

Chapter 9

Towards some answers to the questions of ethics in collaborative research

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The questions of ethics in collaborative research derive fundamentally from the collaborating researchers' respective worldviews and value systems. Developing appropriate and effective answers to those questions depends partly on the researchers' willingness and capacity to make explicit and hold up for examination otherwise unconscious and hence uncontested aspects of their attitudes and values – no easy task. As one way of addressing these questions, this chapter records the authors' exploration of this crucial yet risky process by presenting and critiquing their shared engagement with completing three challenging statements: "To me, good research is:"; "My research benefits:"; and "Ethical collaborative research involves:". The authors elaborate the conceptual resources, methodological assumptions and life experiences that each brings to responding to these statements; in addition, by means of a focused conversation, they articulate some of the synergies uniting their outlooks as well as the potential areas of disagreement and dissent. The chapter concludes by presenting selected aspects of the authors' ethical stance regarding collaborative research and possible implications of that stance for the broader research team's operations and sustainability.

Introduction

We begin this chapter by recalling Lather's (1991) powerful enjoinder to education researchers to submit their assumptions and actions to careful and rigorous reflection:

Too often, we who do empirical research in the name of emancipatory politics fail to connect how we do research to our theoretical and political commitments. Yet if critical inquirers are to develop a 'praxis of the present', we must practice in our empirical endeavours what we preach in our theoretical formulations. Research which encourages self

and social understanding and change-enhancing action on the part of 'developing progressive groups' requires research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work. Our own frameworks of understanding need to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail. (p. 80)

Lather's (1991) exhortation is a timely reminder that numerous questions have been posed about the ethics of designing, conducting and publishing collaborative research. Some of these questions pertain to collaboration among researchers from different countries with different forms of capital and sociocultural traditions (Marshall, 2005), including queries about the cultural situatedness of the concept of informed consent (Dawson & Kass, 2005; Hyder & Wali, 2006) and the pedagogical possibilities of international collaborations in teaching and learning about research ethics (Jefferies & Grodzinsky, 2007). Equivalent inquiries arise from conducting research with members of Indigenous communities (Edwards, McManus, McCreanor, & Whariki Research Group, Massey University, 2005; Street, Baum, & Anderson, 2007) and from collaborative interagency research (McCloughen & O'Brien, 2006). These questions reinforce to us, as three members of a research team, that ethical issues are often complex and unpredictable in their impact on individual researchers and that that complexity and unpredictability are compounded when those individuals interact with their fellow researchers as well as with other research participants.

A specific set of questions has been articulated by the Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre that serves immigrants and refugees in Toronto, Canada: these related to "the relevance of the research to Access Alliance's mission and values, community participation, the nature of the partnership, the removal of barriers to participation (e.g., linguistic and financial barriers), data access and ownership, and capacity-building" (Grégoire & Ying Lee, 2007, p. 74). Another set was explicated with regard to participatory research:

What do participatory theory and practice tell us about the nature and location of 'ethics'? What are the ethical dimensions of participatory work? Are there fundamental principles at play in ethical decision-making in participatory projects? And, finally, is there such a thing as an 'ethic of participation'; and if so, what does it look like? (Cahill, Sultana, & Pain, 2007, p. 305)

All these questions about collaborative research are as much about knowledge and power as they are about ethics. Or to put this crucial point slightly differently: responding to questions about ethics in collaborative research must take account of the political dimension of such research. This point has been reinforced in alternative ways by the observation that "Speaking on behalf of other communities, as education researchers commonly do,

requires justification against charges of imperialism, indifference or ignorance, or misplaced paternalism” (McNamee, 2002, p. 5) and, even more baldly, by the mind-concentrating query that should be applied to all research orientations and paradigms: “As qualitative researchers, what indeed are we for?” (Kenny, 2004, p. 198).

