

Chapter 4 Answers to Study Questions

4.1. What is the definition of ethics, and how does this definition relate to research?

Ethics are the principles and guidelines that help us to uphold the things we value. In educational research, the American Educational Research Association has developed a set of ethical guidelines that must be followed. You can view these guidelines at this URL:

<http://aera.net/about/policy/ethics.htm> . At this site, you will see that the AERA Guidelines are classified into the following major sections:

- I. Responsibilities to the Field
- II. Research Populations, Educational Institutions, and the Public
- III. Intellectual Ownership
- IV. Editing, Reviewing, and Appraising Research
- V. Sponsors, Policymakers, and Other Users of Research
- VI. Students and Student Researchers.

4.2. How do the three approaches that are used in considering ethical issues in research differ?

The three major approaches to ethics are the deontological approach (which states that we should identify and use a Universal code in making ethical decisions), the ethical skepticism approach (which says that ethical standards are not universal but are relative to one's own particular culture and time), and the utilitarianism approach (which says that decisions should be based on an examination and comparison of the costs and benefits that may arise from a study). As you can see, one approach is absolutist, one is relativist, and one says to evaluate the costs and benefits and then make a decision. Researchers and institutional review boards at universities use the utilitarian approach.

4.3. How do societal concerns relate to research ethics?

Societal concerns raise ethical questions such as these:

- Should researchers study what is considered important in society?
- Should the federal government and other funding agencies determine what is studied?
- Should researchers ignore societal concerns?

4.4. What are the professional issues involved in research ethics, and what is the appropriate ethical behavior related to each of these issues?

Professional issues include the following:

- Obviously cheating and other fraudulent activity is never ethically justified.
- What measures should be taken for professional misconduct?
- Duplicate publication, which involves publishing the same data and results in more than one journal or in other publications, is considered unethical except in very unique cases (e.g., it would be ethical to publish your results in a journal article but also provide your research participants with a summary of the results; it also is unethical to send your results to more than one journal even if you ultimately only publish the results in one of the journals).

- Partial publication, which involves publishing several articles from the data set collected in one large study is allowable as long as the different publications involve different research questions and different data, and as long as it facilitates scientific communication. For example, it would be unethical not to publish together highly questions in the same article if it would facilitate communication; it also would be unethical to select out of a set of findings only the “statistically significant” results in a large data set and act as if all of the findings were significant.

4.5. Why is treatment of the research participant an ethical issue to be considered in educational research when the potential for physical and psychological harm is minimal?

The treatment of research participants is a fundamental issue and it involves insuring that research participants are not harmed physically or psychologically in any way. This issue is essential because if researchers mistreat people and violate their individual rights, then the entire enterprise of research will fail. The book discusses some egregious examples of unethical treatment of participants that occurred in the past (e.g., see the Tuskegee Experiment).

4.6. What must a researcher do to ensure that his or her study is ethical?

The researcher must carefully consider all the ethical issues that may arise in the conduct of a study and plan and design the study to prevent unethical mistakes. The researcher also must submit an IRB Protocol to be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board to make sure the plan demonstrates an understanding of the ethical issues involved and that all guidelines are met. Note that many subtle issues can be involved that the researcher must be aware of; for example, researchers are often in a power relationship with potential participants so the researcher must do everything he or she can to make potential participants know and FEEL free not to participate and, later, to withdraw if they want to do so. Informed consent is a must before anyone participates in a research study.

4.7. What kinds of information does a consent form have to include?

Informed consent is provided by research participants and it means they know what participation in the study entails and that they choose to participate. To obtain informed consent you need to provide the following information to potential participants: a statement of the research purpose, description of any potential risks or discomforts, description of potential benefits, description of confidentiality policy to be used, give a list of names participants can contact if they have any questions, and a statement that participation is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any time from the study (for the full list, see Table 4.1).

■ **TABLE 4.1** Information to Include in a Consent Form

Purpose of the research along with a description of the procedures to be followed and the length of time it will take the participant to complete the study

A description of any physical or psychological risks or discomforts the participant may encounter

A description of any benefits the participant or others may expect from the research

A description of any alternative procedure or treatment that might be advantageous to the participant

A statement of the extent to which the results will be kept confidential

Names of people the participant may contact with questions about the study or the research participant's rights

A statement indicating that participation is voluntary and the participant can withdraw and refuse to participate at any time with no penalty

A statement of the amount and schedule of payment if participants are to be paid for participation

The information should be written at an eighth-grade reading level; in cases targeting specific populations, a sixth-grade reading level might be appropriate

For additional tips on preparation of the consent form, go to <http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov/humansubjects/guidance/ictips.htm>.

4.8. Under what conditions can an investigator get a waiver of the requirement of informed consent?

If a research study cannot be conducted if the research participants are fully informed without invalidating the outcomes and if the study has strong scientific merit, then the IRB sometimes foregoes the requirement of informed consent. Even in this situation, however, the following four conditions must be satisfied:

- 1) The research presents minimal risk to participants.
- 2) The waiver will not affect the rights and welfare of the participants.
- 3) The research could not be practically carried out without the waiver.
- 4) The participants will be provided with additional information after participation.

4.9. What is the difference between consent from a minor's legal guardian and assent from the minor, and why are both important?

