

‘Codes are not enough...’¹: a report of ongoing research

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The Lifelong Learning Sector is becoming increasingly diverse. As many Further Education colleges become ‘dual institutions’, working in partnership with Higher Education awarding bodies, there is an increase in undergraduate research projects.

Whilst ethical guidelines are issued by the awarding Higher Education bodies and ethics committees are established in college departments, the considerable variety of projects undertaken (many of which are vocationally orientated and some of which involve vulnerable adults and young people) present new ethical dilemmas to these newly formed bodies.

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) issued a revision of their guidelines for educational research in 2004 as a result of criticisms of the original publication which suggested that they were not only limited in scope, but also in acknowledgement of the diversity of the types of educational research being undertaken, and in particular the growing popularity of ‘action research’. At the time of that revision there was a clear commitment to ‘*review and continuously update the Guidelines*’ (BERA, 2004: p. 2).

This commitment to review is a response not only to the growth of innovative research methods, but also in recognition of a wider ongoing debate on the nature of ethical and moral conduct. ‘*There is no terminus for moral debates*’ (Moghaddum, 2004: p. 1).

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) differentiate between ‘procedural ethics’ and ‘ethics in practice’. The role of procedural ethics are useful at the project design stage for the protection of basic rights. However, these have limited value ‘in the field’. ‘Arguably, procedural ethics has little or no impact on the actual ethical conduct of research’ (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: p. 263). On the other hand are ‘the everyday ethics which arise in the doing of research’ – ethics in practice – are those issues which arise as ‘ethically important moments’ in which an approach or decision made by the researcher may have ethical ramifications (ibid).

As a result, the author has embarked on further research in this area with colleagues in the Lifelong Learning Sector. A forthcoming article for a later edition of this journal will explore the debates in the light of some practical dilemmas faced by researchers and their supervisors.



References

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¹ Small, 2001:p. 387