RESEARCH ON TEACHERS AND TEACHING IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS FOR TYPICALLY-DEVELOPING STUDENTS

1. SCOPE

This approved procedure aims to enable trained researchers to use opt-out procedures for a range of typical classroom research methods, subject to certain constraints and protocols. Researchers in education often study teachers and teaching in normal educational settings for typically-developing students. All students in school are considered to be ‘people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question’ (CUREC 1A checklist section A, question 1; CUREC 1 checklist section D, question 4).

This approved procedure covers situations in which such research focuses on normal classroom activity. The meaning of ‘normal’ is to be agreed between researcher and teachers. The use of ‘normal’ in this document is to ensure that under this approved procedure children are not exposed to, nor asked to do, anything that would not be within the range of usual educational practice for that site. Classrooms have been selected using purposive or opportunistic sampling, or are used as case studies. Children and young people are research participants only because they are normal participants in the context.

This approved procedure is not appropriate for studies that focus on the learning, behaviour, or developmental trajectories of individual students.

For a full range of students in a particular classroom to be included in the research, the sample must not be skewed towards those from well-organised households who respond readily to messages that go home, and reasonable efforts have been made to contact parents and ensure they understand the research. Because of confidentiality the onus for this rests with the school and this approved procedure seeks to “minimise the impact of [...] research on the normal working and workloads of participants”. (Para 19 BERA guidelines) while ensuring that participants are fully informed, as far as is possible.


Details of the types of research covered by this approved procedure, and their related constraints and procedures, are in section 12 Further information.

2. TRAINING OF RESEARCH STAFF

All researchers will have had appropriate research training, and student researchers have agreed the study with a supervisor.
Researchers need to be sensitive to Child Protection issues, and avoid working in situations that could leave them exposed to accusations of abuse. They must follow the guidance set out in the University’s ‘Safeguarding Code of Practice’, including completing the online training course ‘An introduction to Safeguarding’ provided by the Oxford Safeguarding Children Board, as well as undertaking risk assessments of the proposed research. Any risk assessment should also include details of how research participants can report concerns about any member of the University with whom they will be interacting.

Researchers should also take responsibility for complying with safeguarding regulations and research practices which relate to the setting(s) (country, institution) of their research. As well as such compliance, researchers should consult guidance from the relevant professional associations. For example, for research settings in the UK, detailed guidance on obtaining safeguarding clearance can be found on the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) website.

3. METHODS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

The study must have been agreed with the school head teacher and the teacher(s) concerned. Usually the first contact is with the teacher with whom the research is to be conducted, a head of department, or a head teacher. A formal letter to the head teacher should follow including the information and requirements for the research and consent forms intended for students, teachers and parents and a formal request to host the research. The classes for the research can then be chosen and the procedures for consent agreed with the school. It should be noted that agreement by the University for the opt-out procedure to be used does not commit the school to this, and they may still request opt-in procedures be used. Researchers and the school need to ensure that non-English-literate parents are contacted in an appropriate way, and that parents and students who may, for cultural reasons, be especially sensitive about recordings fully understand the implications. In addition, the researcher, together with teachers, should consider the needs of any non-typically developing students in the classes chosen for research. Teachers who are the subjects of the research must sign a permission form for the research to proceed, and undertake to maintain anonymity of individual students, and to provide any necessary anonymous secondary data.

4. INFORMATION PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS

The specific details provided to parents will vary depending on the study, but will always be on University headed paper and will always include:

- the name of the study
- the name(s) and status(es) (e.g. doctoral student) of the researchers carrying out the study and how to contact them
- a brief rationale of the study, including its purpose and value
- why potential participants are being invited to take part in the research
- an explanation of what the potential participant would do, including estimated duration of the test session and where it would take place
- that potential participants can ask questions about the study before they decide whether to participate
that potential participants can choose whether they participate and, if they agree, they may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time by advising the researchers of this decision
- information about any additional personal information that would be obtained
- information about who would have access to the data, how it will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the study
- statement that the data would be anonymised
- what benefits (direct or indirect) may accrue to the participants in the study
- what risks are involved in the study
- that the project has received ethics clearance through the University of Oxford’s ethical approval process for research involving human participants.
- where applicable, a note to explain that the research will be written up as a student’s thesis and how the personal data included in that thesis will be published and stored
- the procedure for raising a concern or making a complaint

The Information Sheet is written in simple but non-patronising language. Most word-processing packages provide readability statistics for a document, and one should aim for a 12-year-old (Year 7) reading level for adults.

