IJDC / *Conference Paper*

Acting in the Best Interest of the Other: An Ethics of Care in Digital Curation

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Abstract

Digital repositories occupy a unique position in the data ecosystem, serving as intermediaries that preserve and provide access to valuable research data. This role carries ethical responsibilities toward multiple stakeholders, including participants represented in repository holdings. This responsibility is particularly salient for repositories of sensitive qualitative data, such as video records of practice (VROP), depicting teachers and students in classrooms, where participants remain identifiable and vulnerable to potential harm long after data collection. Drawing on Tarlow's dimensions of care, we conducted 44 semi-structured interviews with VROP data producers and reusers in education to examine how they perceive care in repository practices. Our findings indicate that data producers and reusers view repositories as sites where ethical practices can be modeled and learned, understand data curation as a form of care enacted on behalf of research participants and future reusers, and expect repositories to inherit and extend the ethical obligations originally held by data producers. We introduce the concept of anticipatory care as actions taken by repositories to shape how future reusers engage respectfully with data across temporal and social distance. These findings suggest that repositories must attend to the ethical epistemologies of their designated communities, not merely their technical and informational needs.

Submitted 2 February 2026 ~ *Accepted* 30 April 2026

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The *International Journal of Digital Curation* is an international journal committed to scholarly excellence and dedicated to the advancement of digital curation across a wide range of sectors. The IJDC is published by University of Edinburgh (via Edinburgh Diamond) on behalf of the Digital Curation Centre. ISSN: 1746-8256. URL: http://www.ijdc.net/

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Introduction

Digital repositories serve as critical infrastructure that supports the work of scholarly communities who produce and reuse qualitative data. Serving as intermediaries that facilitate preservation of and access to valuable data, repositories occupy a unique position in the data ecosystem. This role carries ethical responsibilities toward multiple stakeholder groups, including participants represented in the data held in those repositories. This responsibility is particularly salient for repositories of sensitive qualitative data in which those participants are identifiable and remain vulnerable to potential harm long after data collection.

Video records of practice (VROP) represent one type of particularly valuable and ethically complex form of qualitative data. These video recordings of teachers and students in classrooms capture authentic moments of teaching and learning, making them invaluable for educational research and teacher education. Yet, the qualities that make VROP so valuable also create enduring ethical obligations. Because the participants represented in these data remain identifiable, and the VROP often cannot be de-identified without sacrificing utility, the images and voices of those participants persist in ways that require ongoing care.

To examine care in the context of digital curation, we conducted a qualitative interview study with VROP data producers and reusers: educational researchers and teacher-educators (i.e., people who prepare teachers and provide teacher professional development) (Institute of Education Sciences, 1966). Some of our interviewees were also involved in repositories or proto-repositories (i.e., they hoped or planned to make their data available). In this paper, we focus on their perceptions of curatorial activities and relationships with repositories to address the following research questions:

- How do data producers and reusers perceive care in repository practices and policies?
- What does this mean for our understanding of relationships between repositories and Designated Communities?

Drawing on Tarlow's (1996) dimensions of care, we analyze how VROP users in education understand and evaluate repository practice through an ethics of care lens. Our findings indicate that data producers and reusers in education (1) view repositories as sites of care where ethical practices can be modeled and learned, (2) understand data curation itself as a form of care enacted on behalf of research participants and future reusers, and (3) expect repositories to act in the best interest of data reusers as well as the participants represented in research data, thereby inheriting and extending the ethical obligations originally held by data producers.

These findings have implications for how repositories conceptualize their relationships with Designated Communities. Beyond understanding the knowledge base, technical needs, and disciplinary norms, our research suggests that repositories must also attend to the ethical epistemologies of the communities they serve. Repositories that demonstrate shared values around care may be more successful in building the trust necessary to encourage data sharing and to support appropriate reuse.

Background

Video Records of Practice in Education

In education, VROP refers to video recordings of teachers and students in classrooms, along with the associated documentation, including lesson plans, assignments, and student work. Researchers and teacher-educators, who work with novice and experienced K–12 teachers, reuse VROP (Hoffman & Munson, 2024; Santagata et al., 2021). For example, researchers analyze a school year of classes to examine teaching practices or student learning (Derry et al., 2010; Santagata et

al., 2021). Teacher-educators reuse short clips to help teachers develop professional vision (Goodwin, 1994; Hoffman & Munson, 2024). VROP collections can be extensive (e.g., thousands of hours of data) and may have little metadata.

