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Bryan, Hazel and Burstow, Bob (2018) Understanding ethics in school-based research. Professional Development in Education, 44 (1). pp. 107-119. doi:10.1080/19415257.2017.1361464

Title: Understanding Ethics in School-Based Research

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Word count: 6107 including references

Understanding Ethics in School-Based Research

Abstract

The notion of the 'teacher as researcher' has been in the education lexicon since the mid 1970s. School-based research, we suggest, is currently enjoying something of a renaissance, flourishing within the emerging, complex school landscape. This empirical research engages with 25 school leaders to explore the ways in which research-active schools are aware of, and using, ethical guidance in their research practices. In light of a dramatically changed education landscape, we argue that the time is ripe for a discussion with teachers about ethical considerations and approaches to research. Whilst this research takes place in England, the findings are relevant to an international audience, grappling as they do with issues of professional practice, research practice and understandings of ethical issues in school-based research.

Key words: ethics; school-based research; professional practice; research practice

Introduction

In October 2005 Anne Campbell and Susan Groundwater-Smith hosted the 'International Colloquium on Ethics in Practitioner Research: an international conversation' at Liverpool Hope University. Their subsequent publication in 2007, 'An Ethical Approach to Practice Research; dealing with issues and dilemmas in action research' set out many of the key themes from the colloquium. The text sought, uniquely, to centralise ethical issues and to bring to the surface the relationship between the "field-based practitioner researcher and the academic researcher who may be acting as a research mentor and critical friend under the auspices of award-bearing courses or engagement in government-initiated projects" (Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007, p. 2). Some ten years on, we began to revisit ethical issues in practice research (school based research specifically) in England, in the light of a changed structural education landscape and withdrawal of funding for professional learning and academic programmes, the "Most

volatile period ever over at least ten years, with curriculum and assessment reforms tumbling one over another; but also new school structures being introduced by each government in turn" (Menter, 2016, p. xi). Schools are under great pressure to achieve the requirements of the new reforms, and to navigate these shifting structural arrangements. And yet part of this new vision for schools and teachers is Government promotion of research. Schools are encouraged, and in some cases, required, to engage with and generate research and this is welcomed as a means by which teachers are professionally developed and learners taught in research-rich environments (BERA/RSA, 2014). As Leat et al (2014) reported in the BERA/RSA report "When research is seen as a body of knowledge teachers may or may not choose to make use of it. When research becomes a professional learning process it can have deep influence on how they understand research and may lead them directly towards more active engagement in undertaking enquiry themselves (Leat et al, 2014, p.18). A consequence of this, however, is the generation of potentially uncertain knowledge at a time when Government has legitimised only certain forms of knowledge in the 'press to compliance' (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009): in some cases, where teachers become more research active, this can lead to tensions among staff (Leat, 2014). In light of this unprecedented context, we felt the time was right to explore issues of 'ethical literacy' (Sachs, 2007, p.xiv) with teachers engaging with and in research in schools.

There are many different labels given to school-based research: action research (Elliott, 1991; Somekh, 1993), applied practice-based research (Furlong and Oancea, 2005), practitioner research (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2008), teacher professional learning (Gore et al, 2010) to name but a few. Each arise from a particular epistemology and are framed by a specific methodological approach (Newman and Woodrow, 2015). In this research it has been our intention to listen to the ways practitioners are describing and naming these activities. The research interrogates ethical awareness and practice in school based research, across primary and secondary phases and in state and private schools. Whilst this research has taken place in schools in England, the activities and findings are of relevance to an international audience, grappling as they do with issues of professional practice, research practice and understandings of ethical issues in school-based research .

