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Australian Association for Research in Education

AARE Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics for Research in Education is the AARE's definitive code. It contains some argument for the principles it contains, goes into detail, and in order to achieve completeness within its sections, includes some redundancy. It is intended to guide the behaviour of members, and to protect them against unacceptable demands and pressures from superordinates and sponsoring institutions. It is not intended for use in legal or disciplinary proceedings, and in particular, the absence of any prohibition in it is not intended to imply that the AARE condones the behaviour in question.

While ethical sensitivity is needed in the application of general principles to particular cases, and moral argument is always open to challenge, the principles below should not be breached except where failure to do so would cause significant harm.

In this Code, 'participants' includes the subjects of research as well as researchers, whether or not those subjects are actively participating in the research activities.

Moral reasoning

What constitutes legitimate, and therefore morally acceptable, moral reasoning is the subject of dispute. There are several kinds of such reasoning: consequentialist, in which actions are declared right or wrong by assessing the consequences of doing them, deontological, in which actions are judged right or wrong on the basis of the nature of the action, and there are a number of views related to those of Aristotle, which emphasise the variety of human goods. Thus conducting secret research into adolescent dating behaviour might be seen as wrong because it is spying, and a breach of privacy. It might be seen as wrong because it will diminish the willingness of young people to speak freely to each other of their feelings. Or it may be objected that it is not directed towards the good of the adolescents being studied, may cause them harm, and is pursued for purely extrinsic reasons. Where these various kinds of argument give conflicting results, it is difficult to resolve moral differences. However, over a wide range of issues, all kinds of argument produce the same result. That is true for most of the principles in this document.

In promulgating this Code, the AARE is sensitive to these differences, and to the consequent reasonableness of moral disagreement. The document is intended as a guide to the ethical conduct of research, and as a starting point for further thought, not as a set of laws.

In adopting the four basic principles that follow, this Code takes cognisance of the strengths of these kinds of reasoning, and intends that each should set a limit to the implications of the other. The position roughly is that research should support, and should not harm, human flourishing. Where the consequences of inaction are intolerable, action should be taken, even if the action in itself seems wrong. But where an action is itself intolerable, it cannot be justified by its consequences.

Four Basic Principles

1. The consequences of a piece of research, including the effects on the participants and the social consequences of its publication and application, must enhance the general welfare.
2. Researchers should be aware of the variety of human goods and the variety of views on the good life, and the complex relation of education with these. They should recognise that educational research is an ethical matter, and that its purpose should be the development of human good.
3. No risk of significant harm to an individual is permissible unless either that harm is remedied or the person is of age and has given informed consent to the risk. Public benefit, however great, is insufficient justification. [1]
4. Respect for the dignity and worth of persons and the welfare of students, research participants, and the public generally shall take precedence over self-interest of researchers, or the interests of employers, clients, colleagues or groups.

Specific Principles- The Participants

HARM

Research design should minimise the risk of significant harm. [2]

It should not be assumed that because a risk occurring in the course of research is no greater than the risks of everyday life (such as crossing a road), that the risk in the research is legitimate. The risks of everyday life are undergone voluntarily, and sometimes foolishly or with wishful thinking.

Significant harms to the participants that should be avoided include:

1. physical damage or pain;
2. loss of privacy, whether through exposure to scorn, contumely or victimisation or through the release of data that taken out of context could be misinterpreted;
3. missing part of a curriculum;
4. loss of competitive opportunities (falling behind contemporaries, being put in a lower stream, losing the opportunity to excel in a subject or to pursue a favoured career);
5. harmful social or psychological consequences, such as loss of self esteem, coming to accept as normal behaviour that is destructive of relationships, being deceived, developing prejudices or other false views including views about themselves or others.

The plan and costing of research should include provision for the remedying of harm. This may require remedial teaching, teaching to compensate for lost time, counselling or debriefing.

Researchers should not waste the time of participants with trivial research, and should see that their involvement does not in anyway adversely affect the participants' educational progress. They should endeavour to see that the participants benefit by their participation in the research as well as by the results. Researchers should be aware of and take into account the fact that their perception of harms and benefits might not be that of other participants.