There are a variety of repositories curating VROP. Universities, professional associations, and fee-based services manage these records as well as the researchers who produced the VROP. For example, the Video Mosaic Collaborative[1] (Rutgers University) and Teaching Works[2] (University of Michigan) are university-based archives with hundreds of hours of minimally edited VROP documenting multiple research projects over decades. Everyday Mathematics Virtual Learning Community[3] (University of Chicago) and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards ATLAS (Accomplished Teaching, Learning and Schools)[4] (professional organization) are curated collections, all or partially submitted by accomplished teachers at work in the classroom. ATLAS videos are accompanied by the teacher's written reflection about the instruction or activity shown. Fee-based services include Teaching Channel and MQI Coaching[5] and feature VROP as well as other curricular and professional development resources and programs. International examples of VROP include the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Global Teaching Insights[6] VROP study of teaching, documenting instructional practices in eight countries, and the curated Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)[7] video, which features 53 exemplar VROP from eighth-grade science and mathematics classrooms in seven countries. Researchers who manage their own data often also act as repositories, curating their data and granting (often limited) access to other researchers and teacher-educators.

Ethics of Care

Many professions are exploring how an ethics of care approach can enhance practice (Vosman, Baart, & Hoffman, 2020). For some fields, such as education, an ethics of care is foundational (Anderson et al., 2019; Diller, 2018; McBee, 2007). This commitment to enacting care in educational communities and relationships between educators and students extends beyond classroom environments; it is also a core principle in education research. VROP are a key data type in education (Ball, Ben-Peretz, & Cohen, 2014; Rook & McDonald, 2012). Care for research participants in VROP is expected throughout the data lifecycle, from production to curation to reuse.

An ethics of care has been examined in archives (Agostinho, 2020; Caswell & Cifor, 2016; Friedel, Velte, & Wagner, 2025; Jules, 2016; Mackinnon, 2022), and to a lesser extent, in digital curation (Lassere & Whyte, 2021). In this paper, we explore how digital repositories might view their work through an ethics of care lens.

Repositories play an essential role in education research, preserving and providing access to VROP, which are costly and labor-intensive to create (Andersson & Sørvik, 2013) as well as curate (Kim et al., 2007; Wactlar et al., 1999). In addition to the work of making VROP discoverable and usable, repositories must contend with substantial issues of privacy, because it is often not possible to fully de-identify video data without significantly diminishing its value for reusers (Simon et al., 2015).

We employed a framework based on Tarlow's eight dimensions of care: time; be(ing) there; talking; sensitivity; acting in the best interest of the other; caring as a feeling; caring as doing; and reciprocity (Tarlow, 1996). Of these dimensions, we found that *acting in the best interest of the other* and *time* were most present in our data and will focus on them here.

Acting in the best interest of the other is a dimension of care that varies according to 'the site, the relationship, the time of the caring events, and countless other variables' (Tarlow, 1996, p. 68). For Tarlow, *acting in the best interest of the other* was often indirect, representing actions taken to

[1] Video Mosaic Collaborative: http://videomosaic.org
[2] TeachingWorks: https://www.teachingworks.org
[3] Virtual Learning Community: https://vlc.uchicago.edu
[4] ATLAS: https://www.nbpts.org/support/atlas
[5] MQI Coaching: https://mqicoaching.cepr.harvard.edu
[6] Global Teaching InSights: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/global-teaching-insights.html
[7] Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS): https://nces.ed.gov/timss/video.asp

promote wellbeing or future independence. In the context of digital curation, we argue that this dimension of care encompasses the actions taken by actors in the digital curation lifecycle, including repository staff members, to safeguard and support data producers, reusers, and participants represented in data over *time*. Those being cared for are often unaware of the caring activities that take place.

Time is an essential dimension of care. Care is enacted over *time*. *Time* is foundational for other dimensions of care, including *acting in the best interest of the other*, in that actions to demonstrate care are taken over varying spans of *time*, from short-term to very long-term. *Time* is also an essential element of the digital curation lifecycle, which describes both short- and long-term actions taken in service of preserving and providing access to digital information. Models for curation describe actions over *time* that range from conceptualization to access and reuse (Rhee, 2022). The concept of a Designated Community represents one way in which repositories are expected to be attentive to the needs of data consumers across a wide-ranging timespan.