This chapter presents some answers – albeit provisionally and tentatively – to these kinds of questions about the ethics in and of collaborative research. Specifically each of us engages with the task of completing three statements: “To me, good research is:”; “My research benefits:”; and “Ethical collaborative research involves:” These statements were chosen on the basis of being likely to generate a diversity of responses that would in turn highlight the varied conceptual, methodological and experiential knowledge that we bring separately and severally to the process of writing the chapter. That engagement is followed by a section that elicits some of the synergies and divergences in our outlooks made explicit by responding to the statements. Finally, we consider what those synergies and divergences might mean for our continuing collaboration and the research team’s sustainability more broadly.

Before we launch into completing the three statements, we need to introduce ourselves briefly, in order for readers to situate our responses to the statements against the backdrops of our respective autobiographies. Linda is an educational psychologist and a neophyte (postgraduate and early career) researcher. While her initial research training in the discipline of psychology during the early 1990s was grounded in the positivist tradition, her subsequent research experiences, postgraduate studies and collaborations with colleagues in education faculties contributed to her interest in the interpretivist paradigm, leading to the adoption of a pragmatist position and a mixed methodological approach to research. Linda is curious about the nature and functioning of research teams and collaborations that are often requisite for successful mixed methods research. Her research topics currently fall into two main areas, one being teaching and learning in higher education with a specific focus on the conceptualisation and application of blended learning approaches (De George-Walker, Hafeez-Baig, Gururajan, & Danaher, 2010; De George-Walker & Keefe, 2010), and the second being teacher efficacy for supporting student mental health and well-being that is the topic of her ongoing doctoral study.

Catherine is a specialist in adult and vocational education and training and lifelong learning, with 20 years’ experience as an educator in vocational education and training, tertiary and community settings. She is committed to research that applies transformative, experiential and blended learning methodologies to promote lifelong learning for individuals and to support the development of rural communities. Catherine is currently pursuing doctoral study involving one such community, using participatory action research (PAR) to ascertain and enhance current levels of citizen participation and community engagement. She is particularly interested in exploring ways in which

universities can and should become more directly involved in and responsive to their multiple communities, thereby maximising their educational and social mission and relevance. She is similarly committed to articulating the practical implications and utility of critical theory understandings of the world and of research approaches that acknowledge sociocultural inequities and strive to ameliorate them (Arden, 2006).

Patrick is a qualitative social researcher with research degrees in anthropology and history as well as education. Since beginning work in the university sector in 1991, he has shifted his paradigmatic interest and allegiance from logical positivism to interpretivism to elements of poststructuralism. His central research topic – including for his doctoral study (Danaher, 2001) – is the education of mobile individuals and communities (Danaher, Kenny, & Remy Leder, 2009; Danaher, Moriarty, & Danaher, 2009), which has also prompted a focus on the ethical and political dimensions of education research (Coombes, Danaher, & Danaher, 2004; Coombes & Danaher, 2001), as well as on the work and identities of educators (Anteliz, Coombes, & Danaher, 2006; Danaher, Coombes, & Kiddle, 2007) and more recently of academics and researchers (Danaher, Danaher, & Danaher, 2008). He has a continuing ambivalence about formal education, research and universities, seeing them simultaneously as potentially reinscribing privilege and inequity and as possibly leading to enhanced mutual understanding and transformative dialogue.

Having introduced ourselves, even if necessarily briefly and selectively, we turn now to elaborate our responses to the three statements outlined above. We begin with “To me, good research is:”.

“To Me, Good Research is:”

Linda

To me, good research is: research that is both methodologically and ethically rigorous. Admittedly, my first thoughts about what comprises good research tend to be the methodological ones, such as: good research must have clear aims and research questions; and good research must be based on valid and reliable data that are thoroughly and accurately analysed. The initial direction of my thinking about good research is probably due in large part to my background discipline of psychology – a discipline inclined to focus on the methodological basis of research quality, and further that tends to privilege quantitative and experimental research methods (Gergen, 2001; Salmon, 2003). As noted in my self-introduction, I did gain experience with other methodological paradigms of qualitative and mixed methods research after my undergraduate psychology degree, in roles as an educational psychology practitioner, as a postgraduate student and then as an academic in faculties of education. As a result of these experiences in both psychological and educational contexts, I hold the view that good research is not associated with

any one research paradigm but instead requires the researcher to reflect carefully on the research purpose, questions, participants and so forth, and to determine the most suitable approach for each study. Hence, I have adopted what is often referred to as a pragmatic approach to methodology (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005).

