



ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH – RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN¹

The community of educational researchers is considered to mean all those engaged in educational research including academics, professionals (from private or public bodies), teachers and students.

Educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom

Many of the ethics questions that relate to research with adults apply equally to children, but there are four additional provisos specific to research involving children:

- i. children's competencies, perceptions and frameworks of reference, which may differ according to factors including – but not only – their age, may differ from those of adults;
- ii. children's potential vulnerability to exploitation in interaction with adults, and adults' specific responsibilities towards children;
- iii. the differential power relationships between adult researcher and child participant; and
- iv. the role of adult gatekeepers (parents and/or teachers or others with a duty of care for the child) in mediating access to children, with concomitant ethical implications in relation to informed consent.

The ethics of research with children is a balance. On the one hand, the focus is on ways of preventing and reducing harms in research and ensuring adequate protection of children and young people. On the other hand, there is concern about the risks and harms of silencing and excluding children from research about their views, experiences and participation.

✓ Researchers have to comply **with Articles 3² and 12** of the United Nations

¹ Acknowledgement: this text is based in the following sources

- British Educational Research Association, *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* second revision (2011)
- American Educational Research Association - Code of Ethics - February 2011
- The Research Ethics Guidebook for social science researchers, ECSR (Economic and Social Research Council) and Institute of Education - London <http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk/research-with-children-105>

² *Article 3*

Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3 requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration. Article 12 requires that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity³.

- ✓ Children may never be coerced in participation.
- ✓ In undertaking research with children, researchers obtain the informed consent of a parent or legally authorized guardian. Signers must be provided all necessary info in appropriate language and must have the opportunity to refuse. This consent does not mean the child has consented to participate, but it allows the researcher to seek consent from the child.
Researchers may seek waivers of parental or guardian consent when:
 1. the research involves no more than minimal risk for the research participants
 2. the research could not practicably be carried out were consent to be required or the consent of a parent or guardian is not a reasonable requirement to protect the child (e.g., in the case of neglected or abused children).
- ✓ In undertaking research with children, researchers obtain the agreement of children to participate, to the extent that the children are capable of providing such assent (π.χ. βρέφη), except under circumstances condition as mentioned above. Children must be provided all necessary info in appropriate language and must have the opportunity to refuse.
- ✓ Research with children in institutional settings such as schools can raise particular ethical issues in relation to individual consent, for example, if

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

³ the spirit of Articles 3 and 12 should also apply in research contexts involving vulnerable young people and vulnerable adults.

research participation is conducted as a whole-group (e.g. classroom) activity. Researchers should get active consent from each individual child – not from children as a group (because individuals in the group could feel pressured to take part against their wishes).

- ✓ Researchers recognize that waivers of consent from a child and a parent or guardian require approval from institutional review boards or, in the absence of such boards, from another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research. Under such circumstances, the confidentiality of any personally identifiable information must be maintained unless otherwise (e.g. education researchers may confront unanticipated circumstances in which they become aware of information that is clearly health- or life-threatening to research participants, students, employees, clients, or others. In these cases, education researchers balance the importance of guarantees of confidentiality with other principles of Research Ethics, standards of conduct, and applicable law.
- ✓ Education researchers must ensure that they themselves, and any collaborators or research assistants and students under their supervision, comply with legal requirements in relation to working with school children.
- ✓ Researchers must recognize that participants may experience distress or discomfort in the research process and must take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and to put them at their ease. They must desist immediately from any actions, ensuing from the research process, that cause emotional or other harm.
- ✓ Researchers must recognize concerns relating to the 'bureaucratic burden' of much research, especially survey research, and must seek to minimize the impact of their research on the normal working and workloads of participants.
- ✓ Researchers' use of incentives to encourage participation must be commensurate with good sense and must avoid choices which in themselves have undesirable effects (e.g. sweets to school-children). They must also acknowledge that the use of incentives in the design and reporting of the research may be problematic; for example where their use has the potential to create a bias in sampling or in participant responses.
- ✓ Researchers do not present themselves as diagnosticians or counselors in reporting results, nor do they report information given by a child on confidence