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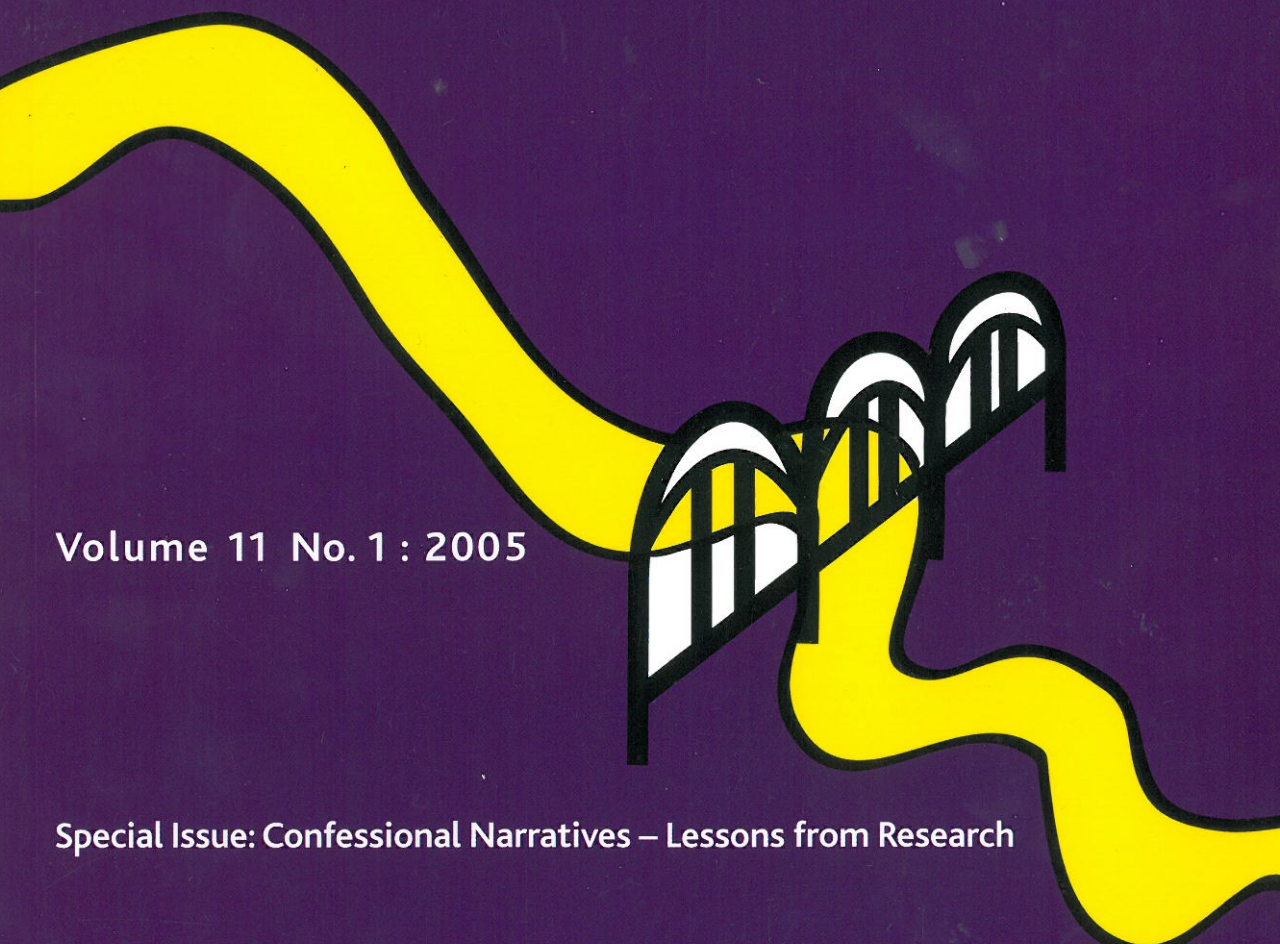
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WJE 2006: Call for papers: Pacific education, Research and practice

The Waikato Journal of Education is a well-established peer reviewed publication that has quality articles on a range of topics related to education.