While methodological issues such as those highlighted must be considered in responding to the question of “What is good research?” the critical dimension of ethicality also demands attention. While ethicality includes adherence to ethical protocols, processes and doing no harm, Hostetler (2005) argues that the ethical dimension of good research is more essentially about doing good – that is, researchers should serve human well-being and be clear about how they are serving it, or not. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) summarise it well when they remind us that good research requires researchers who have “not only an understanding of the technicalities of research and reflective practice, but an unwavering commitment to ethics and the improvement of the human condition in the context within which they work” (p. 209).

Catherine

To me, good research is:

- Research that is done for the purpose of human betterment through the generation of knowledge and increased understanding of the social world and social phenomena, and to that end is necessarily meaningful, useful and situated in real-world problems of individuals, groups and communities
- Educative and democratic, seeking to facilitate learning, increased understanding and insight for researchers and participants alike
- Epistemologically pluralist and diverse, valuing both emic and etic perspectives (Danaher, Tyler, & Arden, 2008)
- Action-oriented, values-driven and critical
- Exploratory and experiential
- Cogenerative – in the sense of informing and being informed by theory (Elden & Levin, 1991, p. 127)
- Systematic, coherent and methodologically defensible and, finally,
- Ethical.

A review of the above list of characteristics of good research reveals a strong pragmatic orientation with a humanist – one could almost say idealistic – bent imbued with an educator’s passion for learning through processes of collaborative inquiry. Indeed, my own journey as an early career researcher and doctoral student is littered with my various attempts at engagement in research that reflects these qualities, beginning in 2005 with two collaborative writing projects (Arden, Danaher, & Tyler, 2005; Parker & Arden, 2006) (the former of

which is the subject of Chapter 6 of this book). Through these projects I was able to explore and articulate the beginnings of a research orientation, or philosophy, which I then attempted to enact in a number of collaborative research projects in which I was engaged as a university researcher in my local community. It is interesting, and enlightening, more than five years down the track, to reflect on these collaborations with a view to exploring the questions of ethics in collaborative research. The ethical question of who stands to benefit from a research effort (*Cui bono?*) – a question first posed as a theme for a postgraduate and early career researchers’ symposium that I participated in very early in my journey as a researcher (see also Coombes & Danaher, 2001; Kenny, 2004) – has become a theme in my own research narrative, and I will take the opportunity to explore it further in this chapter.

Patrick

To me, good research is:

- Conceptually framed, methodologically rigorous and empirically focused
- Focused on both asking and answering complex and sometimes troubling questions
- Directed at extending our diverse understandings of one another, ourselves and the world
- Predicated on the assumption of any issue generating multiple and often conflicting viewpoints, some more powerfully expressed than others
- Based on theory and practice being interdependent and iterative rather than a dichotomy
- Concerned with resisting metanarratives and promoting counternarratives (Danaher, 2008).

At one level, this list of responses to the stem “good research is . . .” might be seen as platitudinous and/or as unsubstantiated generalisations. At another level, the list might suggest a set of evolving, fluid and not necessarily coherent beliefs about a cognitive stimulus that goes to the heart of why I am a researcher – or rather why I would like to see myself as a researcher. From the first perspective (possible platitudes and/or unsubstantiated generalisations), my responses might be considered statements with which one is not able to demur and as having little or no meaning. From the second perspective (shifting beliefs about me as a researcher), those responses could be taken as implying a somewhat ambivalent allegiance to the interpretivist and poststructuralist paradigms mooted in the introduction to the chapter. My even more ambivalent acknowledgement of some of the tenets of critical theory is connected with my final dot point in the list above: I see certain key terms associated with critical theory as sometimes being used in ways that can potentially turn them into metanarratives and hence into being beyond critique. Of course precisely the

same charge can be laid against any paradigm, including interpretivism and poststructuralism; my ambivalence might reflect individual interactions with particular critical theorists (but not Catherine, whose genuine commitment to participatory action research and enacting productive change I have seen at first hand) and/or a temperamental reluctance or inability to see research findings in terms of definitive prescriptions for action.