Designated Community

The OAIS Model defines Designated Community as 'An identified group of potential Consumers who should be able to understand a particular set of information in ways exemplified by the Preservation Objectives. The Designated Community may be composed of multiple user communities. A Designated Community is defined by the Archive and this definition may change over time' (Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems, 2024, pp. 1–11.

We focus here on two key elements of this definition. First, the Designated Community is an identified group (or groups) of potential consumers or data reusers. Second, those consumers should be able to understand information provided by the repository. In the case of disciplinary repositories, those consumers are defined at least in part based on their membership in a disciplinary community—in our case, education. This means that the repository can assume a shared knowledge base among those consumers about, for example, research methods or professional practices and norms around repository policies and representation information needed to access and make use of data.

Research about the Designated Community has tended to focus on understanding how repositories should develop an understanding of their Designated Community (Clarke & Shiue, 2020; Donaldson, Zegler-Poleska, & Yarmey, 2020; Kärberg, 2014; Kim, 2015; Locher, 2017; Parsons & Duerr, 2006). Many scholars define the Designated Community in terms that align with current users (Bishop & Hank, 2016; Daniels et al., 2012; Kärberg, 2014; Locher, 2017; Parsons & Duerr, 2006). In contrast with that previous scholarship, our study examines the relationship between data repositories and their Designated Communities from the perspective of the data consumer.

Research Methods

Data for this article are qualitative and consist of 44 semi-structured interviews with VROP data producers and reusers (researchers and teacher-educators in education). We produced these data as part of a larger mixed-methods research project examining video data reuse in education that included interviews, surveys, and repository usage data. Interviewees were recruited by identifying data producers through repositories and prominent researchers in the literature. We also employed snowball sampling, asking each interviewee to suggest other potential interviewees. Participants included 31 university faculty, five graduate students, two postdoctoral researchers, and six education professionals.

Questions probed perceptions of appropriate reuse of digital records of practice, responsible conduct of data reuse, and the ethics of data reuse in education. The semi-structured format allowed for open-ended questions to better capture nuance in the answers and enabled each interviewee to describe their particular experiences and thoughts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The hour-long interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and checked for accuracy. Researchers then completed two rounds of coding using NVivo qualitative coding software.

Data analysis was done using an initial codebook deductively developed from research literature. Coders then added emerging themes from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the first round of coding, one team coded the researchers' interviews, and another team worked on teacher educators. A Scott's Pi of 0.712 and 0.732, respectively, were achieved (Scott, 1955). A second round of coding was completed to focus on themes concerning ethics of care, harm, and access. In the second round of coding, two team members coded the transcripts independently but continuously compared and discussed results (Boeije, 2002).

This study was reviewed and determined to be exempt by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Data collection and analysis instruments are available via the authors' institutional repository: https://doi.org/10.7302/Z28C9TGP.

Findings

Acting in the Best Interest: Shared Values and Anticipatory Care

Repositories were viewed both as potential vehicles for harm and as a means to prevent harm to the participants represented in the VROP. This dual characterization of repositories as simultaneously protective and potentially risky shaped how interviewees evaluated and engaged with them. Central to the evaluations made by interviewees was the expectation that repositories would share and enact the same ethical commitments that guided their own work. Interviewees sought repositories whose values around care aligned with their own, especially regarding the protection of teachers and students represented in VROP. This alignment functioned as a prerequisite for engagement: interviewees expressed strong preferences to both deposit data in and use data from repositories they believed shared their commitment to *acting in the best interest* of the participants represented in those data.

Acting in the best interest of participants meant more than technical compliance with privacy regulations or informed consent. Rather, it meant protecting and preserving the identities and dignity of participants represented in the data (Interviewee 002, Interviewee 035). This expectation positions repositories as ethical actors who inherit obligations of responsibility from data producers rather than merely legal and technical custody of data.

Shared values emerged as a gatekeeping criterion in repository selection among interviewees. Some explicitly avoided repositories they deemed to lack adequate attention to ethical issues or care toward participants represented in data. Interviewee 038 noted, 'We're a little attentive to those issues, those ethical issues. As a result, we don't pursue video from places that we think potentially might not have attended to that.' This selective engagement demonstrates how value alignment operated as a filter determining which repositories interviewees would trust with sensitive data. The decision to share and/or reuse data was not only technical but also a relational question of whether a repository demonstrated a commitment to care as a guiding principle.