A school-based research agenda

In January 2015 the Department for Education published the 'National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers' (DfE, 2015). Organised through the mapping of four 'domains' (qualities and knowledge; pupils and staff; systems and processes; the self-improving school system) research is referenced twice. Domain 2.3 (pupils and staff), requires Headteachers to 'Establish an education culture of 'open classrooms' as a basis for sharing best practice within and between schools, drawing on and conducting relevant research and robust data analysis'. Domain 4.3 (The self-improving school system) asks Headteachers to, 'Challenge educational orthodoxies in the best interests of achieving excellence, harnessing the findings of well evidenced research to frame self-regulating and self-improving schools'. Headteachers are thus expected to ensure their staff 'harness well evidenced research', 'draw on research' and 'conduct research' in contemporary classrooms. Research is presented as the vehicle through which 'best practice' will be shared and schools will 'achieve excellence'.

Teaching Schools also have a brief to develop research. Section (6) of the application process to become a Teaching Schools sets out the research expectations as follows, where schools are expected to:

. build on existing research and contribute to alliance and wider priorities

. base new initiatives within your alliance on existing evidence and ensure you can measure them

. work with other teaching schools in your area, or nationally, where appropriate

. ensure that your staff use existing evidence

. allow your staff the time and support they need take part in research and development activities

. share learning from research and development work with the wider school system (NCTL, 2016)

Teaching Schools are at the heart of powerful networks, enabling schools to enjoy relatively greater autonomy, with a requirement to undertake research and development.

Whilst the Headteachers' standards and the development of Teaching Schools have been government initiatives, the College of Teaching has evolved through discussions between government and other stakeholders. The emergent College of Teaching aims to provide a set of standards for teachers, a set of standards for professional development, a code of practice and, in relation to 'Professional Knowledge',   'The College will provide access to a quality-assured and diverse professional knowledge base, drawing from academic research and teachers' judgements' (2016, collegeofteachingtrustees.com).

Research Schools, new to the education landscape and coordinated through a partnership between the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Institute for Effective Education (IEE) have been appointed following a competitive process. The first five will be expected to support up to 1000 schools through communication, training, modeling and innovation.

This interest in research is not confined to the UK: there is world-wide interest in the relationship between teaching and research-informed practice in contemporary times (Cain and Hayward, 2015, p.26). Cain and Hayward, in their British Research Intelligence Association 'Research Intelligence' piece, demonstrate how governments are funding selected activities designed to engage teachers with research. They cite the 'What Works Centre' in England and the sister 'What Works' initiative in Scotland. They cite also the MESH guides and the Institute of Education Evidence Library (EPPI Centre). Across Europe, Cain and Hayward note the Austrian national research centre and the French and Norwegian national clearing houses for research.

Teachers too are developing structures to engage in research. ResearchEd (established by Tom Bennett, a serving teacher, in 2013), HertsCam and CamSTAR exemplify teacher-led, research-informed practice. Similarly, there is evidence that the Education Endowment Fund is providing opportunity for teachers to engage in research (RSA/BERA 2014).

The new standards for Headteachers, the Teaching School and Research School briefs, the College of Teaching and grassroots initiatives such as ResearchEd have all emerged onto the education landscape with the last five years. In each case, research is harnessed in very

particular ways in relation to school improvement. Schools may either be engaging with existing research, developing their own research programmes, or a mixture of the two. Such a high profile for research - whether in terms of using research findings or generating research within and across schools – is unprecedented in policy documents, and the drive to encourage research practices is clear. What is less clear is how teachers are to gain the skills and knowledge to undertake such research, and in particular, how teachers are to undertake this research in an ethical fashion.

There are some powerful research roots already planted in the landscape such as that provided in previous years via the Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) Programme. Offered through the former Teaching and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), the PPD Programme provided funding for teachers to undertake professional development at Masters level. Commencing in the academic year 2005/6, PPD funding supported 25,000 serving teachers at a cost of some £25m per annum and ran for approximately 10 years. Whilst PPD funding has ceased the legacy remains, with significant numbers of serving teachers having studied at Masters level and perforce, engaged in ethical considerations of school-based research.