A crucial element of my writing the two preceding paragraphs is my recollection of the focus of this chapter: that we are concerned with ethics in collaborative research. By this I mean that my understandings of what good (and bad) research is have been forged and tempered by means of interactions with a large number of others – fellow researchers, research participants, doctoral supervisors, doctoral students, research managers, faculty leaders and role models past and present. In some cases the views of these multiple others about what research is and is for have been explicit; much more often those views have remained implicit, and have been made manifest indirectly – for example, in the way that research participants have responded when I have talked about my current research project and sought to persuade them to take part in it. One instance has been a question along the lines of “And what will happen to this information at the end of your project?,” implying a final report with recommendations being passed on to those with the power to make decisions and bring about some kind of desired change to the status quo. Significantly, such an outcome does not appear (except implicitly) in the list of statements in the first paragraph in this subsection. This divergence in assumptions about good research – a divergence that has emerged between some participants in research in which I have been involved and me – generates in turn some potentially uncomfortable thoughts about who might be presumed to benefit from that research.

“My Research Benefits:”

Linda

My research benefits: potentially a broad range of stakeholders in various ways, such as:

- The profession (by, e.g., contributing evidence-based practices)
- My higher education institution and faculty (by, e.g., attracting funding and research standing)
- Book and journal publishers (by, e.g., contributing to the development of commercial products)
- Me and my researcher collaborators (by, e.g., contributing to personal and professional learning, career progression, and enjoyment and satisfaction)
- People, communities and society (by, e.g., giving voice and informing policies and practices).

When reflecting on this list of potential beneficiaries, I experience a feeling of unease at the admission of the benefits of my research to me personally, especially when juxtaposed against the seemingly more important benefits to people, communities and society. This feeling of unease harks back to the sentiments expressed in my first statement response about the ethicality of good research – the view that research should do good and contribute to the well-being of people, communities and society (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007; Hostetler, 2005). In light of this, my acknowledgement of a range of benefits that I experience personally from my research seems at best self-interested and self-serving and at worst an unethical conflict of interest. Yet Hostetler (2005) reminds us that in addition to obligations to others researchers have an ethical obligation to themselves:

Call it an issue of integrity or identity. Education researchers have a right and an obligation to understand what they are doing, to stand for something worthwhile that gives their personal and professional lives meaning, and to articulate that thing to themselves and others. (p. 17)

Thus, ethical researchers can, and will, personally benefit from their research in a myriad of ways, and, when this is taken further, it becomes a part of one's ethical obligations to engage in personally and professionally meaningful research and to communicate this clearly to self and others. But the personal benefits of research and the benefits for others, including people, communities and societies and other stakeholders, do not have to be mutually exclusive, and are ideally interdependent. This is most clearly evident to me in my experiences of collaborative research about teaching practices for flexible and blended learning in higher education (De George-Walker, Hafeez-Baig, Gururajan, & Danaher, 2010; De George-Walker & Keeffe, 2010). My collaborators and I have been able to focus on issues of concern in our teaching (e.g., how can we assist students to engage and learn when they have such busy lives and multiple commitments to study, work and family?), develop an understanding of the issues and possible solutions, and transform our own teaching practices and philosophies in ways that have had positive outcomes for students as they shift towards more self-directed engagement and learning. Publication and dissemination processes in turn extend the benefits to the profession, the institution, book and journal publishers, and so on.

Catherine

My research benefits:

- Me, in terms of my professional development and increased knowledge, understanding and expertise, along with professional recognition and other rewards and opportunities
- Co-researchers and collaborators in terms of their learning and development, recognition and opportunities

- My discipline or field of study through the generation of new perspectives on problems and new knowledge that is grounded in real-world contexts
- The university through access to case studies that provide data, connections and credibility, and contribute to “cogenerative learning” (Elden & Levin, 1991, p. 127) through a “scholarship of engagement” (Boyer, 1996, p. 11)
- The community in which the research is situated, in the form of increased knowledge, understanding, skills, networks and hence capacity and, finally,
- Society, through an increased understanding of the nature and workings of the social world that can, in turn, contribute to human betterment.