Legally, minors must have their parent or guardian's consent for them to participate in a research study. The parent or guardian needs to read, consider, and decide whether to sign the consent form for their child to participate in the study. An actual consent form is shown in Exhibit 4.4. In addition to the parent's consent, the minor must provide assent; assent means that the minor agrees to participate in a study after being informed of all the features of the study that could affect the participant's willingness to participate. The researcher discusses the issues with the

minor and should then have the minor also sign the consent form (if he or she can write) to record his or her assent. Also note on the consent form on page 106 the following sentence: “If you are willing for your child to participate, and your child wants to participate, please sign below and return this form to school with your child...”

4.10. What is the difference between active and passive consent, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

Active consent has been the norm in research for many years. Active consent is the process whereby a potential participant indicates his or her consent by signing the consent form. The advantage of active consent is that it is the most direct form of consent, and it is usually the recommended form of consent. The disadvantage is that when used with minors, some forms may not be returned for reasons other than lack of consent. To help solve this problem, some researchers use passive consent for minimal risk studies such as surveys or routine instruction. Passive consent is the process whereby consent is given by not returning the consent form. Note the following passage in the passive consent form shown in Exhibit 4.5: “Participation in this study is completely voluntary. All students in the class will take the test. If you do **not** wish for your child to be in this study, please fill out the form at the bottom of this letter and return it to me. Also, please tell your child to hand in a blank test sheet when the class is given the mathematics test so that your child will not be included in this study.” The advantage of passive consent is that children will be allowed to participate in research who would have been missed by active consent if their parents simply forgot to sign and send in the active consent form or if the child didn’t get it back to the teacher. In other words, active consent forms that are not returned often do not mean lack of consent; it can result because the parents didn’t get the form, didn’t take the time to look at the form, etc. Still, passive consent is controversial and the legislation should be carefully followed.

4.11. What is deception, and when is it used in a research study?

Deception is the lack of full disclosure to participants. It can be used if it is needed to produce a scientifically valid research study. However, the use of deception must be clearly justified, and the advantages must outweigh the disadvantages and this must be approved by the Institutional Review Board.

4.12. What are the ethical obligations of a researcher who makes use of deception?

The researcher is ethically obligated not to use any more deception than is needed to conduct a valid study. If extensive deception is used debriefing must be used. The two goals of debriefing are dehoaxing (informing the participant about the deceptive aspects of the study) and desensitizing (reducing or eliminating any stress or other undesirable feelings that may have been created by participation in the study).

4.13. Why can participants still feel pressured to participate in a study even after the researcher has stated that they can withdraw or decline to participate?

Mainly because they may feel some sort of implicit cultural pressure not to withdraw. Researchers in a power relationship with potential participants must be extra careful that people do not feel pressured or coerced to participate. The researcher must make participants feel that there really there will be no adverse effect if they refuse to participate or decide to withdraw after

starting participation.

4.14. What are the issues relating to freedom to withdraw with respect to minors?

The minor's wish to dissent (e.g., not participate or drop out) must be respected according to the ethical standards of, for example, the AERA and the SRCD. Things get more complicated when the minor is too young to understand what participation entails, as is the case with very young children and infants. The research must, in these cases, look out for any verbal or nonverbal indicators of discomfort and wish for dropping out.

4.15. Why do educational researchers have to be concerned with protecting participants from mental and physical harm in their studies?

Because we live in a society where we have the right to privacy and the right to expect freedom from surveillance of our behavior without our consent. We also have the right to know when our behavior is being manipulated, and, if so, why. The research enterprise must protect its most valuable resource: the actual participants in our research studies. Mistakes have been made in the past that we cannot afford to relive again (e.g., see the Tuskegee Experiment in Exhibit 4.2).

4.16. What is the difference between confidentiality and anonymity?

Confidentiality is a basic requirement in all studies. It means that the researcher agrees to not reveal the identity of the participant to anyone other than the researcher and his or her staff. A stronger and even better condition if it can be met is that of anonymity. This means that the identity of the participant is not known by anyone, including the researcher. An example of this would be where a researcher had a large group of people fill out a survey instrument but NOT include their names on the instruments. In this way, the researcher will have the data but no names.

4.17. What is the purpose of the IRB?

It is the researcher's and Institutional Review Board's responsibility to ensure that all research studies conducted at a university meet the ethical requirements discussed in this chapter.

4.18. What kinds of information should be contained in a research protocol submitted to the IRB?

This information is shown in Table 4.2 and reproduced here for your convenience.

■ **TABLE 4.2** Information to Be Included in a Research Protocol

Information about the purpose and rationale of the research
Information about the research participants to be used in the study
The location of the research
The tasks or variables and procedures to be used
Whether the procedures are experimental
The research design used to answer the research question
The potential benefits to the research participants or general knowledge acquired from the study
Any risks or hazards from participation in the research
Precautions taken to reduce the risks and hazards
A description of how confidentiality will be ensured
A consent form for participation

4.19. What are exempt studies, and what type of studies meet the exempt criterion?

Exempt studies are studies involving no risk to participants and not requiring full IRB review. A list of exempt categories is given in Table 4.3. Many educational research studies are exempt from full IRB review; however, it is the IRB staff and not the researcher that must make the decision as to whether a research protocol is exempt. If a study is exempt, the IRB will provide documentation of this status.

4.20. What is expedited review, and what type of studies would receive expedited review?

Expedited review is the process by which a study is rapidly reviewed by fewer members than constitute the full IRB board. Studies likely to receive expedited review must involve no more than minimal risk.