Ethics in educational research assignment

Education

The relationship between ethics and research is one of the most important problems faced by educational researchers. The demand for accountability and ethical responsibility in research is valid and has become irresistible, as instances to the contrary have resulted in impaired research opportunities, infringement on the autonomy of peoples studied, and in some instances harm to research participants (Howe & Moses, 2002). Many education associations have their own codes of ethics to guide members' research activity.

As a professional educators' association, the AERA documents the initiative involved in educating researchers to produce research of high integrity and quality with respect to human research protections. Ethical principles are vital for educational researchers because important ethical issues frequently arise in their work. This set of principles is intended to heighten awareness of the ethical issues that face these researchers and to offer them workable guidelines to help resolve these issues.

It encourages educational researchers to educate themselves in this area, and to exercise their own good judgment. It is also intended to provide protection for researchers who come under pressure to act in ways contrary to their professional ethics (American Educational Research Association, 1991). Taken in conjunction with typical codes of research ethics, linking teaching and research ethics is helpful in identifying criteria and principles to be met by teacher researchers when conducting formal investigations in their classroom or school (Copeland, 2003).

These include having a valid research design, their responsibilities to the research participants, their responsibilities to the students, and using data with integrity. Additionally, educators collect and analyze data to guide them in making decisions to help improve the success of the students and their schools. Poorly designed research wastes participants' time and often leads to their refusal to participate in any other research studies.

Smith (2000) reminds us that faulty research is not only a waste of time and money but cannot be conceived of as being ethical because it does not contribute to the well-being of the participants. Related to this criterion of validity is the need for the researcher to be able to do the proposed research. She or he must have, or be able to develop within the time frame of the study, the necessary skills for completing the study effectively. In their work, educational researchers' paramount responsibility is to their research participants.

When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Researchers must do everything in their power to protect their physical, social, and psychological welfare and to honor their dignity and privacy. Where research involves the acquisition of material and information transferred on the assumption of trust between persons, it is obvious that the rights, interests, and sensitivities of those persons must be safeguarded. The aims of the investigation should be communicated as well as possible to research participants.

Research participants have a right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected both where it has been promised explicitly and where no clear

understanding to the contrary has been reached. The anticipated consequences of research should be communicated as fully as possible to the individuals and groups likely to be affected (Cornett & Chase, 2006) In relation with students, teachers should be candid, fair, non-exploitative, and committed to their welfare and academic progress. Honesty is the essential quality of a good teacher, neutrality is not.

Beyond honest teaching, educational researchers as teachers have ethical responsibilities in selection, instruction in ethics, career counseling, academic supervision, evaluation, compensation, and placement. Teachers should alert students to the ethical problems of research and discourage them from participating in projects employing questionable ethical standards. This should include providing them with information and discussions to protect them from unethical pressures and enticements emanating from possible sponsors, as well as helping to find acceptable alternatives.

Teachers should acknowledge in print the student assistance used in their own publications; give appropriate credit when student research is used in publication; encourage and assist in publication of worthy student papers; and compensate students justly for the use of their time, energy, and intelligence in research and teaching (Avis, 2005). Teachers have the awesome privilege to influence the attitude of their students toward research by inculcating fundamental ethical values. These values include fairness, honesty, respect, and trust.

Because of their positions of power, teachers have a great responsibility for the moral development of their students. As teachers plan their courses and individual class sessions, they should think not only about the knowledge and skills that they want their students to acquire, but also the values that they want them to develop, for teachers' course policies and classroom conduct will convey values implicitly whether or not they are aware of them. Students will act in ways they have been shown to act.

Students will treat others in ways they have been treated (Cornett & Chase, 2006). The Code of Ethics states that, " In describing or reporting their … research … [researchers] do not make statements that are false, misleading, or deceptive" (American Educational Research Association, 1991). The misuse of statistical procedures can result in inaccurate and misleading results. While the inaccuracy of interpretations resulting from the misuse of statistical procedures is almost certainly not intentional, the fact remains that the assertions made may simply be false.

Improper usage of statistical procedures can turn even the most competently designed experiment into a poor-quality research study, undermining the ethical justification for spending time and money on the research. In turn, this serves to damage the integrity of the field of research as a whole (House & Howe, 2001). Furthermore, the Code of Ethics states that, " If researchers discover significant errors in their published data, they take reasonable steps to correct such errors in a correction, retraction, erratum, or other appropriate publication means" (AERA, 1991).

Upon discovering errors in their previously published work, researchers are therefore bound to make attempts to correct the errors. As applied to the present problem, discovered errors in statistical analyses should be re-analyzed appropriately, with the subsequent results made available to the research community (Ball, 2004). In recent years, the education community has witnessed increased interest in data-driven decision making, making it a mantra of educators from the central office, to the school, to the classroom.

Data-driven decision making in education refers to teachers, principals, and administrators systematically collecting and analyzing various types of data, including input, process, outcome and satisfaction data, to guide a range of decisions to help improve the success of students and schools. Achievement test data, in particular, play a prominent role in federal and state accountability policies. Implicit in these policies and others is a belief that data are important sources of information to guide improvement at all levels of the education system and to hold individuals nd groups accountable. New state and local test results are adding to the data on student performance that teachers regularly collect via classroom assessments, observations, and assignments. As a result, data are becoming more abundant at the state, district, and school levels (Cromey, 2000). There are many ways in which multiple types of data are being used in schools and districts by synthesizing findings from recent research conducted by educational researchers.

An analysis conducted by Cromey (2000) suggests that certain types of decisions are more likely to be informed by data than others. Across studies, he found that district and school staff often use data, primarily test scores, to set improvement goals and targets. Driven in large part by state and federal

requirements to create school improvement plans, majorities of superintendents and principals reported using state test data to identify areas for improvement and to target instructional strategies.

Educational researchers who are knowledgeable about, concerned with, and sensitive to issues of ethics and responsibility are the best safeguard against the abuse of the code of ethics. These principles emphasize both final decisions and the process by which they are made. Ethical decisions are made by people who are educated about ethical issues and principles, carefully consider alternatives, exercise judgment, and accept responsibility for their choices. These principles are dedicated to aiding researchers in making ethical decisions (Ball, 2004).

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of skilled researchers to educate future researchers on ways to design valid research, use data with integrity, and to model a researcher’s responsibilities to their research participants and to their students. As a result, educators can use the data collected by educational researchers to improve numerous aspects of their schools. References American Educational Research Association. (1991). Proposed Ethical Standards for AERA. Educational Researcher, 20(9), 31-35. Avis, J. (2005).

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