School-based research activity has also been a feature of PGCE programmes, following the Bologna Agreement (1999) which required an alignment of undergraduate and postgraduate cycles, and the National Framework for Higher Education (2001) specification that all postgraduate study should carry Masters level credits: subsequent PGCE programmes across the sector introduced students to Masters level research activity which will have included discussions on ethical research practice in school settings. This leaves both a legacy of school based research and a future for such research in terms of newly qualified teachers entering the teaching profession.

The relationship between research and teaching has long been championed (Stenhouse, 1975; Elliott, 1991; Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991; Somekh, 1993; Frost and Durrant, 2002; Durrant and Holden, 2006; Wilkins, 2011). David Hargreaves, in his keynote address at the Teacher Training Agency Annual Lecture in April 1996 critiqued contemporary education research, drawing out a range of themes in his lecture; his view that teaching would be more 'effective' if

the profession were 'research – based', and his observation that research is rarely used as a 'guide to the solution of practical problems' (Hargreaves, 1996, p. 2). In essence, Hargreaves suggested that 'others' – including practising teachers- were needed to reform educational research. In the 20 years since Hargreaves lecture, much has changed in the education research landscape, and the relationship between teachers and research has been particularly positioned in recent policy initiatives.

Research ethics in school- based research

It has been argued that ethics in school-based research is central to outcome, "the quality of practitioner research rests upon the quality of the ethical dimensions that are understood and emphasised" (Sachs, 2007, p. xiv). Thinking in this area is well developed: 'ethically, the first responsibility of all research should be to quality and rigour' (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p. 173). Gorard and Taylor argue that quality is 'paramount' because unethical practices lead to untrustworthy findings, a theme articulated by Furlong and Oancea in their Quality Framework (2005) comprising sub-dimensions of trustworthiness and explicitness as requirements in the research process. Others bring to the fore the dimension of social justice in educational research, suggesting that researchers should realise a commitment to the 'fundamental principles of social justice, equality and participatory democracy' (Griffiths, 1998, p.67) rather than positioning the research only in relation to the immediate case in hand. This articulation of ethical research is far broader than Gorard and Taylor's, advancing the idea that research can lead to personal and political improvement: in this, Griffiths suggests that professional, personal and political improvements necessarily implicate the researcher ethically.

In writing about research in HE and FE, Foreman-Peck and Winch draw out the notion of 'benevolence' in research. Whilst their research focuses upon research outside of the school sector, they nevertheless cast their gaze upon practitioner research in professional education settings and in this their findings are helpful. They distinguish between 'the ethical constraint of benevolence and the epistemic one of a lack of knowledge as to the most effective ways of teaching and learning' (2010, p. 109). Others bring the concept of a system of morality to the fore, where ethics in educational research are viewed as 'The application of a system of moral

principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful and to be fair' (Sieber, 1993, p14). Again, others focus rather more on outcome, 'educational research is critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action' (Bassey, 1999). With a particular focus upon ethics in school-based research, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) chart the complexities and challenges of anonymity, objectivity and ethical access. The complexity of ensuring informed consent where multiple stakeholders may become involved at different stages of the research process is explored by both Doyle (2007) and Felzmann (2009). This, Felzmann observes, is typical of school-based research, 'characterized by the involvement of multiple stakeholders including not just researchers, parents and individual children but also school principals, teachers and the children's peer group' (2009, p.104). The pupil's right to say no in school-based research has been explored by Groundwater-Smith (2007) whilst informed consent is also the subject of research by David, Edwards and Alldred (2001). Their research maps the approach they took to support potential participants (young children) working through the consent process. These processes, they reflected, were pedagogic approaches that evolved from 'liberal education discourses and on practices adopted in 'progressive' British schooling' (2001, p. 347). The pupil's right to withdraw from research projects in school is also explored by Doyle (2007), bringing to the fore the questions of pupil vulnerability, how pupils are positioned in the research process and the ways in which practitioner researchers might be accountable to the pupils (Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007).   Indeed, position has been vigorously argued more recently (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell, 2015), an indication that little has advanced in recent years in relation to pupils' consent.