Critically, interviewees expected repositories to enact anticipatory care, shaping future interactions across *time* between reusers and participants through framing, contextual information, and clearly articulated purpose. This responsibility was described by Interviewee 039, an interviewee with experience as both a creator of VROP and a repository staff member:

> 'If we are creating libraries, we are sharing images, what are our goals and how do we protect those we have videotaped that show up in the videos so that the viewers, those who will be using this video will use them, be respectful of those initial goals? I think that's really the tricky question. We may have very high goals ... it's important that we think through about how to frame videos so that it's clear to the viewer why we're creating these videos and what are the purpose and goals of the people in the videos so they are not misused.'

Anticipatory care operates across temporal and social distance, influencing how people who will never interact with the original participants represented in VROP engage with their

representations. Our findings suggest that repositories bear responsibility not only for immediate access decisions but for cultivating respectful reuse practices among communities of users they may never directly interact with.

Expectations of shared values, inherited responsibility for participants represented in data, and anticipatory care shaped how interviewees understood the role of repositories and evaluated their practices.

Repositories as sites of caring

Interviewees positioned repositories as essential infrastructure for advancing educational research and practice, and as sites in which care should be enacted for participants represented in data and for data producers and reusers. They described repositories as offering valuable services through both the preservation of VROP over *time* and their function as discovery mechanisms. Interviewee 022 explained that repositories were 'a valuable thing to offer', noting that before repositories were available, scholars were limited to relying on informal networks and their colleagues' memories to locate relevant VROP. This infrastructural role was further emphasized by Interviewee 035 who said that repositories 'make it publicly available, then everybody can use it.' This interviewee went on to explain that in making VROP broadly available, 'it becomes able to enrich the broader research field' (Interviewee 035).

Beyond their instrumental value, repositories were seen as sites where ethical norms of care could be modelled and learned. Interviewee 017 described how engagement with repositories shaped their own practices: 'I've learned a lot just by being able to connect and see like how they go about doing it. So, then it makes me think okay how can I do this well in my own work? So, I've appreciated the role modeling of it.' This pedagogical function extended the repository's value beyond access and preservation of VROP to include cultivating better practices across the field.

However, the same interviewees who recognized the value of repositories also expressed ambivalence about depositing their own VROP. This tension revealed their assessment that repositories, while valuable, had not yet consistently achieved the level of care that data producers themselves were enacting: 'I also have concerns with uploading about how it's gonna to be used [sic]' (Interviewee 002). Interviewee 025 argued that repositories performed valuable work while also noting the need for further development: 'we still as a field need to think about how to do it better. And I know there's a lot of permission issues which is very tricky when you're sharing videos of children. And I mean, I think that is being overcome slowly.'

The characterization of repositories as valuable to the field of education but also sites where care practices remain in progress shaped the ways that interviewees characterized the future of data practices in education. Interviewees advocated for normalizing repository use while arguing for the need to improve care practices. As Interviewee 021 explained:

> 'I would like to see a point in time where teaching is, the practice of teaching and improving craft becomes more of a public activity and so that teachers are willing to share their video so that we can talk about the teaching and improve things, and I think these repositories are a nice way to do that. But I also think that we've got to work on norms, and expectations, and really framing how the videos should be viewed. It's not enough just to put all the tapes out there, although people can then take them and use them, and we've been able to use them for our purposes, and other people can use them for theirs, but I think we would benefit the field of teaching if we had some open conversations about it.'

The characterization of repositories as sites of caring, then, operated on multiple levels: as infrastructure enabling research and practice, as pedagogical spaces where ethical data practices were learned, and as institutions whose care practices remained under development even as they provided essential services to the field.

Data Curation as Care

The curation of VROP in repositories was viewed as a set of activities where care should be present. Curation involves policies to steward and govern the data over *time*, curation activities to make available and preserve the data (e.g., metadata, description, design and implementation of curation systems for access, preservation and use, etc.), and interaction with the user community or communities (Lyons, 2007; Yakel, 2007). Interviewees were sensitive to all three of these aspects of curation and expected care to be present in all. Although our interviewees saw value in curation and made references to policies, actions, and interactions, most had only a vague notion of what curation actually entailed. Interviewee 038 made a typical comment: 'I don't know what they currently do with that [data preservation and archiving].' Interviewee 025, meanwhile, assumed good processes and gave hesitant support: 'I think most of the sites that I use are ... trustworthy. A lot of them were developed through different research projects or things like that, so I would assume that there were good processes in place.'

