

Professional Development Guidelines on Ethical Issues in Classroom-Based Research

Authors: Anna Ciraso-Calí, Angelina Sánchez Martí, & Carla Quesada Pallarés

Collaborators: Allan Baez Contreras Benítez, Georgeta Ion, Clíodhna Martin, John Carroll, Leah Elsted, Darren Byrne, & Aimie Brennan

Teacher-research -that is, research conducted by teachers in classroom or school settings- can play a big role in improving educational practice, understanding real classroom dynamics, and giving voice to lived experiences. However, to maximize the benefits and minimize potential harm, it is essential that such research be carried out responsibly and ethically.

This tool has been prepared as a support resource for teacher-researchers who wish to strengthen the ethical dimension of their research practice, under the framework of the [TEACHER Project](#) (2024-2-IE01-KA210-SCH-000277657). It accompanies the [Educational Research Ethics \(ERE\) Competence Questionnaire](#), which invites teachers to reflect on their recent research experiences, identify possible gaps in ethical knowledge, and consider how to respond through professional development. The questionnaire is not an assessment tool, but a means for self-reflection and growth.

Below is a checklist of guidelines and actions designed to help you verify, step by step, that the research conducted in classrooms and schools remains responsible, inclusive, and ethically grounded. Taken together, these serve as a follow-up resource: they provide direction, examples, and points for improvement so that teacher-researchers can respond efficiently by seeking specific professional development.



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| Phase | Guidelines/Actions |
|-----------------|---|
| Research design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explore recent literature (journals, ERIC, Google Scholar) on your topic and review similar educational research experiences. Example: If studying reading strategies, check prior research on literacy programmes. <input type="checkbox"/> Join communities of practice, teacher working groups, or school research seminars to build peer support networks. <input type="checkbox"/> Keep a reflective journal to track personal biases; be very aware that, for your personal and professional involvement at the school or in certain educational practices, you could have a tendency to influence positive or negative outcomes. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider how role expectations and power differences may affect student participation. Examples of measures to address this could be: to collect data anonymously, to ensure that students felt free to express their honest opinions without fear of repercussions; to have an external researcher (for instance, another teacher) conduct the interviews to reduce the influence of participants' teacher authority, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Consult ethical codes, research networks, or local universities and use toolkits like "So You Want to Involve Children in Research?" (Save the Children, 2004) to ensure authentic participation. <input type="checkbox"/> Check whether any groups are excluded from your project and reflect on how to include them. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider if children who participate in research will miss classes, or if participation in the research implies that other staff members have an increased and unfair workload. To minimise disruption, schedule interviews outside core teaching hours, provide makeup work. <input type="checkbox"/> Have some support strategies prepared which will help minimise discomfort. Be ready to support participants emotionally if distress occurs. Example: For a bullying study, provide access to a counsellor if distress arises. <input type="checkbox"/> Review procedures for responding to risk or harm during disclosure situations. Example: If a student reports abuse, follow the protocol of the relevant organisation and alert designated personnel. IMPORTANT: If an interview reveals that a participant or another person is in significant danger, the researcher is obliged to act in response to that disclosure. Confidentiality can and should be broken to protect the participant or third parties. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider the ecological footprint of AI tools for analysis, or consider re-using existing research data instead of producing new ones. |



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Data collection /
production

- Ensure participants understand the purpose of the research. Example: Hold a discussion explaining the study before collecting consent/assent.
- Consider getting assent for children. **Assent** is the willing participation of children when they are younger than legal age of consent (assent can be verbal).
- Consider gaining consent from parents or guardians if the participants are children (**it should be written**).
- Remind participants they can change their mind and withdraw consent or assent at any time without explanation.
- Watch for non-verbal signs of discomfort (e.g: children turning their backs while being observed; not talking in a focus group when the video recorder is on; etc.). If a participant withdraws consent or assent, remove (as much as possible) information that you have already gathered from this participant.
- Evaluate cases where parental consent could compromise participant safety. Prioritise participant safety. Example: Research on sensitive topics like teen alcohol use might require careful ethical balancing.
- Check local education policies (e.g., boards of management, patron bodies, Department of Education) to obtain necessary approvals.
- Promote inclusion of cultural, linguistic, gender, and religious identities.
- Allow multimodal expression (drawings, audio, video, etc.) to respect participants' authentic voices.
- Obtain specific consent when reusing existing data; consult [UKRI guidance](#) on administrative data. Think about the positive and negative implications of using information that you may know because of your role as a teacher, for research purposes.
- Implement data protection protocols, secure storage, and controlled access. Example: Keep participant names separate from survey responses; keep data in a safe memory unit, assuring that you are not sharing it with people who do not have permission to access it; keep stored data under password; plan when to delete data if it is no longer necessary for the research purpose.
- Anonymise or pseudonymise sensitive data and protect privacy throughout the research. You may decide whether to have your data completely anonymous (for instance, gathering questionnaires with no personal identification); or to gather non-anonymous information, but remove personal identifiers afterwards.



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- Decide with participants on meaningful feedback or recognition for their contributions. Close the feedback loop by offering information or opportunities that are useful to them, such as a summary of the results, written acknowledgement of their participation, educational resources, engaging activities, or practical learning derived from the research.

Analysis,
interpretation and
ethical return of
results

- Avoid misuse of AI or automated tools; disclose their use to participants and in all dissemination products (articles, videos, posters, etc.). Avoid using AI to analyse data in particular – this transfers copyright and does not protect data.
- Encourage active participation in all research phases, including data analysis and interpretation. Example: Invite pupils to help categorise survey responses or create coding schemes. This helps close the feedback loop.
- Ensure analysis aligns with objectives, methods, and ethical commitments. Example: Avoid interpreting data beyond what your research methodology supports.
- Carefully review representations to avoid reinforcing stereotypes. Example: Ensure gender or cultural representation is fair and balanced.
- Plan how findings can lead to concrete improvements in practice and benefit the school community. Example: Use study results to redesign literacy interventions or classroom layout.
- Design accessible ways to share results with all participants and stakeholders. Example: Infographics, short reports, activities for families...

Publication,
dissemination and
knowledge sharing

- Be transparent with methods, limitations, and data; avoid misusing statistics. You should report all results, even if they're not what you expected.
- Balance anonymity with preserving authenticity of participants' messages. For instance, you might want to use children's drawings to convey their contribution in an authentic way; but, if you agree on anonymity, you might decide to blur or erase some parts of it, if they can reveal their author.



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- Talk with participants about recognition and co-authorship options. Example: list student contributors in a report appendix, if they agree to do so (parents or legal guardians should also agree, in case participants are minors).
- Discuss potential risks and benefits of dissemination with participants before publishing. Example: Ask pupils whether their photos or quotes can be published online. Explain to them if the results of the study can inform policies that could potentially affect them.
- Declare any conflicts of interest or funding that might influence research outcomes. Example: Note if funding or funded materials were used in the study.
- Obtain explicit, documented consent for sharing findings Example: Signed permission forms for student photos in presentations, or signed permission from parents/guardians for data collected which will be anonymised and shared publicly.



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Sources and more information

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