

## **GUIDELINES 205.7 Research Within Classrooms**

This document summarizes guideline statements and resources from other Canadian Research Offices regarding research ethics of research that is situated within classrooms.

### **Definitions**

*Dual-Role Research* – When teachers investigate their own teaching practice by asking students to participate in a study, they assume the dual-roles of teacher and researcher, with respect to the students. For the students, the teacher has the responsibility to deliver course content and measure their progress, which is communicated to them through grades and other feedback. In some contradiction for the student, the teacher is also asking them to contribute to research that will be circulated publically for the benefit of the teacher, their future students, and the discipline or practice of teaching. (U of Vic, 2008, page 2) This presents a potential conflict of interest, which needs to be acknowledged and managed with appropriate mitigating actions. (U of T, 2003)

*Power-Over* – By nature of the grading requirements of the current university setting, there exists an inherent power differential between students and teachers (Burman, page 67). Power-over conditions like these exist in many forms of research. Their presence does not mean that there will necessarily be undue coercion or abuse of power in the research. When power-over conditions exist, there is the potential for the student participants' ability to give free consent and to withdraw without penalty to be compromised. Power differentials in the researcher (teacher) / participant (student) relationships need to be acknowledged and managed with appropriate mitigating actions. (U of Vic, 2008, page 2-3)

*Practitioner-Research* – This is a general term that encompasses other forms of research in which the researcher has a dual-role. This includes research from the researcher's area of study in which he/she may be soliciting the participation of the people he/she is serving (U of Manitoba). This could include community practice artists who request the involvement of students from their community projects course

to participate in a community-based research project; or a designer who solicits the involvement of design studio students in a research project to test a design that they are developing with an external partner. As with all dual-role research, the inherent conflicts and power differentials in these multiple roles do not necessarily mean that the fair and free consent of the participants or the educational needs of the students are compromised. These situations present conditions that are known to require careful articulation and planning to avoid potential abuse.

*Program Evaluation Activities* – Educators and practitioners of other disciplines are continually evaluating their own performance and praxis (Western U, page 1; MacLean, page 4). In this reflection, practitioners might make use of research methodologies like a systematic interview process or questionnaires. Similarly, institutions and organizations might use research techniques to evaluate the usefulness or efficacy of their programs or procedures. For an organization these activities could be referred to as quality assurance or quality improvement. If these evaluative activities are aimed solely at improving an individual's professional practice, or the organization's programs, they are not considered academic research. If however, they are reviewed in broader contexts, through presentations and publications, or their findings are generalized for broader application, they would be regarded as research (MacLean, page 1, 3; Burman, page 66). Program and professional review activities are only subject to full research ethics review if they become academic research activities (TCPS2, Article 2.5).

*Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)* – There is a growing field of research that aims to quantitatively and qualitatively study the effectiveness of teaching in post-secondary institutions (MacLean, page 1; Burman, page 59). The research and the findings promote scholarly teaching, in which teaching is regarded as an area of study with a disciplinary knowledge base from which to develop expertise.

## **Recommendations for Ethical Practices in Research in the Classroom**

1. Understand the Power Dynamics
  - a. Know and articulate the individual researchers and stakeholder organizations involved in the research (MacLean, page 8). Ensure that all of the participants understand who is

benefiting from their participation. This should be part of the invitation and consent process. Clearly state who will have access to the research data and results (U of Victoria, page 10).

## 2. Student Recruitment and the Consent Process

- a. Whenever possible, include descriptions of the research activities or partnerships in the course materials at the start of the course. This will enable students who are not willing to participate a chance to find an alternate course setting (Burman, page 72).
- b. If the teacher is a named researcher in the study, and his/her students are being invited to be participants, there needs to be an alternate individual who delivers the consent process (U of Manitoba, page 3; U of Victoria, page 7; St. Mary's U, Page 1). The students need to be assured verbally and in writing that their participation will not impact on the way their academic performance is evaluated (U of Victoria, page 7).
- c. To completely avoid conflict of interest inherent in the teacher's dual-role, the grading of the students should be 'blind' to the students' participation in research (St. Mary's U, page 2). If the research can be done after grades are submitted, there will not be any perceived or real conflict (U of Toronto). If the course work is being evaluated as part of the research, the researcher should be blind to knowing whether or not the student has agreed to include their work in the study until after the grading is complete (U of Manitoba, page 4; U of Toronto). Other blind methods might include asking for anonymous responses, or making use of non-teaching researchers to administer the study and code the responses. Methods that mitigate the "power-over" bias in classroom research should be described in the invitation and consent process.
- d. Participants in academic research have the right to voluntarily withdraw at any time without penalty (TCPS2). Students who are participating in research need to be assured that this privilege extends to them regardless of their teacher's evaluation of their progress in class. If grades are attached to some aspect of the research activity, alternate ways of grading needs to be made available for those who do not choose to participate in the research. (Lakehead University)

## 3. Research Practices in the Classroom

- a. If the research is being conducted during class time, students who withdraw should be given alternate activities that enable similar learning experiences (Lakehead University).