Repository care in data management and reuse

Our interviewees enunciated a strong belief that care for research participants over *time* was important. They wanted repositories to *act in the best interest of the other*, specifically, the research participants who appeared in the VROP. However, interviewees had a degree of skepticism about repositories' ability to care for research participants and the ability to maintain appropriate access policies for data depicting these participants over *time*. Interviewees proposed different conceptualizations about what care for research participants entailed and discussed two major areas of repository policy that related to care. First, care meant that the repository protected the dignity and privacy of research participants over *time*. Second, interviewees saw care as evidenced through repository access policies for data reusers.

Repository management and care

Interviewees stated that care for research participants over *time* meant preserving their dignity, maintaining their privacy, and being respectful. For example, Interviewee 035 cautioned, 'People that are creating these repositories need to... always be actively preserving the dignity of the people, the subjects, that are in their videos.' Interviewee 033 linked this directly to trustworthiness: 'I'm not sure exactly what you mean by trustworthy processes for managing the videos. I imagine one you might mean is ... they actually protect people's privacy when they say they're going to protect people's privacy.' Interviewee 017 identified a good approach by one repository:

> 'The more thoughtfully done it is done, the more useful it is to the field. And so, I've had some interactions with [repository] ... and have just really appreciated some of the detail of, like, how they're trying to figure it out and how to make it accessible and how to make sure at the same time that it's ... secure or at least respectful of the individuals that are in the video.'

Interviewees noted the care involved maintaining privacy and respect. One repository manager discussed the work of preparing data for reuse: 'I go through the painstaking detail of every piece of student work I put up there. I make sure to redact the last name so you can only see the first name and the videos, go through and make sure there's no clips that would embarrass students, clips that would reveal who the students are and so forth' (Interviewee 040). Another laid out their expectations for repositories regarding student privacy: 'I definitely think it's important to be careful and conscientious of the student identities and make sure that your video is being used in the way that it's stipulated in your consent form and your IRB. I think there are ways that it can be misused' (Interviewee 041).

Still, most interviewees had only a vague idea of repository management; however, as in the quotation by interviewee 017 above, the idea that it had to be done carefully was prevalent. Interviewee 041 linked care in repository management to transparency of data reuse policies: 'it

just needs to be done carefully to make sure that parents and children and anyone who's using video data knows where it will be shared and how it will be shared and for what purposes.'

Appropriate reuse

One of the key ways that interviewees saw care, specifically respect and privacy, enacted was through data reuse policies they deemed as appropriate. Interviewees offered different ideas about 'appropriate use' and suggested ways that care should be shown during data curation. For example, while Interviewee 041 expressed their opinion of legitimate use 'for educational purposes, and for professional development. I see it as appropriate.' Interviewee 039 cautioned that video clips could be used in many different ways, even within these purposes:

> 'You can take a little clip out of a larger file and use it for purposes that are very, very different from what the people in the video intended. I think you can do that with teaching, as well. A little sequence of a teacher getting upset might be interpreted as displaying inappropriate behavior, but then if you were to look at the lesson or a classroom in a school year context, that same interaction could be interpreted completely differently.' (Interviewee 039)

Other interviewees shared this concern that VROP depicting negative examples of teaching or learning should not be made available: 'If you have one that you feel is a little incriminating of a teacher and their practice, I wouldn't share it' (Interviewee 035). However, some argued for qualified access to these data and noted the importance of context: 'It's important that we think through about how to frame videos so that it's clear to the viewer why we're creating these videos and what are the purpose and goals of the people in the videos so they are not misused' (Interviewee 039).

All agreed that repositories should be transparent about data reuse policies.

> 'I do think that anytime an organization ... asks people to submit documented records of their work or interaction or things they've said, I think they are technically obligated, that they have a responsibility to those people to inform them of how it will be used, of how it will be stored, preserved, kept, of when it might be deleted or destroyed, all of that kind of thing I think is important.' (Interviewee 038)

Interviewees who were also repository managers agreed with this stance, but provided a more nuanced analysis. For example, Interviewee 022 stated, 'It's mostly just about being careful about ... we're building this collection, but some stuff can be used for certain uses, and other things ... have more limited [use].'