Considerations of confidentiality in practitioner research raise the possibility that pupils may find it acceptable to discuss issues and share stories but still decline to give their permission to have their stories used as part of the research, assurances of anonymity notwithstanding (Campbell and McNamara, 2007).

Ethical practice in research, and school based research, can be characterized by competing demands: the need to ensure quality and rigour, to situate the work within a participatory and democratic frame, the concept that one is working within a system of morality, the challenge of

objectivity, access and informed consent in the workplace balanced with the desire to improve educational actions. These competing demands frame the ways in which research is designed and conducted, reported, disseminated and acted upon. They are the very heartbeat of the research process.   Campbell and Groundwater- Smith highlight other tensions at play in practitioner research, including setting the agenda, policy considerations, the right to publish the outcomes of the research and ethics committee regulations in respective institutions (Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007). These are described by Brooks, te Riele and Maguire (2014) as "regulations that have a gatekeeping role (procedures for gaining access) and regulations that relate to confidentiality, privacy, disclosure, data sharing" (20014, p. 45). They draw attention to the fact that ethical considerations for research with children and young people have a reference point in the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) report, adopted in 1989. This rights-based document contains 45 Articles of which Brooks et al draw particular attention to Article3 (the best interests of the child), Article 12 (children contributing their own views), Article 36 (children must be protected from exploitation) and Article 42 (children must be aware of their rights). These principles should underpin school-based research whether undertaken by academics or practitioners.

Ethics in school-based research is presented from a different perspective by Beckett (2016). Reflecting on her practice over a decade in a Northern urban town in England, Beckett maps the development of professional learning communities that were established to address poverty. Engaging with the social realities teachers face in such urban schools, Beckett draws attention to the "erosion of both the teacher and academic voice, marked by a deliberate and ongoing sidelining of research insights" (Beckett, 2016, p. 4). In terms of ethical considerations in school-based research Beckett draws out many. Of particular interest to this research is the way in which she uses the research process to empower the teachers who practice in the face of 'failing' labels. This is a different ethical consideration. It draws the gaze away from research designed to address issues in local School Improvement Plans to issues regarding the state and the professional educator; the voice of the pupil in the face of managerialist approaches to education. This process leads to the development of new forms of professional knowledge, built upon systematic inquiry undertaken by practitioners. These forms of knowledge have

traditionally had little 'weight' in the education system. Indeed, Somekh was calling for a means by which localized action research findings could be effectively disseminated in 1993 rather than findings remaining "local, private and unimportant" (Somekh, 1993, p. 25). In recent years in the English education system, knowledge has been legitimized through particular government channels – the National Literacy Strategy (1998), National Numeracy Strategy (1999); the Masters in Teaching and Learning (DCSF, 2008) that represented both policy initiative and Masters degree to name but a few. During this period in England, teachers are under high expectation in terms of engaging with legitimised forms of knowledge (phonics in the Early Years is a case in point) whilst now invited to engage with and generate research, that is, new forms of knowledge. This is often not without consequence as Leat, Lofthouse and Reid report in the RSA/BERA review of research: "when some teachers become more research active it may create some tensions among the collective staff of the school" (Leat et al, 2014).

The Research Questions

With interest in school - based research so current, we became concerned about risks to research rigour and understandings of ethics in particular.

This paper reports a small- scale research project that included an initial on-line survey, designed to enable us to see if there was a question to answer in relation to ethics in school-based research. The survey was followed by a series of follow-up interviews with 25 senior school leaders.