New Zealand has a strong presence in Pacific education, and Pacific communities have a strong presence in New Zealand schools. However, opportunities for publication of Pacific research in mainstream journals are limited. Therefore, this call for papers seeks articles that focus on Pacific education; both research and practice. Pacific research is reflective of the traditions of the past, as well as the present and future. It often embodies different paradigms, perspectives and critical stances that are not always captured in mainstream research and aims to benefit Pacific communities. Articles will be welcomed that theorise about Pacific research, report on research projects, report on an innovative practice or initiative, or a combination of any of these. As well as traditional manuscripts, the journal welcomes submissions in other formats, such as short stories, poetry and drawings.

Submissions please to Timote Varioleti (vaioleti@waikato.ac.nz) and Jane Strachan (jane@waikato.ac.nz), School of Education, The University of Waikato, PB 3105, Hamilton. Please submit 3 blind copies and a separate page with author/s contact details by 30 April 2006. Electronic submissions also accepted for consideration.

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CONSIDERING PEDAGOGIES FOR CONSENT IN RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT *This article explores some ethical considerations involved in a research project which aims to establish the understandings children have of a frequently viewed video film. Some of the assumptions underlying 'informed consent' and the notion of 'consent pedagogy' will be explored. Then the process of obtaining consent in this research is described and discussed. The process included showing potential participants (aged 9 and 10 years) a video of the research process being acted out and group interaction with the researcher during the showing to clarify the research process. The children's and parents' responses to these procedures are then discussed and some implications of consent pedagogy for future research outlined.*

KEY WORDS

Ethics, Informed consent, Children's consent, Consent pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

This article explains the sense in which pedagogy is implied in the consent process, before describing some considerations around children's consent. It recounts how understandings about the research were created, before reporting on the interactions between the researcher and participants. The issues encountered in the ethics process for this research, rather than the findings, are explored. The focus is on issues that apply to research in education with children although some issues may also be relevant in other fields and with adults as well as children.

CONSENT

Informed consent is a cornerstone element in codes of ethics for research in the social sciences (e.g., NZARE, 1999) but as David, Edwards, & Alldred (2001, p. 348) point out, "the notion of the information on which that consent may be based has rarely been interrogated". The consent process is discussed in this paper with respect to the theories of language, of communication and of learning which are embodied in it.

The language of the NZARE (1999) guidelines, "participants...should *be given* a clear description of what the research involves, how it will be reported, and the extent of public availability" (p. 14, emphasis added), assumes the transmission or distribution of 'information'. The guidelines imply that a clear understanding by

potential participants will result from their receiving a clear description of the research procedure. The adjective 'informed' explicitly signals the requirement for potential participants to be knowledgeable. While codes of ethics and the committees which oversee them focus on the content of information sheets for truthfulness, consistency, completeness, legality and appropriateness of language, they currently tend to concern themselves less with how potential participants come to be 'informed'.

Bernstein's definitions (adapted from Nash, 2003), which separate pedagogy and curriculum, may help to clarify ethics processes. If curriculum is seen as 'what is to be learned' then codes of ethics prescribe the kind of information to be given, that is, the ethical curriculum. If pedagogy is defined as 'how learning is organised', it can be applied in this context to the ways in which procedural knowledge of research comes to be comprehended by potential participants. In these terms then, in the past, what information was 'given' to participants (the consent curriculum) has been the focus of ethics considerations and how that information was to become understood by participants (consent pedagogy) has been given less attention.

This focus on the content of the information is more problematic within the principlist perspective on ethics because its key principles (respect for persons, beneficence and justice) are assumed to be universals. The relationships paradigm of ethics (Cullen, 2005; King, Henderson & Stein, 1999) on the other hand, addresses the pedagogical dimension by creating a framework which provides guidelines for the nature of the relationships between researchers and participants. In specifying the characteristics of the relationships, this paradigm describes the kind of context within which consent knowledge can become understood by both parties. This paradigm is seen (Bishop & Glynn, 1999) as being appropriate for research in Maori contexts. However, the relationships paradigm is not the most appropriate for all research designs, so it is useful here to consider the pedagogy of consent as it may apply within both the principlist paradigm and those designs which incorporate elements of both paradigms.

