

Conducting and Reporting Research: Original Papers

Embedding Self, Others, Culture and Ethics in Intercultural Research

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Abstract

This paper highlights the tensions evident in maintaining ethical principles while simultaneously responding to interpersonal and cultural demands in an intercultural research setting. The tensions reflect the intersections of relationships between ethical principles and practice, between a researcher and her research participants, and between people in the same or different cultural communities. The intricacies of cultures encompass unpredictable expectations for many aspects of research, as shown in the sociological perspectives, which are at the very centre of deliberations in this paper. It is argued that ethics, interpersonal relationships and cultural considerations are representative of the complexity of considerations that researchers negotiate throughout the conduct of an intercultural study. Therefore, it is important that the positioning of ethical practices is considered as central to the wider research process.

Introduction

This paper reports on some ethical tensions that I encountered when conducting a qualitative research activity on Chinese immigrant children's learning experiences in New Zealand early childhood settings. The participants of this research were eight Chinese immigrant children, their parents and early childhood teachers. The tensions that were examined in this paper were associated with my relationships with the Chinese immigrant parents. They were attributed to my dual identities as a Chinese immigrant, viewed as 'an insider' by the parents and as a researcher, 'an outsider' who was obligated to conduct research in line with the ethical standards of a New Zealand university. During the course of the research, I found myself constantly struggling to develop a working relationship with the parents that was both ethical and culturally responsive to them. The question I asked was how to reconcile ethical principles with ethical practice in intercultural research by rigorously maintaining preset ethical responsibilities and appropriately dealing with possible interpersonal and cultural demands.

Intercultural Research

Intercultural research takes place in settings where people from different cultural backgrounds work with each other. The aim of intercultural research is to seek viewpoints and facilitate dialogues from people of diverse cultures thereby identifying differences and establishing shared understandings in relation to an issue that concerns them all (Sizoo,

2008). The intercultural research referred to in this paper considers the learning experiences of Chinese immigrant children in early childhood settings in New Zealand from the perspectives of the children, their parents and New Zealand early childhood teachers, the majority of whom came from non-Chinese cultural backgrounds. The development of this research project follows a process in which the learning experiences of Chinese immigrant children are understood by obtaining opinions of people in Chinese community and the people in New Zealand early childhood community so that understanding about this research phenomenon held by one cultural community is linked with that developed in another cultural community. The objective of this research is to make meaning an inter-understanding of the chosen topic. I hoped what I would learn would identify educational implications for early childhood education so that learning experiences of Chinese immigrant children could be facilitated.

In intercultural research, although intercultural dialogues are the most important theme, these dialogical exercises need to build on the development of interpersonal relationships. It is these relationships that open up room for tensions and gaps in intercultural research, partially because of the cultural specificity to human relationships (Thatcher, 2001). Simply bringing cultures together, therefore, does not guarantee dialogue. On a helpful note, Thatcher confirms that pursuing intercultural dialogue necessitates understandings of “the relationships of the individual to the other” and “traditions” (p.470).

It is the task of this paper to consider the interpersonal relationships in a particular intercultural research setting with a particular focus on the inter-relating factors of relationships and research ethics. I begin by describing my ethically challenging experiences with the Chinese immigrant parents in that research against the backdrop of the relationships between the parents and New Zealand early childhood teachers as well as the relationships between the parents and their children. Within this paper, the interpersonal relationship is an inclusive notion that encompasses not only the relationships that were developed during the research but also the relationships that had been developed before the research. Although the paper mainly focuses on my ethical experiences with the Chinese immigrant parents, some aspects of these experiences were seen to have emerged from the parents’ relationships with early childhood teachers in intercultural settings and the parents’ relationships with their children.

Underpinning all these relationships is the parents’ perception of the tradition to work with others, including people of the same cultural background, teachers and their children. In this research, because of my own Chinese background, the relationships between the Chinese parents and early childhood teachers, the parental roles of Chinese parents and my responsibility to relate to all the participants in an ethical manner, I located myself in a dual position when working with the Chinese parents. One position that I needed to take was as a Chinese cultural member, an ‘insider’ to the parents. The other position that I was also required to assume was that of an ‘outsider’ researcher (Smith, 1999). Maintaining these dual roles created a key ethical tension in surrounding the difficulties of embedding ethical principles within ethical practices in intercultural research. Here is an example of a reflection I made on my experience with the Chinese immigrant parents:

The relationship between myself and the Chinese immigrant parents generated extra demands on me, which was not predicted in the beginning of the research. It was difficult to relate to the parents in an ethical way, simply because they tended to work interdependently as prompted in Chinese culture. This interdependence was at odds with my responsibilities for maintaining other ethical aspects of the research. I was

fortunate that as “an insider”, my hesitation to supply to them with some information they asked for did not turn them away and most parents were enthusiastically taking part in the study regardless. I would, however, wonder how pure ‘outsider’ researchers deal with such ethical issues. Would participants be less demanding to researchers of different cultures? Could ‘outsider’ researchers be in a more advantageous position in intercultural research because the inter-play of cultures and the inter-cultural elements are less visible to them?

This reflection illustrates the cultural and ethical complexity of the issues that I faced in that intercultural research setting. As mentioned above, the issues were located in my dual roles. The need to operate the ‘insider’ identity challenged my obligation to function as an ‘outsider’ researcher and this challenge raises the importance of rethinking ethical principles and research practice so that research is undertaken as an evolving and dynamic process in which issues around self, others, culture and ethics all come alive.

Ethical Principles in Research

Ethical principles in Codes of Research Ethics specify the parameters of relationships of people involved in research, particularly in qualitative research because qualitative research explains people’s life elements and often involves a relationship between researcher and participants. The principles are intended to ensure that a researcher’s experience for gaining knowledge from others does not harm those being researched. They are also intended to provide researchers with codes of conduct during the research if something unforeseen occurs. Research associations and institutions have therefore developed explicit ethical principles and procedures and require affiliated researchers to adhere to them (Robinson-Pant, 2005). Macfarlane (2008) identifies that in order to gain ethical approvals from a research organization, researchers need to obtain informed consent from participants, respect anonymity or confidentiality of the participants and allow participants to be in charge of their participation. The informed consent, in particular, “is key to ethical research” (Coady, 2001, p.65). The key tenet of informed consent is that researchers provide their participants with a clear explanation of the nature of the proposed research, including what is involved in research, and “what they [the participants] are letting themselves in for” (Macfarlane, 2008, p.9). In research with children, consent is sought from their guardians, in most cases, parents, mainly because children are perceived to not have sufficient understanding of what constitutes a research activity and of the research implications for them (Neill, 2005). In practice, researchers format documents that specify their conducts in relation to their research in alignment with the ethical principles. Researchers then submit them to their associated institutions for research approvals prior to research.

It becomes clear here that when the principles are applied to a particular study, what might have initially appeared as ‘principles’ strikingly resemble the nature of rules to prescriptively guide action and conduct. This is consistent with Berkin’s (2005) point that ethical guidelines are “abstracted rules” (p.5). Robinson-Pant (2005) finds that this holds true in the UK too and says that “though ethical codes of conduct were usually introduced as guidelines within UK institutions, all too often they have been regarded as a set of rules and implemented without critical reflection” (p.115). Their claim that the need to adhere to ethical principles obscures the descriptive nature of principles could mean that research is a process in which the two concepts, principle and rule, merge into each other in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish them. Eisner (1998) explains that this phenomenon is caused by an assumption that researchers can anticipate what will happen to their research.

Ethical Practices in Research

There is increased recognition of the difficulties of applying ethical principles in research practice. In light of the social nature of much qualitative research, Ellis and Earley (2006) claim that it is difficult for any researchers or research associations to ritualize the procedures of obtaining informed consent and protection of participants in research. Sin (2005) has found that “getting respondents to sign a consent form or having secured approval from research ethics committees are, in themselves, insufficient to ensure that the process and products of research are conducted and wielded in ethical manners” (p. 281). The evolving and fluid nature of research and research relationships do not allow researchers to fully anticipate what is being consented to, thus would not enable them to inform themselves and their participants of what rules should be followed (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993 cited in Ellis & Earley, 2006). Eisner (1998) also identifies researchers’ lack of knowledge about what will emerge with the research process as the key source of difficulty for them to apply ethical principles. He asks “how does one get such knowledge?” and “can consent be informed?” in recognition of “the mismatch between the informed consent and the key feature of qualitative research to be deductive” (p.214). It may well be advisable for researchers to be aware that few things can be predicted prior to the start of a study (Berg, 2004, cited in Ellis & Earley, 2006).