Before setting out the methods we employed to undertake this research, it seems ethical to make visible the ethical issues we grappled with in this research endeavour. The first issue concerned our professional identities – both former teachers who now worked in universities, we were aware that we might be received as 'experts' who were seeking to 'catch out' our colleagues in their research endeavours; power issues were at the forefront of our minds.   We were aware too that our colleagues may have varying levels of expertise in research ethics and we were keen to minimise their sense of inadequacy or lack of expert knowledge – this could have affected the dynamics in the interview. In this, the notion of the expert was at play. Our colleagues, whilst expert pedagogues, may have perceived themselves as less than expert in

this work. The third key area of ethical concern for us was the area of informed consent. In this we were aware that we were probably raising important issues that may not have been considered before – we knew we would need to manage this 'new knowledge' sensitively. Finally, we were aware that the process of interview is also a process of awareness-raising; we knew we would be raising awareness of rigour, robust processes and ethical practices and our responsibility to our colleagues was of importance to us. We ensured we had time to give to our colleagues to discuss further ethical practices.

Preliminary work

The online survey was carried out in 2013. All schools belonging to our respective HEIs were invited by email to complete a brief SurveyMonkey questionnaire.

Participants were invited to select one of a sequence of statements about their approach to ethical issues within the context of teacher-researchers. The statements read as follows, and were presented in this order:

- we always take full consideration of any ethical issues and use published guidelines (such as BERA, for example) as an aid;
- we always take time to consider the ethical issues surrounding our proposed research;
- we think about any possible legal implications of any research undertaken in the school;
- as a school we already consider ourselves an ethically correct organisation already sufficiently informed by legal requirements (such as DBS) and existing good-practice;
- we haven't had research ethics at the forefront of our planning so far and would welcome guidelines to support with this;
- we do not consider ethical issues to have a bearing on our own in-house research.

When the responses were collated, the table was re-sorted in response order, as follows:

Insert Table 1

An 8.5% return (44 responses out of 520 contacts) resulted. This was disappointing, particularly as we had phrased the accompanying email to stress that we were interested in working

together on these issues, and not seeking to unearth poor practice. Whilst this very low response rate could provide us with no reliable data, the findings were nevertheless of interest. On reflection the low response rate was probably a result of schools dealing with so many demands and having to prioritise – as our findings demonstrate, consideration of research ethics is very low on schools' agendas. We would probably have achieved a higher response had we raised the profile of the survey in advance through our Partnership channels.

This presented a potentially interesting confirmation of one of our tentative hypotheses - that there was a question of the level of ethical awareness among school researchers. Deciding upon an opportunity sample we approached schools that had strong partnership links with our respective HEIs. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken in 25 schools, ranging from primary and secondary phases, Teaching Schools and private. Interviews were conducted with SLT members (or in two cases senior middle managers) who managed professional learning and development in their respective schools.

Two questions were central to the interview:

- What is the boundary, for you, between a teacher who is researching – and a teacher who is actively enquiring into the learning of their pupils?
- At what point should you and your school be concerned about the ethical issues of children as research participants?

In each interview the participant paused before responding to these two questions – they clearly struggled with their responses and it seemed to us that our research was tapping into something important.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim and analysed using MaxQDA. Emerging codes were as follows:

Insert Table 2

Analysis of ethical tensions and boundaries

The research findings fall into six themes as follows:

- not on the radar;

- schools as moral high-grounds;

- informed consent and the right to withdraw;

- anonymity;

- parental permission;

- workload versus the benefits of research

The themes emerged following the coding process, where we employed parent codes, then sub-coded. We then looked for themes that emerged across and between the sub-codes, in order to make sense of the data.

The six themes:

'Not on the radar': In relation to ethical issues and research in her school, Sorrell reflected, that it was 'just not a consideration of colleagues when they are doing any sort of data gathering - interviews or observations – that's not considered at all. I've never heard ethics being discussed'. Susie also reflected this view, 'It's just genuinely never ever been raised…interesting but "No"'. Steve reported that ethics had not been part of the research process in his school, 'It's not on the radar…and I think that's a bit of an oversight' (Steve) and Seb had a similar response, 'That's not something I've ever tapped into myself, no'.
Whilst Susie, Seb, Steve and Sorrell were sure that ethics had never been considered, others were confused by the idea that ethics might need to be considered, 'That's quite difficult one to unpick' (Sam).