Assumptions about language, and by extrapolation, about communication, impact on the informing process. Referential views of language, derived from Saussure's structuralist model, (Barker & Galasinski, 2001) recognise only the literal and descriptive functions, and the structural nature, of language. Discursive views (Burbules & Bruce, 2001) include the power of language in constructing and shaping perceptions, thoughts and social realities. The two views of language result in distinct concepts of communication, with referential views linking to 'conduit' or transmission models where information is sent and received 'mechanically'. Discursive views of language lead to interactive socially mediated and contextually shaped communication models in which knowledge is constructed through social interaction.

A number of current learning theories (constructivism, sociocultural learning theory and situated learning theory) share discursive views of language and conceptualise understandings as constructed (rather than received) within contexts, as the result of interaction with others. Each of them locates the creation of meaning within a social context (which influences the meaning), through dialogic interaction with the text, and between learners.

Sociocultural learning theory, used in this research, builds from a view of social practice which emphasises the socially negotiated nature of meaning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) through the idea of situated learning. Learning from shared thinking is conceived of as changing participation in communities of practice rather than as acquiring something (Rogoff, 1998). As Cullen (2001) points out, sociocultural learning encompasses learning embedded in informal everyday contexts (such as the video viewing being studied here). Since this research design was based on a model of learning which includes socially negotiated learning, it was decided (in the interests of theoretical coherence) to utilise an ethical informing procedure which was based on the same assumptions about learning.

In critiquing ‘informed consent’ David, Edwards and Alldred (2001) put forward the alternative concept of ‘educated consent’ on the grounds that their building of research procedural knowledge employed the discourse of education. This was appropriate for their focus on “the family-education interface” (p. 352). Their discussion of the transmission assumptions of informed consent forms the basis of the position in this article. However, employing the notion of consent pedagogy escapes the potential dichotomy of two discrete categories of practice for achieving consent and may prove useful for thinking about consent in a wider range of research.

Researchers, despite calm exteriors want, indeed, need something from potential participants (often the stakes are high). In pedagogical terms it is important that the learning about the research information be ‘open’ and not propagandised. Nash (2003), in talking about the teaching of science makes a point equally appropriate in this discussion. “The students may not have been taught propaganda, but they have been taught by the methods of propaganda, and so cannot realise their knowledge in the right way” (p. 760). In the context of ethics processes, this point is a reminder that information sheets should not be used to indoctrinate; that they must have information not persuasion as their purpose, and that the ways such texts are used (the pedagogy) must be consistently ‘open’. However, as Newkirk (1996, p. 5) points out, the very information sheet and form help to “heighten the sense of importance” of the study and to stress “our own benevolence”. He points out how careful researchers need to be to avoid ‘seduction’ during the consent process.

The central concern in this discussion about consent pedagogies is with participant knowledge which must be sufficient for making a realistic decision about participation. ‘Realistic’ here means having reasonable congruence with the future actuality of the research sessions. Clearly the practices which will lead to participants having sufficient knowledge will vary widely according to research aims and contexts. This paper, after briefly considering the special nature of child participants, will provide examples from one research context of the learning interactions and the kinds of questions children asked.

CHILDREN

Children and young people between the ages of 7 and 16 years old are currently often conceptualised within education as semi-autonomous research participants.

Their consent is necessary but not sufficient for participation in research; parental consent is also required. The ethical considerations that apply to adult participants are also important with children, but in addition, as Morrow (1999) points out, there are added considerations. It is assumed that their understandings of the world in general and research procedures in particular are less developed than those of adults. Children are potentially vulnerable to exploitation in interactions with adults; and access to children is mediated by adult gate-keepers. The building of children's understandings about proposed research is even more important and requires greater care than with adult participants.

It is not realistic to rely on parents being able, willing and available to provide appropriate scaffolding to build their children's understandings of a research procedure. The onus is on researchers intending to conduct research with children, to design interactive learning phases for their ethical processes, using pedagogies which are appropriate for the research material and the children. I turn now to how this research project enacted the concerns discussed so far.

