

Constructing Ethical Evidence: Can We Rely on the Virtues of a Reflexive Qualitative Researcher to Generate Trust?

Abstract

The qualitative researcher is no objective bystander. Disinterestedness is not an instrument in the qualitative researcher's toolbox. The levels of immersion required make emotional, political and personal responsiveness inevitable. A neutral sounding term like 'reflexivity' does little justice to how powerful these responses can be. The reflexive researcher is fully aware of the consequences of the impact of their mere presence, as well as how they report and apply their research engagement. The 'subjects' of qualitative research are collaborators and researchers are in a relationship that is imbued with meaning for both researcher and researched(-with). The virtues of courage and honesty are essential if qualitative research is to produce the kind of expertise and evidence that makes a difference, but how do these currently affect how and how far qualitative research may be trusted?

Biography

Dr Ron Iphofen FAcSS is a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Sciences, the Higher Education Academy and the Royal Society of Medicine. Since retiring as Director of Postgraduate Studies in Health Sciences at Bangor University, his major activity has been as an adviser to several agencies within the European Commission (EC) and a range of governmental and independent research institutions internationally such as in France for L'Agence nationale de recherche (ANR); in Canada for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC); and in Ireland the National Disability Authority (NDA) of the Ministry of Justice. He was Vice Chair of the UK Social Research Association and convenes their Research Ethics Forum. He has advised the UK Research Integrity Office and the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology among many others. He has advised on several major EC projects and currently leads a 3-year EU-funded project influencing policy on research ethics and scientific integrity across all non-medical sciences: PRO-RES. Ron founded the gerontology journal *Quality in Ageing and Older Adults*; his books include: *Ethical Decision Making in Social Research: A Practical Guide*, Palgrave Macmillan (2009/2011); the book series *Advances in Research Ethics and Integrity* Emerald (2017); he co-edited with Martin Tolich the *SAGE Handbook of Ethics in Qualitative Research* (2018) and edited the *SPRINGER Nature Handbook of Scientific Research and Integrity* (2020).