On the other hand, Simon was adamant that 'We are all very, very aware how ethically correct we have to because of the repercussions' (Simon). That said, Simon did not have ethical approval practices in place, 'Why should you have to seek ethical clearance on something that is going to have a positive impact?' (Simon).

The nuances are interesting here: real surprise when this was raised in interview, as ethics had not been considered in school, to a response that reflected a concern with 'repercussions'

(rather than, perhaps, from a starting point in relation to the rights of the child) and a genuine question relating to the need for ethics when the aim is to impact positively. Such comments illuminate the need for a deep understanding of the role of ethics in school research and how 'explicitness' in research (Furlong and Oancea, 2005) affects trustworthiness (Gorard and Taylor, 2004; Furlong and Oancea, 2005).

Schools as moral highgrounds: There was a sense of moral assurance from many of the participants. As Susie noted, 'No one's going to do a project that actually harmed the children' (Susie). Steve, like Simon, situated the research in terms of improving practice, 'But what are we avoiding – what problem is it solving?' (Steve).   This moral assurance was aligned to a view that research is *normal practice* for teachers, 'It depends on the research practice. If it's about teachers and children in their class then that attunes very simply to their teacher work. That's fine' (Padraig).

There is a sense here that teachers and schools are 'safe' in moral and ethical terms. There is no intent to do harm - indeed they wish to only have a 'positive impact' (Simon) on pupils' lives and therefore no consideration need be given to ethical considerations – no need to be sure of 'doing the right thing'. This highlights the distinction between teaching and research in relation to how pupils are positioned (Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007): Padraig articulates this clearly – if it takes place between the teacher and the pupil in the classroom it is 'normal' and needs no additional consideration of the rights or positioning of pupils.

Informed consent and the right to withdraw: In relation to pupils taking part in research, some teachers were invitational in their approach to research in school, 'I haven't really thought about that…the children were willing to come' (Pat) whilst others stressed the importance of pupils being able to talk to their teacher honestly and frankly at any time, 'That is written into that implicit contract between teacher and student' (Scott) and 'It is seen as a right for the students to be able to comment' (Susie). Others brought to the fore the complex relationship between research participation and teaching, 'We don't really allow them to withdraw from anything as such' (Phyllis). Groundwater-Smith's (2007) assertion that participants should be permitted to simply say 'no' raises issues in relation to the cultural codes of conduct in teaching and the cultural codes of conduct in research. Saunders' (2007) thinking is helpful here,

proposing that teaching as a professional practice can be thought of as 'activism' and research as professional practice can be seen as 'scepticism' we are supported in thinking about the relationship between the two modes of professional practice. Whilst not a binary, Saunders suggests "practical inquiry provides a site for the exploration and development of pedagogy as the constitutive professional practice of teaching" (2007, p. 4.)

The range of responses in relation to consent was particularly wide, from the absolute (and entirely primary school) sense of control – children cannot refuse to do things, to the complete investment in pupil voice – the right of students to comment on their work and environment:

> 'From time to time we do pupil voice things, just find out what the children knew and what they felt about it and then we keep going over it, to see what's sunk in. And so I suppose the child – we just picked them randomly, the same numbers from each class – might rather not answer the question. But we wouldn't expect anybody to opt out. In fact there is a kind of no-opt-out policy in class. So they know anybody will be asked anything – you can't just shrug your shoulders because we say "I'll come back to ask someone else and come back to you ' (Priscilla).

So here there is a practice of listening to pupils, but at the same time there is the expectation that every pupil will take part. This is one of the areas of discussion that highlights a key tension. If a teacher is engaged in research then should not the change in contract (from teacher/pupil to researcher/participant) be recognised and addressed? Such issues are raised by Doyle (2007) and Campbell and McNamara (2007) when considering the right to withdraw or to have one's voice heard but not permit one's stories to be used in the research. In our research, this would not have been understood as an option – our participant's understanding of this aspect of consent was minimal.