PEDAGOGY FOR CONSENT IN THIS RESEARCH

This research is investigating 9 and 10 year old children's understandings of a repeatedly viewed video, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus, 2002). The first part involved children (n=56) taking part in a survey to identify a widely favoured film. Then those who had nominated *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* as a favourite (n=33) were involved in group discussions. Children (and their parents) being asked to consider participation in this phase of the research had already twice given consent for the earlier parts. These consent rounds had provided them with two kinds of experience relevant to their part four decision. Firstly, they had been through two cycles of printed information being 'given' (on the transmission learning model) and then taking part in the research. Thus they had been involved in this researcher's print information that was subsequently experienced in practice. They had personal match or mismatch experience about the print information from which to approach their part four decision. Secondly, the children had experience of interacting with the researcher in their familiar school setting. They had seen me talking with their teachers and numbers of the children would say 'hello Brian Finch' in the playground (perhaps enjoying the unaccustomed permission to call an adult by their first name). The shared experiences of the initial phases also meant that children had already asked questions about procedure and content so they were potentially positioned to be able to ask questions for clarification about part four.

The consent process for part four was given more time and energy than consent in the earlier parts because the consequences for participants (and the researcher) were greater. It involved four sessions in a home setting lasting a total of 4 1/2 hours. Both the shift to a domestic setting and the greater time commitment asked for, justified greater efforts to build the children's knowledge about the procedures. This consent process can also be seen as a transition from school-based to home-based research settings and so it may have signalled a different kind of participation. No longer were children in the research to be the 'captive sample' by

nature of being 'objects' of schooling as Morrow (1999) comments. Participation would not mean the attraction of time out of class anymore (as Edwards & Alldred, 1999, report), but would take some hours of the children's precious 'own time'.

Information video

An information video was designed as part of the consent process to provide, as Munford and Sanders (2001, p. 103) had, "a concrete example of ... the things they might be asked to do". Children of this age cannot be assumed to have accurate or relevant understandings of 'interview' and labels such as 'sorting activities' will not necessarily have relevant meanings for them. Verbal descriptions depend on knowledge and past experiences. Showing the children simulated research procedures with similar age participants was seen as an effective supplement to the information sheet in providing a realistic impression of what the research would entail. The intention was to provide images of participation in each of three planned data-gathering sessions and the confirming of transcript material, to make the written information more comprehensible. A further reason for supplementing the print information was to reinforce the positive orientation of the research. Teachers and parents on hearing that the research focused on video viewing invariably assumed that negative 'effects' were being investigated. The video demonstrated that interview questions were not about violence or other negative aspects of viewing.

Further, following a sociocultural learning model (and Munford & Sanders' example), an opportunity to discuss the video content was given. Discussion was thought to be especially necessary to allow children to think through duration (of sessions and of involvement), which cannot be clearly conveyed in a brief video. The aims of the video were to convey, through indicative examples, not just the process but also the research tone (friendly, relaxed, respectful, appreciative of time, accepting of answers), to make concrete the child pair - researcher interaction and the domestic (rather than school) setting. The video was structured to provide enactments of each procedure; for example, the word 'interview' appeared on screen followed by the acting out of an interview between the researcher and a pair of children. In this way the video provided a gloss for the information on the printed sheet. This procedure also reduced the reliance on print comprehension for building the children's knowledge (their literacy levels were varied). The researcher made it clear before beginning the showing, that the video could be paused and that children were free to talk while it was screening. The talking over and pausing which occurred was to ensure that questions were vocalised as the children thought of them, rather than risking them being forgotten by the end of the six-minute video. The pre-viewing of the video and discussion of it occurred during group discussion sessions.

Recognising children's location in and comparative lack of power within their families implies the need for parents too to have the opportunity to build understandings for consent and thus suggested the need for their own copies of the video. Each child at the session received a videotape copy of the six-minute information presentation to take home and keep. This was intended to allow the

children and parents together to reach a decision about further participation in the light of their other commitments. The usual contact details were given on the video to allow adults to further clarify or ask questions about the information supplied. This was an attempt to provide the opportunity for interaction with the researcher as part of parental educated consent.

Interaction

From the six group discussions (involving a total of 33 children), 58 comments relating to the video were made. Most of the utterances (80%) were questions. The comments that were not questions were statements which spanned a number of topics, from identifying the researcher, attempting to identify the children in the simulation, identifying the university library, linking the questions being asked in the simulation with the present session, through to commenting on the number of times simulation participants were thanked ('there's a lot of thank-yous in that'). The discussions did not centre around whether to take part but on clarifying the nature of the research process ahead. (There were three short statements of intention to participate (e.g., 'I want to do it') but no other child responded to those comments.)

