



ETHICS IN CHILDHOOD RESEARCH: LESSONS FROM THE FIELD IN CYPRUS

Dr Loizos Symeou
Cyprus Pedagogical Institute,
Department of Research and Evaluation
E-mail: lsymeou@cyearn.pi.ac.cy



What did my research involve?

- Exploration of teacher-family collaboration in state primary schools in Cyprus.
- Examination of cultural differences in family life which have implications for teacher-family collaboration.



How did I tackle it?

- Multi-case study strategy:
 - six state primary schools
 - seven teachers
 - their pupils
 - the pupils' parents
- Ethnographic approach
- Data: individual interviews, focus-groups, observations and researcher's journal
- Participants were volunteers



What about ethics?

Voluntary participation?

- The right to choose (Hill, et al., 1996; Rudduck, 1999)
- Informed consent (Lindsay, 2000)
- Do adults “know best”? (Brooker, 2001).

Parental consent?

- Parental permission (Edwards, 2001)
- Cypriot context (parents as legal and psychological guardians)
- School/Ministry regulations



What about ethics?

Ethical appropriateness of interviewing

- They might intrude in children's life, disclose their personal lives and manipulate them (Brooker, 2001; Lindsay, 2000; Morgan, 1998)

'Ethical interviewing'

- Formulating acceptable questions
- Alerting for the possibility of causing distress
- Ensuring confidentiality
- Guidance for the possibility of disclosure
- Concluding with a short debriefing
- Sincere thanks and praise



What about ethics?

Children's vulnerability

- Feeling of threat during being interviewed, deriving from external and/or internal pressures (Powney & Watts, 1987; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993)

'Relaxed interview'

- Conversational style
- Empathy
- Encouragement
- Understanding
- Careful language
- Effective communication (clear, alternatives, prompts)



What about ethics?

Children's vulnerability

- Children's utterances are better in every way (longer, clearer, more complex, more thoughtful) when the children are in a familiar environment, *with familiar adults* (Brooker, 2001).

'Trust'

- Establishing strong rapport
- Ensuring familiarity
- Extensive time in the field
- Opportunity to reject being tape-recorded
- Confidentiality, anonymity, renaming



What are my conclusions?

- Ethical considerations are a prime concern when conducting research with children
- Any ethical code is inadequate
- Any ethical decision is subjective
- The researcher is the wiser ethical decision-maker
- ‘Mind the gap’ between the etic and the emic