Education research should not take significant risks of pain or physical damage to minors.

CONSENT

Informed consent may be given by adults to research involving such risk to themselves. Minors should not be asked to consent to risks of harm that cannot be remedied; and educational researchers are not entitled to accept the consent of parents or educational administrators on their behalf. For

lesser risks, the consent of both guardians and students should be sought. If participants are too young to consent, research should not carry any risk of harm, and the consent of guardians should still be obtained. [3]

The information to be given prior to consent should include the nature and methods of the research, its purposes, any risks run by the participants, and the likely social and personal consequences of its publication and any other factors which might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate. Participants should be informed of any changes in these considerations which occur in the course of the research.

Subordinates, students or others may not be compelled or pressured to participate in research. Researchers should not exploit participants or populations for individual gain, nor for the gain of their employers. Research of a population should always be for the benefit of the population, or of those that they serve.

DECEPTION AND SECRECY

Persons should know when they are to be participants in research, be asked for their informed consent, and be entitled to withdraw at any time. The desire to draw a random sample does not override this principle. [4]

Deception is an attack on the autonomy and integrity of participants. Such deception is scarcely ever justified, but there may be exceptional cases where the harm to be avoided is great enough to justify temporary deception. The researcher must submit the proposal to an institutional ethics or research committee. The onus of proof is on the researcher to justify deception; and such justification must include a demonstration that the individual participants are likely to benefit substantially from the research and are under no risk of harm beyond that of being deliberately but temporarily deceived, and that awareness of the research or of its true nature would destroy its validity. In all cases the participants should be given as much of the gist of the research as is compatible with its success. After the study, the researchers should explain to participants and institutional representatives the reasons for the deception, and must seek their permission before publishing the results of the research.

Research on unwitting participants is normally unacceptable. However, where the behaviour studied is intended to be fully public, such research is permissible, provided that individuating details are removed and photographs are destroyed before the research is made public. (It is the intention of the

unwitting participant here which is central. Behaviour which is exhibited to a limited audience such as in a classroom or at a meeting or in a hotel bar is not intended to be observed by people at large, and so is not fully public in the relevant sense.)

CONFIDENTIALITY

Participants and informants have the right to remain anonymous. Their privacy should be protected by the removal of identifying descriptions from published data, unless they explicitly waive their rights. These rights should not be waived by minors, nor may their guardians waive them for them.

Prospective participants should be made aware where there is a risk that anonymity may be compromised by subsequent investigation (for example by other researchers combining the results with work of their own).

Researchers should report results or communicate with the public in such a way as to minimise the likelihood of data being taken out of context or otherwise misinterpreted.

Secondary researchers should respect and maintain the anonymity established by primary researchers.

Before data is transferred to others, investigators should ensure that the recipients give written assurance that measures to ensure confidentiality will be maintained.

GENERAL

Researchers should inform themselves about cultural, religious, gender and other significant differences in the research population, and be sensitive to and respect these differences in the planning, conduct and reporting of their research. [5]

Researchers should minimise the risk of harmful social or psychological consequences of their research, and take steps to remedy any that occur.

Participants in research should be involved in the planning and conduct of the research and in preparation of the findings, wherever this will be of benefit to them and will not jeopardise the efficacy of the research. Participants have a right to be informed of the outcomes and the practical consequences of the research.

Where research is done on the very young, or on persons who cannot adequately understand the nature of the research, the research should be planned to ensure that there is no risk of harm, and should be monitored to ensure that no harm in fact occurs.

Where a researcher discovers evidence of a problem or condition which calls for remedial action, the researcher should report this to the appropriate authority, unless harm may occur to participants as a result or breaches of confidence would be involved. [6]

Studying Groups [7]

HARMS

Significant harms to the groups being researched that should be avoided include:

1. stereotyping;
2. the creation or reinforcement of prejudice;
3. loss of privacy and dignity;
4. affront, for example as a result of insensitivity;
5. damage to the integrity of institutions;
6. destruction of personal relations;
7. destruction of inter-group relations.