The children's questions showed a range of inquiry. They asked about:

- the practicalities of the simulation procedure ("Did they get paid to do it?", "What school were those kids from?");
- the simulation settings ("Where's this?");
- the ethics of the simulation procedure ("Did those children know they were being taped?");
- research names ("If we did it could we make up a name, any name?")
- the future research process ("Is this what we'd do?", "Do we pick someone else from this group?", "Would you come to our house?");
- the ownership of the information video tape ("What if you don't want to do part four, do you still get to keep the video?", "Is it our tape, own tape after we watch it?");
- practical problems with the information video tape ("We haven't got a video only a DVD, what should I do?");
- the exact conditions of consent ("If we don't want to do the next part, do we have to or in the middle if we .. can we..?" (child's ellipsis), "Does it say on the piece of paper, if you want to?");
- the place of parents in the consent process ("Is this for our parents?", "Could we watch with our family, like our parents?");
- the extent of their agency in using the information video within the consent process ("Can we watch it anytime at home?", "Can we look at it before our parents do?"); and

- the results and dissemination of them (“What are you going to write about in your research?”, “What will you do with the research?”).

The preponderance of questions and their range illustrate that the children’s focuses were clearly on finding out about the research prior to making a decision. They took the opportunity through questions to initiate interaction about the research. The example quotations above are representative in that first person plural (‘we’) was the most common pronoun form used. It seemed that this form of language was indicating that individuals were inquiring on behalf of the group. Within the group discussion room there was no hint of social leaders showing pressure either to participate or not to. My impression was of thoughtful group inquiry through which the children were preparing to exercise their agency. I was not, however, privy to the conversations as they returned to their classrooms.

These interactions showed the children as inquiring, thoughtful operators who wished to be fully informed before committing themselves. The interaction pattern was not an ‘Initiation-Reply-Evaluation’ one because the children were generating questions (and sometimes answering them). In short, they were taking the opportunity to learn about the consequences of consent for themselves. One child made an explicit link between the group discussion and the interview example on the video remarking that the questions were “[T]he same kinds of questions we’ve just been talking about”. Twenty children from this group of 33 gave consent with 17 actually taking part over the six month data gathering period.

The consent process artefacts (the videotape and information sheets) to be taken home may potentially have acted as bridges for discussions about the consent decision at home. From the school sessions it is clear that children did think about and learn about the research process to come. It was hoped that the video would provide stimulus for discussion between parents and children about the decision.

Ascertaining the kind of interaction which took place between parents and children in making the decision to participate is more difficult. Only one parent responded to the offer to make contact and that call was to discuss potential session arrangement difficulties. While it can be argued that the right to withdraw during any research procedure represents a safeguard for participants, in this case we can suggest, more positively, that the school-based discussion may have formed a useful information-base for the decision-making by children and their parents.

Resources

There were costs to this research in time, effort and money in producing the information video. Although the video required less than 10% of the total data-gathering and transcribing budget, it did require time, thought and organisation (including, of course, a further round of informed consent involving the children to be filmed). Such resource implications need to be considered when weighing up the manageability of a research design. Also to be taken into account are the different skills involved in producing a video and the potential for technical difficulties. In this project there were significant technical problems associated with sound, with light and with editing. (Murphy’s law contributed irreparable faults with equipment and loss through theft of the private computer used for editing and storing footage.)

It was important to keep the research purpose of the video in mind, to remember that the most important factor was the content of the video, rather than its technical polish. It may be that children and parents interpreted the existence of the information video as indicating a seriousness of intent to communicate about the research.

FEEDBACK

Feedback from children and parents

Parents and children were asked during the final (confirmation of transcript) session about whether the research process did match the expectations from the consent process.

Parents' reports indicate that some households did not watch the information video ("I have to admit to not watching it") while others found it helpful ("Um, it did give you information. It told you basically what you wanted to know.") Several children watched separately with each parent. This occurred both where the parents lived separately and where they were in the same house. One child in such a situation watched it "like four or five times, it was kind of soothing" (unintended consequences!).

Some parents indicated that the decision of whether to participate was solely the child's:

We actually left it up to Scott. We said, "you decide". We do that with lots of things with our kids. They choose their sports, they decide which schools they want to go to and then take the consequences. So if Scott had said no, that would have been fine with us. [The children's names used are self-nominated pseudonyms.]