These issues raise implications worthy of further consideration. First, the very idea of ethical practice should best be considered an ongoing process, consisting of phases that might be characterized by different issues. Secondly, what are specified as ethical principles should not be treated as formalized rules because researchers’ inability to have full knowledge about the later developments of their research constrains them from predetermining absolute research rules.

Simons and Usher (2000) go to great lengths to mesh situated practice with ethical standards. Central to their argument is an emphasis on the contextual issues that emerge during a research project. For them, ethics has more to do with research contexts than following abstract standards. They define this context-oriented ethics as ‘situated ethics’. In her discussion about situated ethics, Hunter (2001) is quite explicit that “ethics is a two-edged sword, both responsive and engaging, enabling of agency but also normative and conventional” (p.205). Cullen, Hedges and Bone (2005) also believe that ethical decision-making should be guided by two perspectives: universal ethical principles and a focus on relationships. Implicit in this viewpoint is “that in practice, researchers may draw upon both perspectives to examine ethical considerations” (Cullen, 2005, p.253).

The idea of integrating research relationships with ethical principles mutually and contextually ties together the concepts of ethical principles and research practice. This potential integration appears to help alleviate the constraints that ethical principles impose on researchers but leave us wondering about how effectively this integration can be realised in practice. For example, in what ways can the three perspectives all guide research processes? Is it possible that when enacting positive relationships, researchers might violate ethical principles? Under what circumstances should the contextual issues be more important than ethical principles and how might we determine that?

Ethical Practices in Intercultural Research

The tensions between ethical principles and practices in research can be compounded in intercultural research. Given that intercultural research involves more than one culture, different cultural ways of understanding and doing things are more likely to emerge during

the research process. The current emphasis on recognising and affirming cultural variations as prompted by sociological and anthropological perspectives has given rise to a definition of culture as an interdisciplinary entity, encompassing the values held by members of a given group, the norms they follow and the materials they create (Robertson, 1992). This places the concept of culture as the possession of a particular group. Smith (1999) endorses Foucault's term of "cultural archive" (p. 44) to support her argument over the complexities of culture in human lives. For her, cultural orientations are formed in many layers and consist of not only contemporary but also historical subtleties of numerous aspects of human functions. This view is rooted in a belief that cultural undertakings can be implemented unconsciously and cultural rules can be "masked in some way and ... tend to be articulated through implicit understandings of how the world works" (Smith, 1999, p.43). These unconscious, implicit and subtle cultural orientations necessitate contemplation over the roles of culture in research.

Consistent with this premise, there is growing evidence to suggest that there are cultural differences in research. Robinson-Pant (2005) argues that there is variation between cultures with regard to the interpretation of what could do harm to research participants. He takes the view that ethical procedures based on western values may not be effective across cultures. In making these points, Robinson-Pant conveys a message that cultural considerations are imperative in research processes and it is dangerous to make universal and homogenised assumptions about research, as may be the case when institutional ethics codes and guidelines ignore, or pay only token heed to the complex nature of cultures.

In the absence of cultural insights into understanding research, it is unlikely that researchers or research institutions can set ethical principles in a way that they can appropriately guide research. This may result in two possible outcomes. Cultural implications for research are under-recognised in determining sets of ethical principles, and attempts to incorporate cultural values within pre-determined research ethical processes may lead to inappropriate research practices.

For Robinson-Pant (2005), in the UK, research institutions set ethical principles and require researchers to follow them in the belief that these principles can take care of the ethical dimensions of research. After ascertaining the sources of research problems of international students who conducted research within their own cultures, Robinson-Pant reflects that while the student researchers could easily fit in the cultural norms of the cultures they were researching in, "they could not afford to ignore the possibly contradictory ethical concerns of the UK educational institution" (p.100). In an attempt to follow the UK ethical guidelines, the student researchers found themselves in a situation in which it was difficult for them to respond to cultural issues that occurred in the research practice.

In New Zealand institutional and research organisation protocols, social and cultural sensitivity is frequently positioned as one of the research ethical principles (Cullen, Hedges & Bone, 2005), alongside confidentiality and informed consent. Researchers need to identify ways in which they can be socially and culturally sensitive, on an application form "written [and designed] by tertiary institutions and organizations such as the New Zealand Association for Research in Education that undertake or supervise research" (Hedges, 2001, p.8). The underlying logic for the inclusion of a cultural component in research ethics might be summarized roughly as follows: researchers need to understand the importance of social and cultural components in research; researchers need to know how to apply sensitivity to their work with people of particular cultures; research institutions or organizations need to know how to guide researchers to sensitively relate to the people of particular cultures.