The question of who serves to benefit from research raises, among others, the important issue of the inherently political nature of any social research (Somekh, 2005), and in particular of action research. Wadsworth (1998) maintains that “action researchers need to . . . understand the practical and ethical implications of the inevitability of the value-driven and action-effects of their inquiry” – that is:

- The effects of raising some questions and not others,
- The effects of involving some people in the process (or even apparently only one) and not others,
- The effects of observing some phenomena and not others,
- The effects of making this sense of it and not alternative senses, and
- The effects of deciding to take this action (or no action) as a result of it rather than any other action and so on. (pp. 5-6)

In this spirit, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) urge action researchers to adopt a critical stance in order to help the research move beyond what they describe as a “celebratory account” towards an “emancipatory account . . .that attempt[s] to address the more difficult and challenging substantive ethical concerns in relation to the wider social and political agenda” (p. 205). For the researcher, the need for a critical perspective is particularly relevant to the question of who stands to benefit from the research (*Cui bono?*) (Coombes & Danaher, 2001; Kenny, 2004). Applying a critical lens to the above list of benefits is a sobering exercise, revealing that the two more or less guaranteed beneficiaries of my research are myself and the university – primarily in terms of recognition, credibility and other rewards that are generated through these research activities, along with my own personal and professional development. This would be closely followed by benefits gained by co-researchers and collaborators identified in evaluations of the outcomes of these research collaborations as well as the claims of co-generation of new knowledge, which are to some extent evidenced in the publications generated through the research (see, e.g., Arden, Cooper, & McLachlan, 2007; Arden,

Cooper, McLachlan, & Stebbings, 2008; Arden, McLachlan, & Cooper, 2009). The sobering revelation, however, concerns the extent to which claims of benefits to the community in which the research is located, as well as to society more broadly, are upon closer scrutiny revealed as little more than a kind of hollow rhetoric that is easily trotted out unreflectively, and on demand.

Patrick

My research benefits:

- Me
- My fellow researchers in collaborative teams
- My university (through the annual publication collection that generates income from the Australian Commonwealth Government)
- The participants in research projects in which I am involved
- Less directly, other members of the communities to which those participants belong
- My doctoral students (through my drawing on my experiential research knowledge in helping to facilitate their own research)
- My other students (through my drawing on my experiential empirical knowledge of the issues that I have researched to provide examples in my teaching)
- Other education researchers who might read my publications and/or attend my presentations at academic conferences.

At first glance, the sequence of my statements in the previous paragraph might appear illogical, even eccentric. They might also seem to denote the range of my interestedness, beginning with myself and moving out to people who (as readers of my publications) might never be known to me, and with the participants in research to which I have contributed in the middle of that range. Yet acknowledging myself as the first intended beneficiary of my research reflects at least two realities: most if not all of us operate on a daily basis to fulfil our needs and aspirations; and I am the only person (and that not entirely) whose interests I can know with any kind of accuracy or comprehensiveness. The same principle applies to the rest of the list; as it progresses, I have less direct and sustained contact with the members of each group (with the exception that I have more ongoing connections with my doctoral and other students than with the participants in my research projects other than when I am conducting those projects).

Some of my research collaborators and I have taken up these ideas more fully in a number of publications related to my primary research interest, the education of mobile learners (e.g., Anteliz, Danaher, & Danaher, 2001; Danaher & Danaher, 2008; Danaher, 1998; Danaher, Danaher, & Moriarty, 2003). A recurring theme in those publications is that addressing the question of who benefits from my research is inextricably linked to identifying the

interests of the participants in that research, both myself and the people who provide data for me to analyse. Furthermore, those interests are multiple and heterogeneous rather than singular and homogeneous, allowing for divergences of opinion and outlook among the members of mobile communities, for example. This point resonates with the statement that “Travellers are neither more nor less good, just or true than any other population” (Remy Leder, 2009, p. 219). This is not intended to denigrate Travellers or any other group of research participants; on the contrary, it seeks to assign to them the same kind of human agency that researchers would presumably ascribe to themselves and other members of the academy.