Curation activities: creating access and representation information

Interviewees noted that decisions about reusing data were influenced by data cleanliness, organization, and description. These curation activities were identified as evidence of prior care, enacted for the benefit of future data reusers. However, as Interviewee 002 notes, this is not an easy process, particularly when you want to reach different, if allied, designated communities.

> 'I also think that we just don't have enough common language ... it's an infrastructure problem ... Like when you read descriptions ... I'm thinking about the [repository name] descriptions that they're crafting now. When you read that description, and I know it's not strictly research, they wanna [sic] make it available to teachers, practitioners, and researchers.' (Interviewee 002)

Interviewees wanted a variety of descriptive information with the videos, including keywords, grade level, data producer, and materials referenced in the videos (e.g., student work, teachers' notes). Their assessments of repository description practices revealed how representation information functions as a form of care, or its absence as a failure of care, over *time*. Inadequate

metadata forced reusers to invest significant personal *time* searching for relevant content, a burden that interviewees linked to gaps in fine-grained tagging (e.g., Interviewee 025). In contrast, when repositories invested curatorial labor in multi-dimensional indexing (e.g., by grade, topic, pedagogical qualities, etc.), they demonstrated that they were *acting in the best interest* of reusers whose needs they could not entirely anticipate in advance. Interviewee 020 articulated this ideal as a system that would enable pre-service teachers to independently locate appropriate materials, while Interviewee 027 explicitly connected sustained engagement with a repository to its thoughtful organisational structure: 'I appreciate how everything is tagged and indexed so many different ways. I feel like that has helped my use.'

These divergent experiences illustrate how descriptive practices mediate the relationship between repositories and their Designated Communities. When repositories anticipate and address the knowledge needs of future reusers through careful descriptive work, they enact a form of anticipatory care that reduces the labor burden on data reusers. When they fail to do so, reusers must compensate with their own *time* investment—a transfer of curatorial labor that several interviewees experienced as a gap in care.

Repository managers were acutely aware of the limitations of their systems and the ongoing nature of digital curation work. Interviewee 022 described their VROP database as 'still imperfect, but much, much better than what we used to have', characterizing the development of searchable access as an incremental process of improvement rather than a completed achievement. This framing positions curation as care work that unfolds over *time*, never fully complete and always responsive to an evolving understanding of user needs.

The challenges of creating representation information emerged as particularly complex when staff from repositories attempted to apply standardized descriptive frameworks to VROP content. Interviewee 002, who consulted on tagging high-leverage teaching practices, discovered that even experts who had collaborated on research teams reached different conclusions when applying ostensibly visible categories to video evidence:

> 'And even though they're supposed to be highly visible practices ... At times they actually weren't very visible, and people who had worked together on research teams, we had a lot of disagreements about what we were seeing.' (Interviewee 002)

This finding has implications for understanding how repositories can *act in the best interest* of Designated Communities: the descriptive vocabularies that structure access are not neutral technical decisions but rather interpretive acts that shape how reusers can discover and understand data. When expert consensus proves elusive, repositories face difficult choices about whose frameworks to privilege. Those choices carry ethical weight because they impact discoverability and access for future reusers.

Both accounts reveal how digital curation labor involves navigating between the particularity of individual VROP and the generalizing demands of systems. This tension suggests that care in curation requires not only technical competence but also awareness around infrastructural limitations.

Repository interactions as caring

Interviewees referenced interactions with repositories in different ways. Many cited instances of asking reference questions, both successful (e.g., Interviewees 013, 029, 037, 041) and unsuccessful (Interviewee 002). Many of these reference questions concerned finding data. In some cases, this was data that was previously unknown to the interviewee: 'So when they told us about the dataset, this was very useful to us. And so then we engaged with them in the process of getting access to it, which took a while but turned out to be very fruitful for us so far in the research' (Interviewee 013).

Beyond providing access to primary data, interviewees envisioned repositories as potential sites for leveraging community expertise. These visions ranged from pragmatic coordination to aspirational community-building, and their articulation revealed varied understandings of what *acting in the best interest* of a Designated Community might entail.