There is no doubt that these expectations highlight the importance of culture and relationships of people in research. However, given the subtlety and complexity of cultures, we might ask what cultural sensitivity entails on the one hand, and how cultural sensitivity can be applied in research on the other hand. I am concerned with the lack of clarity offered around enacting this principle and wonder how researchers and research associations ascertain whether a researcher is able to make a sensitive response to a culture. I share Cullen, Hedges and Bone's view (2005) that cooperation and power sharing between researchers and research participants throughout the research process "will definitely help" but some questions remain unanswered for me: what kind of culturally specific knowledge and skills does a researcher need in order to ensure cultural responsiveness in research?; and what might be the unforeseen consequences when researchers acknowledge the implications of diverse relational experiences during research and incorporate these experiences into the research process?

The following section of the paper will describe the tension that I experienced when conducting an intercultural research activity. The tension illustrates that cultural sensitivity or cultural responsiveness is a difficult undertaking in research. In connection with my research experience, I wish to highlight that: cultural sensitivity cannot be easily transferred to cultural responsiveness; the unpredictability of cultural demands in intercultural research might contradict researchers' responsibilities for other ethical aspects of the research.

University Research Principles and My Research Practice

The research principles set by my university concerning researchers' relationships with participants include the elements of informed consent; freedom from coercion; respects for rights of privacy and confidentiality; minimization of risk of harm; limitation of deception; social and cultural sensitivity; research and teaching merits; avoidance of conflict of interest; respect for property rights; no discrimination; special care taken of vulnerable participants, for example, children (Research Policy Group, Victoria University of Wellington, 2007, p.A1). Through these, a crucial step to ethical research for me was deciding what was expected from participants in this research, what aspects of the research would contribute harm to the participants and what research processes would be ethically appropriate.

Following these principles, the ethical application procedure I took included submission of participants' information sheets and consent forms written in the first languages of the participants, data collection schedules and a completed application form provided by the University. On the information sheets, I stated my research aims, data collection methods, participants' rights of privacy and confidentiality and my responsibilities for them. I also considered potential 'harm' that I might need to alleviate through careful practice. My methodology called for data to be collected through naturalistic child observations and interviews with Chinese immigrant children, their parents and early childhood teachers. I could therefore anticipate some inconvenience that the research might create to the participants. One was the possibility of having each participating child singled out as being special by other children, due to my close attention to that child. I also anticipated the time of the interviews as a potential inconvenience to the participants. At that time I was not able to think of any other implications the study could possibly make to the participants. However, as the study proceeded, an aspect that was not particularly salient at the outset became more apparent; it was that of the maintenance of ethical principles valued by the Ethics Committee of my university when working with the Chinese immigrant parents in accordance with their cultural needs.

Many Chinese immigrant parents participated in this study with enthusiasm. The nature of this research to investigate and understand learning experiences of the participating Chinese children through me intensively observing what the children were doing in their early childhood settings might have given the parents an impression that they could expect detailed information about their children's learning, although I explicitly wrote to them in the information sheets that only a summary of the field notes was to be provided at the end of each child study. One parent expressed that she "wanted to tell me about her child as well as know more about her child". Without hesitation, the parents shared with me the experiences of their child and of themselves in relation to their child's early education. However, at the same time, many parents wanted to know what I had observed or heard about their child. They did not seem to have listened to my explanation about following the ethical procedure of viewing only a summary of their child's data at the end of the study.

There might be two explanations for this. Firstly, the Chinese cultural value of interdependence framed parents' relationships with me. Fundamental to this is what Anderson (1999) terms as "the interrelatedness of the individual to others" (p.483). In his research on Chinese students' attributional styles, Anderson identified the goal of interdependence in these students' relationships with others. A major theme of interdependence, for him, revolves around people's desire to "make self meaningful only in the context of social relationships, duties, and roles" (p.483). Drawing on the concept of interdependence to understand my research relationships with the Chinese immigrant parents, this could mean that the Chinese parents expected reciprocal duties and roles to be undertaken in ways that were meaningful to both of us. It is about who we were and how we saw ourselves as members of Chinese communities, but not about who I should also be and what I should also do as an outsider researcher. The concept of interdependence that was valued by the parents in my study as such introduced the possibility of my responsibilities being fluid and my identities being unfixed. My dual identities, for this reason, had a constitutive influence on the possibility of tensions in this research.

