Case 1: An unwelcome visitor

Vidya is a young researcher conducting her first major study: a massive qualitative study about perceptions of the importance of learning English. One of Vidya's acquaintances knew a teacher who worked in a low-income city school which seemed ideal for data collection. Vidya decided on interviewing that teacher first. Vidya interviewed the teacher and the students in that classroom. Everything went well. Vidya then decided to go from class-to-class, asking teachers if they and their students were interested in 'answering a few questions'. Some teachers said yes, while others said no. Unknown to Vidya, some teachers informed the principal about what she was doing. The principal and a group of teachers confronted Vidya as she was walking down the hall. They confronted her and angrily asked what she was doing here. Vidya explained that she was a researcher. The principal was further enraged and accused her of putting the safety of school children at risk. Vidya was told to leave the school premises.

Case 2: A failed ethics application

A research team from an elite Western university submitted an ethics application for a qualitative study that aimed to capture the language environment of children living in an indigenous community in north-east India. The team wanted to capture 'authentic' and 'spontaneous' language to potentially analyze as qualitative transcripts, so they proposed to install recording devices in the park next to a pre-primary and primary school, hoping to capture conversations as they happened. Since the conversations were in a public area, they felt there was no need for a) consent forms before planting their recording devices, and b) a talk about the project with the neighbourhood preschool and primary school, the families of children who come to the park or community elders. They described in detail where the recording device will be placed so that no regular activity is disrupted and yet maximum conversations can be recorded. By giving detailed information of the study procedure, they felt that they fulfilled the basic requirements of the ethics application. They were confident that the innovative nature of their project would impress the ethics committee and that they could start collecting data next month. To their surprise and disappointment, their application got rejected.

This material is for training purposes for the TalkTogether Teacher Study (2022)

Case 3: An unexpected reaction

John was an associate part of a research project that hopes to use semi-structured interviews with teachers to capture effective teaching strategies in vocabulary learning in three-year-old children, as well as challenges teachers face in teaching. All necessary ethics procedures were completed: 1) the ethics application was approved; 2) principals of the school sites were informed and gave their approval to conduct the study in their schools; and, 3) participating teachers submitted their consent forms. In his first-ever interview with a teacher, John wanted to stick literally to the interview script. John turned on the audio recorder, which – unbeknownst to him – startled the teacher. His eyes were constantly on the interview script and paid little attention to the teacher. Upon asking the next question on the interview script, 'Why did you find situation you described challenging?', the teacher suddenly started crying thinking she is participating in a performance evaluation and assuming she failed. John was shocked as he did not anticipate the teacher's reaction. He had no idea what to do in this situation.

Case 4: Famous for the wrong reasons

Alia was a research assistant interviewing for a large-sample qualitative project. Students in several schools participated in the study. After transcribing every interview, Alia kept the transcripts with student's details and details of their guardians who gave their consent on her laptop. One day, Alia lost the laptop. Luckily, all transcripts in the laptop, including the spreadsheet, were backed up. She didn't lose any information related to the study. Alia bought a new laptop and thought nothing about what happened. A few weeks later, a principal called the research team in a state of distress. One of the students' mothers found out that their names, their children's' names, and their contact details from the transcripts were posted on the internet. Parents complained that their children's email addresses were spammed with malicious emails, and some also reported attempts to hack into their online banking accounts. While investigating, the research team concluded that the leak came from Alia's lost laptop. The parents were angry and threatened to report the research team to the local authorities. Local news outlets became aware of the complaints and sensationalized the incident, naming and shaming members of the research team and the universities they were affiliated with.