“Ethical collaborative research involves:”

Linda

Ethical collaborative research involves: first and foremost a commitment to relationship-building and -maintenance via meaningful engagement in collaborative processes. Mitteness and Barker (2004) identify several collaborative processes essential for research teams to function well, including: seeking to understand one another personally and professionally; elaborating a common language which emerges from a respect for different perspectives and paradigms; establishing mutual trust and respect; developing effective approaches to formal and informal leadership; and devising constructive approaches (as opposed to destructive ones) to engaging with the debates, dilemmas, challenges and conflicts arising in collaborations. Reflecting on my experiences of collaborative research, I have observed that research collaborations that invest in these processes, and perhaps more fundamentally engage in dialogue for and about these processes, demonstrate an ethical attitude and engagement among the collaborators.

It is also important for ethical collaborative research that the dialogue turns to matters of ethics explicitly. In my experience, ethics is discussed but tends to be restricted and task-oriented, often towards preparing applications for ethics committees. While ethics applications are certainly necessary discussions and tasks for ethical research collaborations, there is considerable benefit from ethical dialogues which delve deeply into concrete ethical matters such as privacy and confidentiality, as well as meta-ethical positions, for which Hammersley (2009) reminds us that there is often a lack of consensus among researchers. Developing deep understanding of one’s own and others’ ethical positions through dialogue might not only assist collaborative researchers in their ethical research decision-making but also, perhaps more importantly, help to develop a collective ethical identity, and provide insights and new possibilities for collaborative researchers about how their research might do (more) good for people, community and societies.

Catherine

Ethical collaborative research involves:

- Clarification and management of stakeholder expectations (transparency)
- A commitment to action, and to acting in truly participatory, collaborative and inclusive ways
- Approaching research with an open mind and a willingness to learn and share
- Demonstration of mutual respect and a commitment to open communication and the development of a trust relationship over a sustained period of time amongst co-researchers and participants
- A commitment to reflexive and reflective practice – holding up the mirror to our own practice/praxis as (co)researchers through ongoing evaluation
- Avoiding the “missionary position” (*Campus Review*, 2008, as cited in Arden, McLachlan, & Cooper, 2009, p. 92).

Evaluations of the research partnership between university and community stakeholders conducted as part of this author’s collaborative research found that taking the time to make explicit difficult and less tangible factors such as these was critical to the sustainability of research relationships, with the last item on the list referring to the need for universities “to have a little bit of humility – to work with each other and respect what we can learn from each other,” rather than seeing research collaborations with communities as “a one-way activity . . . simply outreach from a missionary obligation perspective” (*Campus Review*, 2008, as cited in Arden, McLachlan, & Cooper, 2009, p. 92). This last factor was seen as being particularly useful for attempting the challenging and uncomfortable task of raising and discussing the power imbalances that can serve to undermine effective research collaborations between universities and communities.

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) pose a series of ethical guidelines for practitioner research which they claim “underpins an orientation to research practice that is deeply embedded in those working in the field in a substantive and engaged way” and state that in addition to adhering to ethical protocols (such as obtaining informed consent from participants) ethical practitioner research should “be transparent in its processes . . . collaborative in its nature . . . transformative in its intent and action . . . accountable to the broader community for the processes and products of the research [and] able to justify itself to its community of practice” (2007, pp. 205-206).

Patrick

Ethical collaborative research involves:

- Empathy, respect and trust among research team members
- Empathy, respect and trust between research team members and other research participants
- Recognition of the interplay (and sometimes the conflict) among multiple interests on the part of research team members and other participants
- Recognition that ethical understandings and practices are culturally specific and socially constructed
- Explication (as far as possible) of one's own ethical and political positions and assumptions
- Explication (as far as possible) of the impact of one's ethical and political positions and assumptions on one's planning, conduct and evaluation of research projects.