Secondly, there was limited communication between the Chinese immigrant parents and early childhood teachers. The parents did not know much about their child's experiences in a childcare setting. My study, therefore, was regarded by parents as a perfect chance for them to learn about their child's learning within the centre. The parents were so keen to know what I had recorded from the teachers about their children's experiences that they were oblivious to my research obligations, which I had explained to them previously, regarding maintaining the confidentiality of some aspects of the data that were collected. Wiles, Charles, Crow and Heath (2006) reflected a similar experience:

many of our study participants reported that, in their own research, they found that participants frequently disregarded researchers' explanations of what study participation would entail because they were keen to 'get on with it'; this seems to be particularly the case with research with relatively powerless groups. (p.293)

The word 'powerless' might not be directly related to the Chinese immigrant parents, but from my research with them, I could see that the parents did not actively participate in their children's learning programmes at the childcare settings to, for example, help make decisions, and they did not know much about their children's experiences in a non-Chinese cultural setting. When an opportunity occurred for them to learn more from me, an 'insider', it was understandable that the parents sought this. Their behaviours were not only merely triggered by our similarities but also by their differences from the culture of the childcare centres and the relationships between the parents and teachers. My dual identities, under

these circumstances, positioned me as a site of intercultural exchanges and as such obscured my focus on doing the research.

As mentioned before, although I approached the Chinese immigrant parents as an outsider researcher, the parents were seeking 'xiang hu yi lai', an interdependent relationship with me, as promoted in Chinese culture (Chiang, 2003). Our interdependence, a core value of collectivist cultures is similar to that of "whakawhanaungatanga" upheld within the Maori worldview. Bishop and Glynn (1999) propose whakawhanaungatanga as a methodological process involving building interpersonal relationships. In this research, the parents were active participants; we were connected and mutually dependent on each other. This type of relationship seemed to be an appropriate one, with reference to the concepts of whakawhanaungatanga and the interdependence concept of Chinese culture. Within this relationship, it is clear to me, however, that an important ethical issue needed to be addressed: the rights of each participant within the large context of the rights of all the participants ought to be defined. I also needed to pose solutions concerning how best to operationalize participants' rights versus my responsibilities as well as to conceptualize contributions of the research, to them, to Chinese immigrant children and to the early childhood educational field.

Moreover, it can also be realized that my role in this intercultural research setting, when given the freedom to construct it for myself, could blend both the Western individualistic approach and the Chinese collectivist approach. Given that "differences between individualists and collectivists can cause discomfort when they come together" (Gonzalez-Mena, 2003, p. 18), the experiences that I encountered when working with the Chinese parents could also derive from my own struggle to find ways in which the collectivistic value might be threaded into the individualistic value of the New Zealand academy (Smith, 1999). Due to the difficulties in doing this, I found the interpersonal relationships in this research to be challenging. In her contemplation on the experiences of indigenous researchers to do research within the context of New Zealand academy, Smith (1999) also writes:

Many indigenous researchers have struggled individually to engage with the disconnections that are apparent between the demands of research...and the realities they encounter amongst their own and other indigenous communities, with whom they share lifelong relationships (p.5)

My responses to the interdependent relationships requested by the Chinese participants, following the ethical principles of a New Zealand institution constitutes what Smith has termed "inside-out" (p.5). Throughout the research process, I was wondering how to reciprocate my relationships with parents in a way that enabled the ethical principles particularly the principles of confidentiality of information and minimising harm to be upheld. Because each child's data was sourced from a number of parties including the participating child, the child's parents and the child's early childhood teachers, I was liable to keep many aspects of the data confidential, in order to protect all the participants. In addition, I was responsible for maintaining that ownership of the data was protected for each individual, therefore transferring children's data from the children to their parents was not possible. Even so, in exchange for my participants' contribution to the research, at the end of each case study, I offered them a summary of the data gathered from observing the child. However, in anticipation of parents' expectations and their reactions to what might not seem too positive, I was wrestling with the idea of what information to provide during that stage in order to protect the children from harm.