Please refer to the Information Sheets associated with this Approved Procedure.

5. CONSENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Group A activities, which do not alter the students’ normal classroom experience and/or which focus solely on the teacher will need only signed informed consent from the head teacher and teacher. Sample letters should be provided with the ethics application. All information will be shared with the teacher. For Group A, there are no vulnerable subjects and no additional or abnormal activities involving young people. The research would be covered by CUREC 1.

Group B activities do not place students at educational risk, do not store images of students, and do not identify or focus on individual students. Students and parents need to be fully informed by information letter and provided with an opt-out form, and can choose to opt out at any stage. Opted-out students must have alternative provision of equivalent educational value, or in other cases they must be placed where they cannot be observed or recorded. All reasonable efforts must be made to contact parents and ensure they understand the letter, but confidentiality means that this onus often rests with the teacher or other school staff. In some contexts, such as independent boarding schools, the school itself is in loco parentis in this respect.

Please refer to the Opt-out Form associated with this Approved Procedure.

Guidance on the informed consent process can be found at: http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/resources/informed-consent/
6. **FINANCIAL AND OTHER REWARDS TO PARTICIPANTS**
   Apart from the implicit benefits to practitioners and children of having extra attention paid to their work, no rewards will be given in exchange for participation in the research.

7. **POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS/RESEARCHERS/OTHERS AND WHAT WILL BE DONE TO MINIMISE**
   Researchers should take advice from the Department and host schools about DBS clearance ([https://www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/overview](https://www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/overview)). Researchers must be sensitive to child protection issues and not work in situations that could leave them open to accusations of abuse. Researchers must be aware of, and conform to, the requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998) and the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) and the BERA Revised Guidelines (2004).

   Please also refer to the **Parent Information Sheet associated with this Approved Procedure**.

8. **MONITORING AND REPORTING OF ADVERSE OR UNFORSEEN EVENTS**
   The research will take place in the classroom under the supervision of the classroom teacher. Any adverse or unforeseen events will be reported to the Head Teacher.

9. **COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS**
   The school should receive a brief report about the research, and parents informed that this will be available.

   See also parent information sheet.

   In all publications arising from the research, identities of the school and teachers and students will be concealed unless further, specific, informed, opt-in permission is obtained. Teachers should be informed about any reports of the research which are going to be in the public domain, but do not need to be informed about reports which are only going to be in the research domain.

   It is usual to give teachers copies of video and audio material arising from their practice, and copies of any transcripts made.

10. **DUTY OF CARE ISSUES / CONFIDENTIALITY**
    Research under this approved procedure does not focus on individual children as subjects so it is unlikely that any data would accrue which would give reliable information about individual children that is not already available to the school in other ways. Data about the class that is of direct interest in the study may be kept confidential from the teacher if this is necessary, whilst it would be unethical not to share general matters of concern with the teacher if they are unaware of them (see BERA guidelines paragraphs 27-29). Data collected under this approved procedure should not be withheld if it has serious implications for the child and might give access to services that might be of help, but matters of this nature should be discussed with the teacher rather than with parents. It has to be
considered that the researcher may have a skewed, partial, perspective and may not be an expert in special needs.

11. DATA PROTECTION ISSUES

Each child whose words or work is used in the study as an individual has to be given a code name and the key to these must be kept secure. Written work must be made anonymous before being handed to the researcher. Any video or audio material on which children are still identifiable must be kept securely in a locked cabinet and not stored on desktops, laptops or websites and destroyed as soon as an anonymous version has been produced.

12. FURTHER INFORMATION

BERA ethical guidelines, under which the research must operate, are available at http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/2008/09/ethical.pdf

**Group A research activities:**

Classroom research typically includes:

- observation of teachers
- audio-recording of the teacher with lapel microphone
- agreed curriculum-related non-invasive normal activities such as paper, verbal, computer tasks set by the teacher as part of the curriculum (excluding sensitive topics sometimes taught during pastoral, social and health education lessons) where the focus is not on individual performance on such tasks but how the tasks relate to the teaching

For this kind of research, opt-in informed consent of the teacher is usually sufficient, but researchers are advised to follow the ethics procedure of the school.