DECIDING WHETHER TO ENGAGE IN RESEARCH ON A GROUP

For the most part, enhancement of the general good and indirect benefit to the participants are adequate reasons for doing research. But research on socially disadvantaged groups should be designed for their direct benefit.

Researchers should take account of the volume of research being published about a group, and if that appears to be reinforcing prejudice or causing the harms listed above, they should consider the desirability of shifting the emphasis of their work.

Investigations which repeat or trivially extend well established research are a waste of resources. Repeating new research may be a way of testing its validity. However if the effect of repeating research is likely to be the reinforcing of prejudice against disadvantaged groups, it should not be undertaken.

Projects should be discussed with the representatives of the group concerned where such exist (and with other appropriate authorities where they do not) before they are commenced and the results discussed before they are published. These representatives or authorities do not, however, have the right to censor the result.

PUBLICATION

Members researching socially disadvantaged groups should be sensitive to the risk that publication may create or reinforce public prejudice.

Communication of the results of such research should be phrased in ways which minimise the risks of feeding prejudice.

The publication of research should take account of the rights to privacy and dignity of the research populations, and to their legitimate sensitivities.

It may be desirable not to publish the results of the research. Before deciding whether or not to publish, the researchers should consider whether injustice will result from publishing or from refusing to publish the results or part of the results.

INSTITUTIONS

Where research on groups takes place within an institution, such as a school, university, hospital or prison, care should be taken to avoid the disruption of institutional processes, and if such disruption occurs, to see that the authorities are informed of its existence and causes and that the consequences of such disruption are remedied if possible.

Subject to pressing concerns to right injustice, researchers should seek the permission of the authorities before the work is commenced, should work within agreed guidelines and should in any case inform authorities of the results before the work is published.

Australian Association for Research in Education

Research Institutions and the Public Domain

HARMS

Significant harms to society and its institutions that should be avoided include:

1. inferior education;
2. false or distorted beliefs, including distorted views of education or of education research;
3. injustice;
4. inappropriate reliance on a style of education;
5. perpetuation of falsehood;
6. devaluing of education research;
7. loss of reputation;
8. withdrawal of funding;
9. loss of the opportunity to do research;
10. reduction of academic freedom.

PURPOSES

Research should always be directed towards the enhancement of some human good or goods.

Researchers should recognise the value of long-term curiosity led research, and support and encourage it.

Researchers should endeavour to ensure that their work is of significance; that it does not waste time and money.

Research Methods

Researchers should recognise the uncertainty of all claims to knowledge, and in particular should recognise that justifications for research methodologies depend upon epistemological views which are disputed and uncertain. Where research results are presented in a context where this is not well understood, researchers should beware of presenting them as though they were infallible. They should declare the existence of alternative professional opinions to their own . Responses to those opinions should be honest and measured.

This humility is especially important when education authorities or governments are committed to acting on the results, for example in the designing and use of tests.

Researchers should keep themselves informed on the methodology of research, including disputes about appropriate methodology. They should regularly reform their own methodology in the light of that discussion, and be rigorous in its application to their work.

Researchers should make themselves aware of the impact of other research, including research in other sub-disciplines, upon their work. They should offer their work for discussion from time to time by researchers in other sub-disciplines. Researchers should act to maintain the breadth of research, both in respect of the range of sub-disciplines involved and in respect of the variety of groups and problems studied.

Social Responsibility

Researchers should conduct their professional lives in a way that enhances future research, the public standing of the field, and the discipline's research results.. While robust criticism of the research of others is to be encouraged in academic contexts, such criticism should be respectful in nature. Scandalous behaviour is not acceptable.

Researchers have a social responsibility to defend the importance of educational research in general, for example in the face of attacks by governments, political parties or members of other disciplines.

Researchers should honestly disclose their qualifications and limitations when providing professional opinions.

