

GUIDANCE FOR CONDUCTING ETHICAL RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS

Before you begin a participatory research project with students, you should ask:

- Are students the best audience or population for your research objectives?
- Will the students feel obliged to be part of the research because you are their tutor?
- Will their participation or non-participation in the project may have a negative impact on your relationship with them or their relationship with the rest of the cohort?
- Will the students be able to withdraw from the project at any point, and feel comfortable in doing so?
- Will their work load be detrimental to their achievement on their own course?
- Will they have access to sensitive material because of their participation in the project?
- Will they be prepared for any difficult or unanticipated traumatic consequences that may arise from project - how will they be safeguarded and trained?
- Will the students be named as co-creators/authors on the project?
- Will they be paid for their work or receive some kind of compensation for their labour?

Do not out research on/with students-participants who you teach/assess/examine due the conflict of interest. Work with student-participants who you do not have a direct pedagogic relationship with or who are alumni. When working with students there needs to be consideration on how this is done ethically. We do not want to cause our students harm through our research nor do we want to exploit the power we have as teachers over our students.

Why do we work with students in our research?

We need to be honest with ourselves - do we work with students because they are accessible? They are in a sense a captive audience, a group of people that we can easily share our own work with. However, is the student body necessarily the best audience or population for your research objectives? Time should be taken to think about the who the best collaborators/participants/audiences are - they may not necessarily be students.

Educational research

You may position yourself as an educational researcher and have an expertise in researching within this field. You will most likely be guided by the BERA ethical guidelines as well as the University's Ethics Policy. When working with students they should be treated as any other participant, informed consent must be gained and revisited throughout the project.

Treating your own students as participants should be avoided especially if you teach them, assess or moderate their work. This is because they may feel obliged to be part of the research because you are their tutor. Their participation or non-participation in the project may have a negative impact on your relationship with them or their relationship with the rest of the cohort.

Sometimes it seems informative to include examples of student work and actual pictures of students in articles, presentations, conference proceedings. Permission needs to be sought from the student and they need to understand that their work will be publicly accessible. You also need to think carefully about the attribution of the work. There is no

clear-cut answer to this because naming the student may break the rules of anonymity and this could compromise the student especially if they have been critical about their education. On the other hand, it is only right that students are acknowledged for their intellectual property. This is an ethical dilemma that needs to be considered on a case-by case-basis.

Students as collaborators

There may be occasions when students are collaborators on a project as co-producers or co-authors. Once again these should not be people that you do not teach, assess or moderate. Accusations of favouritism or special privileges could easily follow from a collaborative project between a member of staff and a student.

However, if the project entails working with students from other parts of the University or from another institution there are still ethical considerations. For example, will their work load be detrimental to their achievement on their own course? Will they have access to sensitive material because of their participation in the project? Will they be prepared for any difficult or unanticipated traumatic consequences that may arise from project - how will they be safeguarded and trained? Will the students be named as co-creators/authors on the project? Will they be paid for their work or receive some kind of compensation for their labour?

Close-to-practice research

There are some forms of practitioner research that may be undertaken as teachers. For example, an action research project may start off with an intervention upon which the teacher reflects. The impact of the intervention could be measured through data that does not identify individuals, for example grade profiles, metrics about participation, retention and success. Processes of observation, field notes, reflective practice or discussions with colleagues may be undertaken where the students are not participants and not under scrutiny as part of a research project. Ethical considerations still need to be understood so that none of the stakeholders in the project are harmed or dehumanised.

Research projects about well-being, mental health and therapy

It has been reported that the mental health and well-being of students should be an area of concern for educators. It is through good intentions that some people would want to carry out research into this area. However, it is an ethical minefield and could lead to people being harmed by the research. Inquiring into the mental health of anyone and especially students should not be undertaken in a research context. This kind of work needs to be carried out by those with high levels of expertise and experience. Due to the kind of organisation we work in it is unlikely that our research staff would have that academic skill set.

It is also not recommended that researchers conduct any kind of therapy-based project on students or other participants.

Data about well-being may arise as an unexpected outcome of a project, people may volunteer feedback that talks about well-being. This is fine as long as it is reported in an ethically sound way where people are treated with respect and their contributions anonymised.

Unanticipated discourses and traumas

All participants whether or not they are students can become vulnerable at any time during the research process. You need to be aware of this and plan in strategies for dealing with such occurrences. Signposting to the appropriate services would be appropriate if the project throws up any particular issues for the participant. The researcher also needs to look after their own well-being and be mindful of their

vulnerabilities. There may be times when it is better for the participant to withdraw from the project either temporally or permanently.