

# Objectivity



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Objectivity plays a crucial role in both the formation and conducting of any research project, though the need for such objectivity may increase when children are the primary focus. The ideology of early childhood research existing solely for the benefit of children and families is encouraging, however, it is not always accurate. In a world where social exclusion, basic human motivation and the necessity for standardized ethics are prevalent, can we in fact achieve complete objectivity in early childhood research?

Throughout the following we will not only seek to answer this question, but we will pose possible solutions to this controversial matter. Social Exclusion, in my opinion, is the leading contributor of prejudicial research. To paraphrase, early childhood research is defined as objectively obtaining and applying essential knowledge that will ultimately benefit young children and families as it pertains to development and learning. (NAEYC, n. d. ) That being said how is it possible to foster objective results when entire classes of children, such as those with disabilities are often excluded?

The theory of Social Inclusion suggests that in order to achieve a healthy society in terms of development, we must first address the need for the removal of barriers and social norms. In light of this theory, researchers must strive to value differences, regardless of race, gender, disability, religion or culture. (Friendly & Lero 2000, pp. 9-11) By employing methods such as epistemological reflexivity, the researcher can more objectively analyze his/her definition of the research, limitations, data construction, methodologies and alternatives that may depict opposing results.

Another roadblock is that of basic human motivation. What compels us to act? Though the majority of researchers may be wholly ethical, we cannot dismiss the existence of those that desire to achieve academic approval, status and financial gain. Clinician A. H. Maslow (1954) believed a hierarchy of needs dominated human motivation that included those very desires. This may be especially true when politically fueled organizations are at the forefront of the study.

Take for example an announcement made by the Department of Assessment and Evaluation in Nashville, Tennessee where study approval was equated not with the possible future benefit of children but with the quick turn around of results and cost effectiveness. Furthermore, cost was not purely determined by actual financial means but also as “good will” and/or any resource that may fall to the responsibility of the Department. (Conduct Research Criteria, n. d. ) Financial Interests also contribute greatly to diminished objectivity in research.

In an attempt to counteract this influence, The Office of Research Integrity, a division of the U. S Department of Health and Human services has established policies for those seeking research grants. Its purpose is to “promote objectivity in research by establishing standards to ensure there is no reasonable expectation that the design, conduct, or reporting of research funded under PHS grants or cooperative agreements will be biased by any conflicting financial interest of an Investigator. (O. R. I, 2000)

In conclusion, we are left with the question of whether complete objectivity can be achieved in early childhood research? While the enforcement of

ethics and alternative research methods may prove to be invaluable tools in lessening the negative effects created by subjectivity, they will never be obsolete. For this to occur, prejudices must be recognized and addressed to facilitate growth and development on either side.