Anonymity: The issue of anonymity was also rejected from a similar moral position. Sam gives an account that two other schools also echoed in their accounts of similar reasoning:

> 'Children are no different than anyone else, they will say what it is they wish people to know. However on a moral level if someone is going to fill in a survey and actually says: "Yes I have been bullied" or "I am being bullied" or "I know someone who has been

bullied" - then to not be able to go back to that person and say "Okay I'm listening to you now and this is what we're going to do about it" – well that's wrong. So with that particular survey - which we're going to do again in December – that's precisely what happened. The first time we did it there were 40 odd people who commented about bullying. The Heads of Year met with all of those pupils. What we found is that in some cases they clicked the button by accident and they didn't mean it and so on and so forth. Indeed the vast majority was things like that – but the point is we were able to go back to the children. So in terms of ethics we were clear from the start that we will get back to them about this.'

This is interesting in terms of the teacher/researcher's accountability to their students (Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007). Whilst on the one hand there are issues in relation to consent in this school (David et al, 2001; Groundwater-Smith, 2007), the teachers did understand the importance of sharing the findings with the students.

Parental permission: The expectation of parents featured considerably, "I've never had an example of a parent saying "I don't want my child involved"" (Pat). Others drew a parallel between research and teaching in terms of parents, "I would assume, as a parent sending their child to my school, to expect you to want to establish how their child learns best" (Scott). Some participants cited the permission forms parents sign at the start of the year as permission to include their child when a teacher is undertaking research, "Parents already sign a document about photos or publicity" (Steve).

This last comment was echoed in two other schools, one of which also requires parental consent before a child is invited to join a focus group. Without this permission (given at the start of a child's career in that school) there will be no invitation issued. Persephone took the view that research was a normal part of school practice '…parents have information letters about what's happening and we'd talk about it being part and parcel of school – initiatives and innovations – every newsletter there's an update. It's termed part of the school's work in order to promote learning. Parents can ask questions'.

As with the teacher/researcher issue, there were some outstanding examples of practice. Scott talked at length about his own practice:

'My approach with the launch was to inform parents, through the newsletter, of the [background] research. We'd talked to the parents about it in a broader sense – where we'd come across it…that this was something that was a powerful tool for developing our teachers and therefore helping to improve our education for their children. I also invited governors to our training process and for them to write in the newsletter to parents about their views on why they were supporting it. I also invited parents if they had any questions or issues to contact the school to speak to me about it. I also did a series of assemblies with all students, in which I had exactly the same process.'

He received no negative feedback– and this was a major piece of research focussed CPD. The exception was from a small group of pupils who offered themselves as additional members of an observation team (of staff) to act as pupil data collectors and researcher assistants.

Workload versus the benefits of research: Several of the SLT were concerned about the extra bureaucracy attached to research activity and what effect this might have on an already overloaded workforce. Pam asked, 'Do the potential outcomes outweigh the strain on staff?' and Susie, when considering what processes might need to be in place reflected that it '…almost makes something like this unworkable'.

Discussion

We were struck not only by the wide range of practice, but also by just how many of the 25 schools were actively involved in some form of research related activity. Overall, however, the emphasis was on the use of existing research knowledge to improve classroom practice rather than producing a new population of researcher/teachers. Participating schools largely presented themselves as 'system(s) of moral principles' (Sieber, 1993) in their own right; why, they seemed to ask, would they not do this? At the forefront of the argument made by each participant was the notion of improving practice; they were undertaking research in order that they could take informed decisions in relation to practice (Bassey, 1999). Participants aligned research with teaching - which was also presented in terms of moral principles. As to the ethical issues surrounding this, schools in the sample were broadly very confident of their moral security.