Other children indicated that it was "partly mum and partly me" who decided. One pair of children reflected that before seeing the information video "I just thought I'd have to write a big report, or something like that" (Maisy and Sonya). There were no indications after the consent process was completed that the research process had produced any surprises for either parents or children.

Feedback to children and parents – concluding the relationship

During research we ask participants to 'pretend' that the camera or tape recorder are not really there and request that they do not act differently from normal (which is counter to our social senses about language, audience and situation) in order to satisfy our curiosity about our research questions. Participants know that others are doing the same procedures and so are curious about what others might say and do. To provide closure on the experience it would seem appropriate to give some feedback. Some of the participants' parents report their children being part of other research 18 months previously but not having heard anything about the findings or results and this leaving them with feelings of disappointment. Such feedback can be seen as part of researchers' reciprocity with families.

Morrow (1999, p. 309) raises the question of "how researchers bring to an end what may become a close relationship with the children they are working with". In this case there was a gap of about a month between the third and the final session

with children due to the time required for transcription. After consultation with members of the ethics committee I had decided to create extracts of transcript (usually around six typed pages) for the children to read and approve rather than confront them with full transcripts (although the full transcripts of all sessions, usually totalling 100 pages, were always taken and shown to the children). At this session I thanked them for their contributions to the research and gave them a book voucher (this was not signalled to them earlier so that it would not act as an inducement; Hill, 1998). This was my closure move. Also at this final session several parents asked when I would have findings and asked whether I could inform them. I undertook to provide a preliminary summary to the parents by the end of that year as feedback to the household.

DISCUSSION

The information sheet and the information video each provided a representation of the research procedure. The video was able to show ‘children like us’ demonstrating that silences, hesitations or ‘I don’t know’ responses were not seen as negative because they were included in the example. In this way the intended tone of the research may have been conveyed. The more concrete enactment on the video generated more interaction than would have been expected from a print representation.

It is clearly important that if there are dual representations of the research, to be ethical, they must offer consistent information. It is important that the portrayed tone of the research sessions not be misleading in any way. The purpose of the visual text must be, along with information sheets, to inform participants, *not* to persuade them.

Pedagogies of consent are particularly important for research which involves content, activities or contexts which differ significantly from the children's routine classroom patterns. In such cases children can not be expected to bring understandings or relevant experiences to the task of building their knowledge of the research information. The increased researcher resources required for more fully knowledgeable consent will determine that the approach will be employed when the participation stakes warrant it.

Research on television has shown an analogous movement (Alasuutari, 1999) in its location of text meaning to that advocated above. There was much attention to the way meaning was constructed in the making of the programmes and then studies showed that audiences did not always respond in the ways expected by “textual determinism” (Moore, 1993, p. 6). Research began into the meanings actually created by audience interactions with the texts (Nightingale, 1996). Texts are accepted as being polysemic (having a number of meanings). This adoption of an audience ethnography paradigm has moved research focus to the audience’s reception of texts (Alasuutari, 1999). Literacy research too, has moved to consider the meanings created through interaction with texts using the reader-response theory (Beach, 2004).

The position being argued here is that attention needs to be given to the interaction between the information texts and the potential participants. In the

consent context, researchers wish to create interactions with the information which will maximise understanding, hence the labelling of this aspect of the ethics design as ‘consent pedagogy’.

CONCLUSION

Consent pedagogy can not guarantee complete understanding by participants. Alderson (2004, p. 107) suggests, “asking the children how much they understand about the project and their rights”. But such asking will not ensure either trust or the child’s ability to actually utter the words, “I no longer want to do this” to an adult researcher. Within most cultural contexts adults have power over children and so such attempted evaluation may verge on being coercive. There are significant limits then, to any ‘assessment’ of the consent learning process. The situation requires considerable thought and care in designing the process to ensure the highest possibility of consent with genuine understanding.

In this paper discussion of the importance of thinking about the learning models embodied in the consent process leads to the suggestion of an amendment to the NZARE’s Ethical Guidelines. Section 2.2 *Informed consent* could have additional wording such as, “steps should be taken to ensure their understanding of what the research involves” added to it. This would provide some encouragement for researchers and committees to begin considering the pedagogies of the consent process.

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