At the most basic level, interviewees identified coordination failures that repositories could address. Interviewee 002 described duplicating transcription labor, describing an instance of investing hours in work that another researcher had already completed, because no mechanism existed to share derivative resources across the user community: 'I literally sat down and transcribed a three-hour [project name] class to realize that someone else had already done it.' This frustration points to an expanded conception of curatorial responsibility: repositories might *act in the best interest* of reusers not only by providing access to primary data but by facilitating communication among those who have invested labor in developing that data further.

Some repositories had already moved in this direction. Interviewee 040 described a repository that actively incorporated transcriptions from the fifty dissertations produced using their video collection, transforming the scholarly work of data reusers into enhanced access infrastructure. Similarly, Interviewee 038 noted how responsive repositories incorporated partner feedback to add new search filters aligned with professional frameworks used by the designated community: 'I do think, for the most part, it seems like they've been responsive over the last couple of years to suggestions and recommendations from partners.' These examples suggest a model of care enacted through reciprocal engagement in which repositories attend to how their communities actually work with data and adapt their systems accordingly over *time*.

These aspirations for community reflect a shift in our understanding of the repository's role within its Designated Community. Interviewees imagined repositories not as static archives but as dynamic spaces facilitating ongoing professional exchange. Interviewee 011 emphasized the practical value of staying connected to colleagues who share similar approaches, while Interviewee 021 articulated a more transformative vision: making teaching practice itself more public through repository-facilitated conversations. Both accounts suggest that *acting in the best interest* of a Designated Community may require repositories to cultivate relationships and interactions, not merely provide access to data.

This expanded vision of care raises important questions about institutional capacity. Facilitating community would require resources and expertise beyond traditional digital curation functions. Yet the frequency with which interviewees articulated such desires suggests that they perceived a gap between what repositories currently offer and what their designated communities need. Attending to this gap, or explicitly communicating the limits of what repositories can provide, may itself be a form of care enacted through honest engagement with community expectations over *time*.

In summary, our interviewees saw repositories as assuming the data producer's role and responsibility to act in the best interests of the teachers and students in the VROP. When sharing data, they also looked to repositories whose values around care aligned with theirs, particularly regarding protection of the teachers and students in the videos, and to a lesser extent, protection of the data producers as well. Interviewees also saw repositories as an extension of their scholarly or teaching communities and suggested ways that repositories could work better in relationship with them.

Discussion and Conclusion

Several key dimensions of care emerge from our findings. In this discussion, we focus on *acting in the best interest of the other* and care over *time,* two of the eight dimensions of care established by Tarlow (1996). Both care and curation are relational processes that develop and take place over *time*. Both involve people taking actions on behalf of others, either directly or indirectly. In some cases, the perception of being cared for exists within an active relationship, but in others, the carer is *acting in the best interest* of the individual cared for outside of a direct relationship. For example, in the case of research data, data producers and repositories enact care long after a research project has ended. For instance, repository stakeholders, such as data producers and reusers, expected repositories to also *act in the best interest* of the participants represented in the data. While this was particularly salient in our study focusing on the field of education, with VROP depicting children and teachers in learning environments (Andersson & Sørvik, 2013;

Bacevich, 2010; Rook & McDonald, 2012), it has implications for other qualitative data repositories containing data in which participants are identifiable.

Repository work extends over *time*. This includes the development of practices that maintain consistency and flexibility over *time* through intentional steps to thoughtfully curate data, which enable repository users to be able to find, access, and (re)use data (Higgins, 2008; Rhee, 2022). This also includes the development and maintenance of relationships with Designated Communities over *time*. Interviewees wanted a relationship with the repositories where they deposited data. They voiced an expectation that repositories would share and reflect their ethics of care and articulated that this was an important factor in decisions about whether to engage with those repositories as either data depositors or reusers. This suggests that a relationship with Designated Communities should include more than understanding their scholarly traditions, current research questions, methodology, and preferred data delivery formats and technologies. Our interviewees expected repositories to understand and adhere to their ethical epistemologies, or moral and ethical principles about knowledge practices (Reis Monteiro, 2014), and expectations for care of the data and the individuals represented in the data throughout the data lifecycle, reflecting the type of roles for information professionals described by Caswell and Cifor (2016).

