ETHICAL ISSUES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Susan Lees - In liaison with Professor Helen Simons, Chair of the School of Education's Research Ethics Committee.

Recommended reading for this element


Robson, C. (1996) *Real world research: a resource for social scientist and practitioner-researchers*, Oxford: Blackwell. See Appendix B: Ethical principles for conducting researching with human participants (British Psychological Society) and Appendix C: Guidelines on anti-sexist language (British Sociological Association)


Hartley library locations for these books are shown in bold
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The school of Education has a research ethics committee (SREC) to oversee research ethics within the school and provide guidelines for those carrying out research projects and those supervising student research projects. Before you conduct your research project, you should:

- take a look at the school’s Research Ethical Guidelines published in the Research Student’s handbook.

Your supervisor and course director will be aware of the guidelines laid down by the school’s research ethics committee (SREC) but you also have responsibility to ensure any research you conduct is ethical.

The route you need to adopt in devising ethical guidelines for conducting your research project is as follows. Guided by your supervisor/tutor within the precise guidelines agreed by your Programme Director and Course Board, you will:

1. Complete an Ethics Review Checklist for Student Research Projects. This document asks a series of questions about your proposed research.
2. Discuss the checklist and your responses with your supervisor, and, if there is no problem, have it signed and dated and proceed to the next stage.
3. Develop a precise Ethics Protocol for your particular research project. (before doing this take a look at the document ‘Drawing up an Ethics Protocol’ available from your supervisor/programme director) to see the issues you need to consider in the protocol.
4. Check the protocol with your research supervisor/tutor
5. Commence your fieldwork. Good Luck!

There are many ethical issues to be borne in mind when conducting research. Here are some of the main ones.

- Make sure you have the permission of the institution in which you aim to carry out your research
- When interviewing, ensure informed consent has been received from your participants (or from parents or the school if children are involved). This is important in any research approach but particularly so if you are tape-recording an interview or videotaping observations)
- Ensure that the institution and your interviewees are aware of the nature and purpose of your research and the procedures of confidentiality and anonymity you intend to adopt
- Use code numbers rather than the names of your respondents when you report quotations from interviews or results from questionnaires.
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- Also make sure to the best of your ability that the interview will benefit your interviewee and not harm them in any way (The ethics checklist offers guidance here).
- Decide who will receive feedback (and when) on the outcome of your project before you begin and ensure that this is communicated at the outset. Do not make promises lightly and never promise what you cannot deliver.
- Remember to thank your participants.