**Group B research activities:**

Classroom research also typically includes the following methods, in which there may be some focus on students as participants in the classroom:

- observation which includes students in normal classroom behaviour
- audio-recording with microphones which include students’ voices in normal classroom interactions
- video-recording focused on teachers
- analysis of written artefacts from the lesson, made anonymous
- pedagogic activity such as researcher teaching the whole class, or having teacher-like conversations with individual or small groups of students in the classroom, within the usual curriculum
- teaching innovations, such as trialling innovative methods in a systematic way

All the above methods are often used in schools for development purposes and internal information purposes. The difference between research activities in Groups A & B is that in Group A there is no
need at all to focus on students. In Group B there is the possibility that individual students will be the subject of temporary focus, in their normal classroom participation, but the unit of analysis is the teacher and/or the classroom situation and/or the lesson, not individual students. This approved procedure recognises that opt-out procedures are adequate for these types of research, so long as it does not:

(a) disrupt the normal range of classroom practices as agreed by the school
(b) identify individual students by name or by video image, but instead uses codes to maintain anonymity
(c) focus on individual students’ behaviour or learning, nor on named work
(d) place any student at risk educationally or in any other way

and is agreed by the head teacher of the school and the relevant teacher(s). Students and parents are fully informed and can opt out at any stage without educational risk.

**Types of research in group B**

**Observation**

Students’ real names must not be used, nor obviously identifiable features. A coding system has to be established at the start of the research and used throughout observation notes, and the key to this code must be kept securely and only accessible to those members of the research team who need to use it. Events the researcher sees or hears which are of any concern and might relate to Health & Safety or Child Protection issues must be reported to the teacher. No information can be recorded about students who have opted out.

**Audio-recording**

Normally students will not be identifiable from audio-recording, and identifying sounds can be disguised in any use of the recording outside school and the research team’s use. Names uttered in the sound recording can be digitally cut or obscured and the original recording destroyed. Transcriptions should be accessible only for research purposes. Students who have opted out must be positioned somewhere which avoids accidental capture while ensuring that they have their normal educational experience.

**Video**

The camera will point at the teacher, and avoid deliberate filming of students’ faces or otherwise identifiable images. If a student walks into view, or goes to work in the area at which the camera is directed, the identifiable image will be removed from the electronic record. For example, this can be done *in situ* by covering the lens and recording in sound only, or by taking steps within a reasonable timeframe after recording to edit out the images of students. Images of students accidentally captured will not be reproduced or used for research purposes in an identifiable way, nor stored electronically in an accessible form. It is not just a matter of obscuring visual images, but of obscuring identity within the clues provided by a familiar context. Researchers should have such procedures in place at the planning stage. Students who have opted out must not be captured on film at all; it is usually possible to seat them somewhere which avoids accidental capture while ensuring that they have their normal educational experience.
Analysis of written artefacts
This research does not focus on individual students, so written artefacts are only used to give depth and full information about what was being done in the lesson, not as records of individual learning. The written material being used in this kind of research is that which is produced in the normal work of the lesson and has to be made anonymous or coded before being handed to the researcher, excluding that of opted-out students. This process must be included in the agreement with the teacher.

Pedagogic intervention
Some classroom research entails the researcher acting as a support teacher, or questioning individual or small groups of students in the classroom in ways typical of teachers and teaching assistants. Many classroom researchers are also qualified teachers so their ability to act appropriately is not an issue. Any pedagogic intervention by the researcher must be agreed with the teacher and must be within the normal practices and curriculum of the classroom, teachers and teaching assistants. Students who have opted out must have alternative educational provision, which is equivalent to what they would have without the intervention. This approved procedure is not appropriate for deliberate non-curriculum innovations.

Teaching innovation
Researchers may agree with teachers a particular way of teaching for a certain period of time, and monitor both the methods and the results. To obtain permission from a school for such a teaching innovation, researchers must produce a full justification for this research and convince the school that what they are going to do will not put students at risk educationally. This process does not therefore have to be repeated with every student and every parent. Instead, the information letter should be from the school and researcher jointly, and the opt-out procedure used. This procedure recognises that educational development is a normal part of school life, and that teachers constantly change the way the curriculum is organised, try new ways to teach, and alter the nature of tasks. Thus as long as the school supports the research it can be seen as within normal school practice. Students who have opted out must have alternative educational provision elsewhere which is equivalent to what they would have without the innovation.

13. CHANGE HISTORY

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