Previous research has established that Designated Communities are essential for digital curation/preservation (Bountouri, Gratz, & Sanmartin, 2018; Giaretta, 2011). They have also argued that the concept is problematic (Bettivia, 2016; Frank & Rothfritz, 2023; Locher, 2017; Moles, 2022; Parsons & Duerr, 2006). Our findings here extend the current understanding of Designated Communities. In addition to a group of consumers for whom data sharing should be facilitated and data reuse understandable (Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems, 2024), Designated Communities are also groups whose ethical epistemologies and practices can and should inform repository policies and practices.

Our findings also surface a form of care we term anticipatory care: actions taken by repositories to shape how future reusers, who will likely never interact directly with either data producers or participants represented in VROP, engage with data. Present in medical literature, anticipatory care in that context indicates instances in which high-risk individuals are identified and offered early care (O'Donnell et al., 2012). Anticipatory care as we conceptualize it in digital curation operates across temporal and social distance, extending the ethical obligations of data producers into future contexts that they cannot foresee or control.

This concept builds on Tarlow's (1996) observation that *acting in the best interest of the other* is often indirect, representing actions taken to promote wellbeing outside of direct interaction. For repositories, anticipatory care is enacted through framing, contextual information, access policies, and representation information that guide reusers toward respectful engagement with data. We found that anticipatory care was present in contexts where data was identified as risky or potentially harmful to participants represented in those data (Frank et al., 2018). This positions repositories not only as custodians of data but as active shapers of the ethical conditions under which reuse occurs. Future research might examine how repositories operationalize anticipatory care and whether such practices influence reuser behavior.

These findings carry practical implications for repository development and assessment. If communities expect repositories to understand and reflect their ethical epistemologies, then community engagement must extend beyond surveys of technical needs or preferred file formats. Repositories serving disciplinary communities might consider incorporating ethical commitments into their policies, documentation, and communication with depositors and reusers. This could include articulating shared values around participant protection, developing guidelines for appropriate reuse that reflect community norms, and creating mechanisms for ongoing dialogue about ethical data practices. Our interviewees' emphasis on transparency suggests that repositories should clearly communicate not only what they do with data but why, thereby linking policies to the ethical principles that inform them. Repository certification frameworks, such as CoreTrustSeal, might also consider more deeply engaging with how repositories demonstrate alignment with the ethical expectations of their Designated Communities, beyond their technical and informational needs.

Our finding that repositories function as sites where ethical norms are modeled and learned suggests an underexplored dimension of repository impact. Interviewees described how

engagement with repositories shaped their own data practices, positioning repositories as pedagogical actors within their communities. This extends the traditional understanding of repository value beyond preservation and access to include the cultivation of ethical data practices across a field. Repositories that attend to this role might consider how their policies, interfaces, and interactions communicate expectations about care, recognizing that these signals contribute to the broader normative infrastructure of their disciplines.

This study has limitations that suggest directions for future research. Our sample was drawn from education, a field with strong existing commitments to ethics of care; communities with different ethical traditions may hold different expectations for repositories. Additionally, our interviewees were primarily data producers and reusers rather than repository staff, whose perspectives on enacting care would complement our findings. Future research might examine whether and how repositories can operationalize the expectations identified here, and how alignment (or misalignment) between repository practices and the ethical norms of disciplinary communities affects trust and engagement over *time*.

In this paper, we investigate where in the data curation lifecycle repositories have the opportunity to enact care by *acting in the best interest* of research participants. From decisions that inform selection and ingest, to storage and description—as well as decisions about access conditions—data producers expect repositories to create and enforce policies and practices that show care for those represented in data. Choosing to be represented in data means accepting vulnerability, and scholars in education recognize that this vulnerability requires everyone involved in the data lifecycle, including repositories, to move beyond technical compliance and embrace an ethics of care that acknowledges the power dynamics inherent in data collection, the potential for harm even from seemingly anonymized datasets, and the ongoing responsibility institutions bear toward participants long after initial data collection has concluded and the data producers have handed data over to a repository (Caswell & Cifor, 2016).

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services National Leadership Grant # LG-06-14-0122-14: "Qualitative Data Reuse: Records of Practice in Educational Research and Teacher Development.". We thank the participants who took part in our interviews for their openness in sharing their experiences and for entrusting us with their stories. Their willingness to contribute their time and insights greatly enriched this study.

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