In terms of pupil participation in research, the complexity of consent came to the fore echoing Felzmann's (2009) mapping of multiple stakeholders. Some felt that research was what good teachers do as a matter of course and therefore consent need not be given – but pupils were not permitted to withdraw - whilst some invited pupils to take part, and others had systems in place for permission to be gained. Whilst these layers of consent emerged during interviews, none of the participants discussed the ways in which they gained consent from pupils themselves – no participant talked through the ways in which pupils are made aware of the research process, or invited to formally consent (Groundwater-Smith, 2007; Doyle, 2007; Campbell and McNamara, 2007; David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001). Indeed, in terms of anonymity and confidentiality, cases were made for not giving these assurances as they would inhibit teachers from acting upon information - such as in the case of bullying (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995).

Issues of quality and rigour (Gorard and Taylor, 2004; Furlong and Oancea, 2005; Sachs, 2007) in school-based research underscore our findings. Whilst our participating schools believed that they were engaged in relevant and informative research activity, we would question the trustworthiness of much of the activity, albeit undertaken for ethical reasons.

Habermas' concept of 'Knowledge Interests' (2007) is helpful to our thinking here. Our findings reveal that participants were focused mainly on the development of Practical Knowledge and were largely working within the boundaries of the social norms of teaching. Some of our participants articulated research as Instrumental Knowledge - as a means by which they were undertaking action research to implement initiatives with the aim of affecting the learning environment/ experience of the pupil. Few of our participants demonstrated Emancipatory Knowledge, that is, self-knowledge or self reflection in relation to the research process: they did not articulate their limited understanding of research and rather, were passionate about the possibilities of research and it's potential to them as leaders in schools without a full understanding of the processes involved.

We know that this is scratching at the surface of a newly emergent issue. The unreliability of our results is well demonstrated by comparing interview results with the earlier questionnaire. The table below compares both sets of data. Interview data numbers were considerably lower

than the questionnaire, but the response rate was very different. This may well be the educational effect of a semi-structured interview, where participants were encouraged to think out loud for considerable periods and who consequently had a significant time (over the order of 30 minutes for this question) to explore their own thinking, as opposed to 2 or 3 seconds perhaps to choose one response from a list:

Insert Table 3

It is now a decade after the International Colloquium on Ethics in Practitioner Research and during this time the education landscape in England has changed dramatically. Our research has sought to explore issues of ethical awareness in schools in contemporary times and there are three observations to make here.

Firstly, all schools in our small sample of 25 had research projects taking place. They were of differing scope, but whilst all were referred to as 'research' no participant in our sample had engaged with the BERA guidelines on ethics, and our participants articulated significantly limited understandings of the importance of quality, rigour and trustworthiness in research.

Secondly, a discourse of inclusive practice and pupil voice resulted in participants in dismissing notions of informed consent, the right to withdraw and the right to say 'no'.

Thirdly, our participants approached research in classrooms in the same way they approach teaching. They saw little difference in these two activities either in terms of their aims, design or planning, in execution or acting upon findings. As a result, research activity is treated as teaching activity.

A key theme to emerge from this research is the way in which ethical issues in school-based research are necessarily situated. The teachers in the study gave context-rich descriptions of their practice that were framed by differing school cultures (Simons and Usher, 2000) and this gives rise to considerations of ethics in school-based research that are understood beyond a set of codes (Small, 2001), beyond a series of regulatory guidelines (Hammersley, 2009), to a

position where ethical practices in research are more closely aligned with pedagogic practices, and where teachers are supported in developing a wider understanding of ethical analysis (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009).

There is clearly a need across our sample schools for the development of a deeper understanding of the dimensions to research ethics that would enhance their practices. Whilst the BERA/RSA report champions research activity in school settings, a strategic approach to supporting schools in developing ethical awareness is clearly needed. This may not result in a set of rigid guidelines that have no regard for context and culture, but rather, a means by which schools can engage in rich discussion of ethical considerations and then apply those to their own contexts.

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