It is clear that my dilemma involves issues of fairness for all participants but further to that, constitutes a tension between rights and responsibilities of different related parties. I was aware of the importance for me to respond to the parents in culturally appropriate ways. However, my responsibility for protecting the children and other parties of the research did not allow me to be solely culturally responsive. My dilemma has resonance with Eisner's (2005) reflection on ethical practices, that researchers "would like to be candid but sometimes candor is inappropriate" (pp.225-6). In response to this dilemma, a key approach that I used was to adopt a disposition of reflexivity and negotiation on what was happening between my responsibilities and participants' rights. Upon completion of each study, the field note data was summarized in a way that I kept only the scenarios that displayed the situations in which the child was engaged in learning. However, even such a short version of the field notes provoked reactions from some Chinese immigrant parents.

The following was one of the notes in my research journal, an analytical and reflective record that I maintained in the research process for personal thoughts and research analysis. This note was made after I showed Eden and his mother the summary of Eden's data.

I visited Eden's mother and Eden at their home with the summarised field notes and the interview transcripts that I have taken from them. His mother was warm as usual and we conversed in their lounge while Eden was playing around. In the summary of the field notes, I described Eden's learning behaviours in social situations. In response to his exclusive play with Chinese children, the mother immediately said that Eden needed to go to another centre with no or fewer Chinese children, so that he could learn English. In a rage, she called Eden in and blamed him for making no effort to play with English speaking children. Eden simply stood there with a confused and sad look. I was embarrassed as well as feeling guilty about what happened to poor Eden. Regardless of how I explained, the mother was adamant that Eden should be moved out of that centre.

Eden's mother's firm response to Eden's mono-cultural behaviour based on the field notes was undeniably clear as she perceived Eden to be in a strong need of leaving his early childhood centre. The field notes, once used in this way, served as a disruptive tool of Eden's experience and by this analogy, the research brought up an expected outcome to the child. Although incidents like this were unusual in my study with Chinese immigrant parents and children, it alerted me to the significance of reconsidering that component of the research. I had been mistaken to presume that the participants regarded all the described learning experiences as appropriate experiences. My understanding could have differed from that of the parents and some descriptions that I perceived to be positive could trigger certain negative reactions of the parents. Following this incident, I enclosed a note with the field note summaries stating 'these data only document a specific period of a child's behaviours in his/her normal course of development; they would not provide sufficient insights into understanding the child and his/her learning setting'. Although parents' reactions to their child's behaviours still occurred, the note seemed to work in that I did not see other parents condemn their children in front of me. No further parents, afterwards, insisted on taking an immediate action following the reading of the notes. However I did not know whether they did so at a later time.

Conclusion

My study revealed a journey of responding to an ethical tension between participants' demands for information and my responsibilities for maintaining confidentiality of information, alongside building effective relationships with the participants in a way that was responsive and appropriate to their culture. Questions and challenges have surfaced concerning the difficulty of attending to all these ethical practices in a balanced manner, in line with the ethical principles that were set prior to the research. Pivotal in this process is the merging of ethical relationships and cultural responses through reflective application of ethical principles.

The development of relationships between researchers and research participants is essential to successful completion of a research process. What is equally important in research, particularly in intercultural research, as shown in the case of this article, are the relationships among participants themselves, including the people from the same or different cultural backgrounds, in the same families or across work settings. Because of the different 'groupings' of people, intersection of cultures in intercultural research and the cultural, personal and situational specificity in people's ways of thinking and behaving, making research principles embracing in this sort of research is difficult.

In this intercultural research, I described my role to have dual features of being 'an insider' and 'an outsider'. In the case of relating to Chinese immigrant parents within the New Zealand research paradigm, I saw my experiences as lenses through which I could look closely at culture interplays and gain awareness of and insight into how cultural values could clash with research obligations.

I take the view that research ethics should be considered as being much more than a blind adherence to pre-determined principles that have been agreed to in an application form, but should rather be viewed as an ongoing practice. In my study, I relied on nothing but my own conscience to deal with the issue to try to reach a 'rational judgement' (Eisner, 1998, p. 226), through constantly thinking of my role, the role of my participants, my responsibilities and the rights of the participants. This research process raised my awareness that researchers should be responsive to the tensions that might arise during a research practice and maintain respect for participants. The reality of ethics as applied in a research process is that the researcher will often have to pause and reflect on these tensions and respond only after carefully deliberating on the implications of various courses of action. This view could add a dimension to the responsibilities of research supervisors and colleagues of beginning researchers to offer researchers opportunities to discuss and reflect upon ethical tensions and dilemmas. Finally, it hardly needs saying that educational institutions should organize their research courses, particularly the course of research methodologies, in a way that student researchers are prepared to reflectively respond to ethical issues in research processes.

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