As with my response in the previous section, my contribution to this section begins with the people with whom I have most direct and sustained contact in a research project. On the other hand, unlike my previous response, this one ends by returning to me, again on the understanding that the only person whom I can really encourage to do the kind of explication recommended in the last two points in the list is myself. The list is also intended to be limited to my sphere of influence – for example, while I can hope that research participants will respond to my questions as accurately and comprehensively as possible, I cannot guarantee that that will occur, and I certainly have no way of knowing if they engage in empathy, respect and trust towards other members of their communities. Again this statement is not intended to denigrate any individuals or groups, but simply to acknowledge the complexity of the roles and responsibilities of the multiple stakeholders in any research project as well as the restricted power of any one of those stakeholders (including my fellow researchers and myself).

The discussion in the two previous paragraphs is informed by the concept of situated ethics (Piper & Simons, 2005; Simons & Usher, 2000), which emphasises “understanding ethical practice as contingent and located in the specific power grids of particular institutions” (Anteliz & Danaher, 2005, p. 3). This notion in turn articulates with Pring's (2002) contention that “Virtues are fostered – and indeed related to – particular social contexts and without that social support personal virtues so often weaken” (p. 125). That contention brings us back to the collaborative dimension of research ethics – that it is only in collaboration with our fellow researchers, research participants and research stakeholders that we are able to make explicit and strive to enact the elements of ethical research.

Synergies and Divergences around Ethics in Collaborative Research

Having written separately our responses to each of the three statements presented above, we met to engage in a focused conversation about the synergies and divergences in our understandings of ethics in collaborative research revealed by those responses. We were reassured by the extent of the commonalities in our ethical positions. Yet we were also interested and somewhat surprised to find aspects of diversity in those positions, reflecting not only our respective personalities and temperaments but also our varied disciplinary and paradigmatic backgrounds. We used the conversation to identify and talk about those similarities and differences and their possible implications for our work as researchers, some of which we explore in this section of the chapter.

Turning first to the synergies, we found that the following elements of collaborative research ethics were generally consistent among all three of us, either explicitly in our written statements above and/or evident in the focused conversation:

- An awareness of the necessarily close connectedness between who we are individually and collectively and what we believe about research ethics (see also Day Langhout, 2006)
- A familiarity with our respective disciplinary and paradigmatic foundations without a rigid adherence to them (see also Cummings, 2005)
- An acknowledgement of the tension between allowing our voices to be heard in the research and enabling the voices of other stakeholders to be articulated (see also Cunningham, 2008; Lewis & Porter, 2007) (this point emerged during the focused conversation after we had written our individual sections of the chapter)
- A commitment to the importance of empathy amongst team members and between researchers and other research participants (see also Finn, 2009; Ritchie & Rigano, 2007)
- A corresponding sense of responsibility to identify, understand and where possible and appropriate help to fulfil the aspirations and needs of the multiple others linked to any research project (see also Katsouyanni, 2008; Pontecorvo, 2007).

With regard to the divergences, while they were certainly outnumbered by the commonalities, it is important to examine, even if briefly, three of them here – one selected by each author. The first is an area of potential tension in Linda's disciplinary and paradigmatic background; the second relates to a possible disjuncture between participatory action research and pragmatism in Catherine's research; the third concerns Patrick's ambivalence about the apparent goals of some approaches to education research. That is to say, only

the third theme is a point of dissent between two of the authors; each of the first two denotes an apparent contradiction within the research of a single author. We see this as another important dimension of sustaining synergies in our collaborative research: working together we are able to identify and explore sites of divergence within individual researchers' activities while also drawing strength from the distinct commonalities among us.

For Linda, a postgraduate and early career researcher and educational psychologist, there are at times disciplinary and paradigmatic tensions as she has sought to negotiate a research space between psychology and education. In response to the tensions arising from the qualitative–quantitative divide, Linda has adopted a pragmatist position and mixed methodological approach to research. Such an approach often necessitates collaborative research as one researcher rarely holds the necessary expertise across all methods. This approach also takes up the aforementioned processes as identified by Mitteness and Barker (2004) as essential for collaboration (namely the importance of seeking to understand one another personally and professionally, and adopting a position of mutual respect in relation to identified synergies and divergences). It is her experiences of collaborative research, and in particular the willingness of collaborators to engage in these processes, that are lessening the tensions and enabling Linda to become clearer about the space that her research occupies, not only between, but also across, psychology and education.

