...

## 'Optimistic' Model of Informed Active Consent (Crow et al, 2006)

- ☯ Time awaiting ethical approval enables better researcher preparation and reflection
- ☯ Good information in advance focuses participants better
- ☯ Trust can enhance data quality
- ☯ Trust can have positive effect on participation rates

# Deception

Researchers must:

- ☯ ... avoid deception or subterfuge unless their research design specifically requires it to ensure that the appropriate data is collected or that the welfare of the researchers is not put in jeopardy.
- ☯ Decisions to use deception or subterfuge in research must be the subject of full deliberation and subsequent disclosure in reporting. [12] (BERA, 2004)

# Deception

Covert research using deception or subterfuge:

☯ Rare

☯ Special circumstances

☯ Subsequent disclosure and seeking of post-hoc consent

☯ Ethical approval

☯ But ...

☯ ... Consent by deception is not consent at all!

# Wizard of Oz Systems Routine Deception?

- ☯ Researching HCI contexts: WoZ approaches
- ☯ 'Prior to the task, the users are informed that they are interacting with a spoken dialogue system that will give them instructions to set up the connection. However, their utterances are intercepted by a human wizard'. (Janarthanam and Lemon, 2009)
- ☯ Ethical considerations?

# Wizard of Oz Systems Routine Deception?

- ☯ A hands-on trial is used to identify how best to support users in a task to set up a broadband system on a home computer.
- ☯ The participants are told that they are interacting with a spoken dialogue system that will guide them through the task by issuing instructions and responding to questions.
- ☯ However, the participants' inputs are intercepted and coded by a human 'wizard, enabling the speech system to provide an appropriate response.

# Wizard of Oz Systems Routine Deception?

- ☯ What are the benefits of conducting the research in this manner?
- ☯ What 'harm' is there in it?
- ☯ Do the projected benefits justify deceiving the participants?
- ☯ Is it actually necessary to deceive the participants?

# Consent Summary

- ☯ The norm: Informed active voluntary consent?
- ☯ The vehicle: Openness?
- ☯ The basis: Trust?
- ☯ The result: High quality data and research?
- ☯ How do you feel?



## Finally ...

- ☯ ... is it possible to have rules governing decisions about ethics in educational research?
- ☯ ... Yes but ...
- ☯ “All the pleasure in life is in general ideas but all the use of life is in specific solutions – which cannot be reached through generalities, any more than a picture can be painted by knowing some rules of method. They are reached by insight, tact and knowledge.” (Holmes, 1899)

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