Researchers should pursue and report their work with integrity and honesty. They should ensure that their own work is competent. If they change their field of work, they should ensure that they become competent before they publish or make contracts to publish their findings. They should not approve the use by inadequately trained persons of techniques requiring specialised competence, except where they are being trained in the use of such techniques under the direct supervision of a qualified person.

Reports of Research

Reports of research should draw attention to the limitations of the results, both in reliability and in applicability. Researchers should avoid and if necessary act to correct misuse of research and misunderstanding of its scope and limitations. They should not exaggerate the significance of their results, nor misrepresent the practical or policy implications. This is particularly important where the results are for widespread public consumption. Nevertheless, researchers should not shun public controversy.

Researchers must not fabricate, falsify or intentionally misrepresent evidence, data, findings or conclusions. They should report their findings fully without omission of significant data, disclosing details of their theories, methods and research designs which might bear upon interpretations of their findings. They should report research conceptions, procedures, results and analyses accurately in sufficient detail to allow knowledgeable, trained researchers to understand and interpret them.

Researchers should be aware of the political context within which their results will be read, and of the likely political consequences of the research. They should take care that reports of research are so phrased that they minimise the likelihood of misuse.

EMPLOYMENT

Where researchers participate in actions related to hiring, retention or advancement, they should not discriminate on the basis of gender, colour, social class, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnic background, national origin, personal acquaintance or other attributes not relevant to the evaluation of academic or research competence. They should not be party to recommending those who are manifestly unfit.

Sponsorship and Ownership

PUBLICATION

Researchers have a duty to disseminate research results to stakeholders, to other researchers, to their students and to the general public.

The first duty of a researcher is to reach the widest possible audience, not to maximise personal benefit. Arrangements concerning publication, while recognising entitlement to financial benefit by the authors, must not restrict the availability of intellectual products to scholars, students and the public.

Researchers should not enter agreements where restrictions are placed on dissemination, other than short-term restrictions to avoid injustice (for example to avoid harm to disadvantaged groups, or to allow a brief time for a response to be prepared by people the research may implicitly criticise). [8]

Researchers must be free to interpret and publish their results without prior submission to, censorship by or approval from individuals or organisations, including sponsors, funding agencies, participants, colleagues, employers, superordinates, supervisors, administrators or governments. This understanding should be made clear to participants before the research commences, and to sponsors before contracts are entered into.

OWNERSHIP

The data, argumentation and results or conclusions of a research study belong to the researchers who designed and constructed the study unless specific contractual arrangements have been made with respect to these matters. The ownership of other output, which might be used to generate money, such as patents, tests or computer programmes, belongs to the employer or the sponsor, unless other arrangements are made in advance. Arrangements concerning the share of royalties or other profits between funding bodies and authors should be determined in advance of publication. In order to encourage free exchange of research findings and to allow teaching to proceed without restriction, institutions should not be granted intellectual property rights to the written output of the researchers they employ. [9]

INTEGRITY OF RESEARCH

Researchers should not allow sponsors to compromise the integrity of research, the community of researchers, the participants in research or the users of research.

Researchers should not agree to conduct research in which the analysis or the findings are subject to modification by funding agencies before they are published, or in which the conduct of the research may be prejudiced. They should not accept proposals which would distort results or mislead readers. [10]

Contracts should be reviewed by the internal processes of the researcher's institution before they are signed.

Researchers should not use time paid for by their employers to work for private gain without prior agreement by the employer.

Researchers should only accept sponsorship or research grants for research which they are competent to do. They should be meticulous in the fulfilment of contracts. Agencies are entitled to an accounting of the use of their funds, and to a report of the procedures, findings, and implications of the funded research.

When publishing or in other ways propagating their work, researchers should make clear where they stand to benefit financially or otherwise from their research. They should indicate where their affiliations may have affected their interpretation of their research. Reports of sponsored research should include disclosure of the sponsorship and any disclaimers the funder or sponsor wishes to have included, except where confidentiality to participants would be breached thereby.

AUTHORSHIP

Intellectual ownership is a function of creative contribution. It is not a function of effort expended, nor of formal relationship or status.

