



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

The Nexus I Case

Author(s)

Kenneth D. Pimple

Year

2000

Description

A case study in which researchers in a federally-funded research study focused on elementary education are asked by parents and administration of the school they are studying ask the research to engage in a number of activities outside the scope of the study.

Body

Speakers

Narrator; Thomas Ware; Molly Emmett.

Background

Thomas Ware, a faculty member in the School of Education, is part of an interdisciplinary team including a sociologist, a social worker, a psychologist, and a cultural geographer (among others). The team has been working on a grant proposal for a pilot project they call Nexus I, in which they will intensively study a single elementary school for insights into the factors that help encourage – and discourage – student achievement and parental involvement in education. It is an ambitious project even in its preliminary phase; the team hopes to learn enough from Nexus I

to secure a second grant for Nexus II, in which they will study a second school and coordinate ten similar teams from eight other universities to study schools in six different states. In the process of writing the Nexus I grant proposal (a two-year process in itself), the team spoke with superintendents and elementary school principals in six different schools about taking part in the first phase of the project. Four of the schools were adequately interested in taking part for the team to name them as potential study sites in the grant proposal. The principals and superintendents wrote letters of support for the grant proposal, saying they would cooperate with the team if the project were funded.

Now news has come from the funding agency that Nexus I will be fully funded, and the team has decided that their first choice to study for Nexus I is the Pinetop Elementary School. In the proposal writing stage, superintendents had only agreed to the goals and general methods of the project, not the operational details. Now team members are in the process of meeting with the Pinetop principal and the school superintendents to work out the details of the study and secure necessary permissions and commitments for particular study activities.

In Molly Emmett's office

Thomas Ware is meeting with the Pinetop principal, Molly Emmett. Together they have gone over a ten-page summary of the project. Ware has answered all of Emmett's questions, frequently referring her to the relevant section of the complete project description (which he has also provided her) for her to read later. Now they are finished going over the summary and Ware, feeling quite satisfied with the conversation, begins to pack up his things.

WARE: Thank you for your time, Molly. If you don't have any more questions, I'll be on my way. Of course you know how to reach me if anything comes to mind.

EMMETT (*smiling*): Actually, Thomas, I did want to bring up one more thing.

WARE (*stops shuffling his papers*): Of course, please go ahead.

EMMETT: As I was discussing the project with teachers and parents, they became very excited about your presence here in the school, especially as they became aware of the wide range of expertise of the research team. They asked me to find out whether you would be willing to engage in a number of activities beyond the Nexus research, and they came up with a list of possibilities.

WARE (*nods*): I understand. I'd be happy to hear your ideas and share them with the team.

Emmett reaches into a desk drawer and hands Ware a four-page document.

EMMETT: The ideas are summarized here; you should feel free to circulate them to the team, and to ask me any questions you might have. One idea is for your team to give two or three progress reports at a neighborhood meeting – we'd host them here at Pinetop, naturally. Another is for some of you – all of you, ideally – to do some teaching on your own areas of expertise. You know, make a presentation, not on Nexus, but on social work or cultural geography or whatever, either to a couple of classes or the whole school. Some of my teachers would like to have an informal seminar series with some of your team members to brush up their skill and knowledge. We'd work out details with each individual team member. There are also two different groups of parents and teachers who would like to meet with some of the people on your team several times to get advice on their projects, primarily advice on writing grant proposals.

Ware glances through the summary, nodding.

WARE: Very interesting ideas. It's a long list!

EMMETT (*chuckles*): Remember that they're just ideas, not demands. WARE: I'll copy this and circulate it to the team. We should be able to discuss it at our next meeting. I can't make any commitments right now, of course.

EMMETT (*rising and extending her hand*): Of course, I understand. Let me know what you find out.

WARE (*shaking her hand*): Indeed I will.

Do Emmett's requests sound reasonable? How should Ware and his team respond?

Notes

Prepared for use at a workshop entitled "People Studying People: Core Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research" at the School of Education, Indiana University-Bloomington, September 2000.

Copyright © 2000 by Kenneth D. Pimple. This case is wholly fictional; any resemblance to actual people or specific events is completely coincidental and unintentional. This case may be reproduced and used without permission for non-profit educational purposes. Permission must be requested of the author in writing for other uses.

Also available at the TeachRCR.us site.

Rights

Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

Parent Collection

Ken Pimple Collection

Topics

Community and Participatory Research

Human Subjects Research

Social Responsibility

Discipline(s)

Research Ethics

Social and Behavioral Sciences