Researchers can consider scheduling data collection activities outside of class time (U of Victoria, page 5).

- b. If the research is being conducted during class time, the researcher needs to consider the extent to which confidentiality of responses can be guaranteed for the participants (UBC, page 2-3). Research activities need to be appropriate to the classroom setting, and should not interfere with group interactions or classroom trust that is generally expected within a classroom setting (MacLean, page 5, 6).
  - c. Research activities in the classroom should fall within the generally accepted framework for the course curriculum and not be unduly disruptive of the students' learning (U of Manitoba, page 4; U of Victoria, page 5; St. Mary's U, page 1).
  - d. Recording of identifiable data such as video or audio recordings of the participants' or of their property including their artworks, needs to be justified and explained to the participants in the consent process. If identifiable information is to be publically circulated (in presentations or publications), a media release process should be added to the consent process (U of Victoria, page 5, 10).
  - e. If the entire class is being video or audio recorded, there need to be methods to ensure that the wishes of those who choose not to participate in the study are respected. The presence of the recording device should not result in less participation in course learning. (MacLean, page 6)
4. Other Considerations
- a. Research that involves the contributions of traditional activities or stories from Aboriginal Communities may require the approval and protocols of the community of origin. Research that focuses on Aboriginal knowledge should seek the involvement of the appropriate offices and organizations before participants become involved (TCPS2, chapter 9; U of Victoria, page 11).
  - b. Wherever possible, students should be involved as active partners in pedagogical research (MacLean, page 7; Burman, page 75-6). The duty to publicly recognize substantive contributions of students in classroom-based research extends beyond the recommendations for ethical treatment of research participants (Emily Carr University, page 2; Burman, page 74). The researcher should aim to disseminate their contributions in ways that not just protect their identity but, in consultation with the students, also maximizes potential benefits to their academic progress or professional practice (MacLean, page 8; Burman, 75-6).

- c. Publication or presentation of the results of classroom-based research –whether formal or not—without the consent of those involved and without the prior review of the Research Ethics Board could constitute a reportable breach of research conduct (Burman, page 70, ECU, page 2). Plan ahead, and take the steps to ensure that everyone involved is treated with the highest level of respect and dignity (Burman, page 76).
- d. **TEMPLATE 205.1 Student Media Release** is available from the ECU-REB for use by instructors within classrooms. It can be used when the instructor would like to formalize the agreement between the student and the instructor for release of images or recordings of the student or their property.

## Resources

Burman, Mary E. and Kleinsasser, Audrey M. "Ethical Guidelines for Use of Student Work: Moving from Teaching's Invisibility to Inquiry's Visibility in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *The Journal of General Education*, Vol 53, No. 1, 2004.

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. *Tri-council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, December 2010.

Emily Carr University, "5.1.1 Responsible Conduct of Research: Integrity + Scholarship Procedures," 2012.

Lakehead University Senate, "Research: Guidelines on the Use of Students as Research Subjects," 2008.



MacLean, Mark and Poole, Gary (2010). "An Introduction to Ethical Considerations for Novices to Research in Teaching and Learning in Canada." *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 1 (2). Retrieved from [http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cjsotl\\_rcacea/vol1/iss2/7](http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cjsotl_rcacea/vol1/iss2/7)

UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, "Guidance Note, Appendix 3, ACTION RESEARCH." 2003.

University of Manitoba, "'Practitioner-Research': Guidelines for Researchers and Research Ethics Boards at the University of Manitoba."

University of Toronto Ethics Review Office, "Teacher-Researcher Conflicts of Interest," 2003.

University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Office, "Guidelines for Ethics in Dual-Role Research for Teachers and Other Practitioners," Version 3, January 2008.

Western University Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board, "Ethics Considerations for Teachers' Research With Students in Their Own Classroom."