All those and only those who have made substantial creative contributions to a product are entitled to be listed as authors of that product. These may include research assistants and/or students.

Authorship and principle authorship are not warranted by legal or contractual responsibility for or authority over the process that generates an intellectual product. (Supervisors of students' research, for instance, do not have an automatic right to authorship.)

Anyone listed as an author must have given consent.

The work of others who have contributed to the production of an intellectual product or which is relied on or used within it should be acknowledged appropriately within the product. Such work does not provide grounds for a claim to joint authorship.

It is improper to use positions of authority to appropriate the work of others or to claim credit for it.

GENERAL

Authors should not use a position of authority over other individuals to compel them to purchase an intellectual product from which the authors benefit. An author's belief that her or his book should be bought by the author's students should be evaluated by an independent committee.

Researchers in competition for research funds should avoid denigration of their competitors, exaggeration of the importance of their research, or promising more than they can deliver.

Training Researchers

TRAINING

Researchers have a duty to ensure the competence of those inducted into the field, and to provide appropriate help and professional advice to novice researchers. Such help should include advice about career prospects, including the impact on career prospects of alternative research projects, assistance in securing research support and employment, encouragement and support.

Training in understanding the ethics of research should be part of the training of researchers. This should involve direct teaching, advice and example in relation to the research of both trainer and student.

Supervisors of trainee researchers should take responsibility for the ethical acceptability of the research plans of their students.

FAIRNESS

Researchers should not exploit students, but should be committed to their welfare and progress. They should not discriminate between students or between those who wish to become their students on the basis of gender,

colour, social class, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnic background, national origin, personal acquaintance or other attributes not relevant to the evaluation of academic or research competence, but should make choices where necessary on the basis of achievement, intellectual capacity, willingness to work and potential.

Researchers should be fair in their evaluation of research performance and should communicate that evaluation fully and honestly to the student. In judging the output of trainee researchers, examiners should be mindful of the standards of the profession and of the possibility of competent disagreement.

Students may be expected to become aware of disagreements, both personal and intellectual, between researchers; but they should not be used as pawns in such conflicts, nor should they be embroiled in disputes or personal animosities with the colleagues of their supervisors or encouraged to despise other researchers.

Editing, Reviewing and Appraising

SUBDISCIPLINES AND METHODOLOGIES

Editors and reviewers of material submitted for publication and reviewers of research proposals should recognise the variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives, and within the limitations of the purposes of a particular journal or funding body , the full range of sub-disciplines which contribute to educational thought and practice.

Subdisciplinary partisanship and methodological bias should not influence judgement of the worth or publishability of an article or book, of the funding of research proposals.

The judgement of standards should be related to the sub-disciplines involved in the proposal, article or book, and the methodology adopted. Merit should be understood to involve both the competence with which the argument is conducted and the significance of the results achieved.

PROCEDURES

In refereed journals, blind review with multiple readers should normally be used, and where this is waived the fact should be made explicit.

Judgements of the adequacy of an inquiry should be made by reviewers who are competent to read the work submitted to them. Editors should strive to select some reviewers who are familiar with the research paradigm and who are not so unsympathetic as to preclude a disinterested judgement of the merit of the enquiry.

Authors have the right to know the grounds for rejection of their work. Comment by reviewers should be constructive and educative.

Journals should have published policies for refereeing articles. They should publish statements indicating any special emphasis expected to characterise articles submitted for review.

GENERAL

Editors should insist that sexist, racist and other discriminatory language and ad hominem attacks are removed from articles prior to publication.

Researchers should not try to prevent the publication of a critical review of their own work.

Maintaining Ethical Standards

Each researcher has a responsibility concerning the ethics of education research. Maintaining ethical standards is not only required for the general good, but is in the interest of the research community.