For Catherine, there is a potential disjuncture in practice between the respective principles of participatory action research and pragmatism. The former are based solidly on extensive, comprehensive and ongoing consultation, negotiation and participation, and on continually involving all stakeholders in the research as fully as possible. The latter entail making strategic decisions throughout the research about how far it is feasible to implement the former in particular contexts and situations. Inevitably this requires the researcher to exercise judgement about each context and situation, based on her perceptions of who has particular expertise that is required with regard to a certain issue, for example, compared with a potential view that other individuals might be seen by the group or community as contributing less positively or productively to the process. Equally inevitably this induces a concern on the researcher's part that she might unconsciously be privileging some members of the group or community at the expense of others. This divergence can be synthesised as the tension between inclusiveness and comprehensiveness on the one hand and efficiency and finalisation on the other.

For Patrick, his aforementioned ambivalence about certain terms in critical theory (and admittedly equivalent terms in any other paradigm) potentially becoming a metanarrative that narrows and controls thinking rather than broadens and opens thinking resonates with the following statement: “For as the Frankfurt School demonstrated, moral discourse is around to help us realize

the best of which we are capable, while it is the task of social theory to remind us of how and why, as a society, we often fall short of such lofty ambitions” (Elliott, 2009, p. 182). While he eschews the pessimistic resignation about accepting the status quo that might result from such a position, he is more confident about the kinds of understandings that collaborative research can and should generate than about prescriptions for specific action that might be proposed. Again, while sharing Catherine’s enthusiasm for participatory action research, he remains aware of the practical and philosophical difficulties in groups of people researching together, let alone entire communities aspiring to initiate and sustain wholesale change.

Conclusion

This chapter has elaborated our separate and shared responses to three statements that encapsulate broader streams of thought about ethics in collaborative research. The process of articulating our views about what constitutes good research, who benefits from research and what is involved in ethical collaborative research has highlighted specific areas of convergence among all of us as well as a few sites of potential difference, even disagreement. These areas and sites will be useful topics of conversation and writing as we continue to collaborate, both among ourselves and as members of a larger research team.

In relation to that broader team, we contend that many of the commonalities and divergences identified in this chapter are likely to be evident if a similar exercise were undertaken by the team as a whole. Given the team’s commitment to sustaining the synergies among their members as well as those with other research participants, such an exercise is liable to be considered a worthwhile activity in the next phase of the team’s operations. Based on the principles outlined here and in the other chapters in this book, we anticipate that the benefits of enhanced communication and heightened understanding will outweigh any possible risks.

Yet we need also to acknowledge those risks. While this chapter marks our debut as co-authors in this specific configuration, each of us has previously written separately with the two other authors. This means that we have already established a strong framework for engaging in this kind of exercise: we have become well-versed in how to respect one another’s viewpoints while feeling comfortable in articulating our own. We have done this through our personal and professional interactions prior to joining the research team, and we have reflected explicitly on those interactions in particular team meetings and in preparation for writing and revising the chapter. Conducting such an exercise prematurely, before sufficient rapport and trust have been developed, is likely to be counterproductive at best and permanently damaging at worst. This observation is a timely reminder of the fragility, even vulnerability, of many of

the answers to the questions of ethics in collaborative research presented in this chapter.

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Strategies for sustaining synergies

- Record your key questions about ethics in collaborative research, and identify the extent to which they match the questions outlined in this chapter.
- Write your individual responses to complete the three statements “To me, good research is:”; “My research benefits:”; and “Ethical collaborative research involves:”; then use the comparison with fellow team members’ responses as an opportunity for comparing and contrasting the team’s ethical stances.
- Consider whether or not there are specific responses to those statements in the chapter with which you agree and/or disagree particularly strongly, and reflect on why you might hold those views.
- Imagine a scenario in which the three chapter authors are seeking to join your research team. Articulate some questions related to their ethical stances that you might pose to them as well as some criteria for deciding if you would accede to their request.
- Topic for debate: “Sometimes it is better to ‘agree to disagree’ than to seek fundamental resolution of conflicting ethical stances in a research team.”

Further reading

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