Researchers should not accede to breaches of ethical standards by collaborators. While there is room for difference of opinion about the morality of certain actions, if it is believed that a significant breech of ethics is occurring, the issues should be discussed with the researcher. If it is believed that a serious breach is occurring, and the researcher is unwilling to change her or his ways, the matter should be reported to the immediate superior of the researcher, or in the case of a trainee, to the supervisor. In the case of inaction, and where the breach is severe, reports should then be made to the head of an institution, such as a vice-chancellor. It may on occasion be desirable to ask the Executive of the AARE for advice or action, for example if the head of the institution declines to take appropriate action.

Whistle-blowers who have thrown public light on unethical practices should not be subjected to vilification by other researchers, but should be protected against attacks or threats to their careers. Where research assistants or secondary researchers discover unethical practices, they should have avenues to report this to an ethics committee without fear of reprimand or reprisal. They should also have avenues for seeking confidential advice (for example from an AARE committee) before they take any action, or before making a formal report.

The AARE should have an ethics committee to discuss matters referred to it from time to time as new issues arise, to issue advice as appropriate, and to propose revisions to the Code of Ethics in the light of experience and change. It should not have a disciplinary role, but should have charge of a programme of ethics education.

This Code has been constructed with the aid of the Draft Codes of the American Educational Research Association, the Australian Council for Educational Research and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, and the 1978 Code of the Australian Association for Research in Education. In many cases the precise wording of these documents has been incorporated.

Adopted at the Annual Conference, November 1993.

Footnotes

1. This principle should not be taken to imply that research should not be done into a wrongful practice on the grounds that the perpetrator would suffer loss of reputation or employment if the practice were made public. Most often, it will be the publication and not the research itself which causes the harm. Whether or not the research should be published will depend on the case; basically on degree of wrongfulness of the research.

2. It is not possible to spell out precisely what constitutes significant harm. The two clauses that follow give an idea of the kinds of things that should be avoided or remedied. None of them are trivial. The researcher should be sensitive to the possibility of these kinds of things occurring in the circumstances of the proposed research.

3. As with medical research, in extreme cases where for example saving a life depends on successful research, more risk may be justified.

4. The right to withdraw is founded in part in the right of the participant to decide for him/herself by what values his/her life will be governed. It is not open to the researcher to overrule that decision in the interests of the general good.

5. For example, research on the fitness of girls might have to take account of the clothing restrictions placed on Muslim girls. It would not normally be right to insist on such students taking part in activities which require sports clothing, or to report on their fitness without taking into account the restriction on their opportunities.

6. If the harm that requires remediation is severe, it may be desirable to seek release from the promise to keep confidence. If that release is not given, it will be necessary to examine the severity of that harm and to compare that with the harm that is involved in breeching confidence. It is not possible to make hard and fast rules here. Research on disadvantaged groups is usually undertaken from a laudable motivation to bring them some benefit. But excessive research can increase the disadvantage, by repeatedly drawing attention to the weaknesses of group members. It is reasonable for a government department or a private sponsor to have a certain amount of time after the conclusion of the research and before the results are published, to prepare a response in case the research report is misleading or is poorly argued, or to correct whatever weaknesses have been exposed.

7. The issues here are complex. The preservation of rights to publish is based on the duty to disseminate results, for the advancement of knowledge and the benefit of humankind, and on the requirements for good teaching. Selling patented products does not in general contribute to these benefits. On the other hand, private companies or individuals are not likely to foster research and set up manufacturing plant to produce products which may benefit humankind unless their profits are protected by patents. A company might nevertheless agree in advance to waive its rights to patents under all or some circumstances, in order to encourage researchers to work on practical consequences of their research. In general, education institutions might be expected to take this approach, in so far as their prime functions are not entrepreneurial. Tests and computer programmes are intermediate in status between patentable inventions and research conclusions, and what is

appropriate will vary with the item. They should accordingly be discussed with employers on a case by case basis.

8. It is not reasonable for sponsors to choose researchers on the basis of the findings that they are likely to produce, nor to insist on the right to modify the results before they are published. Such proceedings corrupt the research process, promulgating and perpetuating mistaken beliefs and supporting mistaken policies. Subsequent research which relies on the distorted results may also be made unreliable.