

Research in Schools

1.0 Approval of Schools Ethics Committees

- 1.1 If the research is to be conducted in the NSW government schools or TAFE colleges, the approval of the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) is required. This should be sought after approval is obtained from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee
- 1.2 For research involving independent schools, approval from the relevant administrative body is required.

2.0 Consent of parents/children

- 2.1 In general, the Committee requires that written parental consent be obtained for every school child who participates in research, regardless of the age of the child. This is in accord with NSW DET requirements relating to research in NSW government schools. For independent schools, depending on the policy of the administrative body, the Committee might make an exception in cases where the research is innocuous playground observation, or anonymous non-intrusive surveys. In these cases parents must still receive notification of the intended research with sufficient time to allow them to object to their child's inclusion.
- 2.2 Written consent must be positive. That is, it is not acceptable to include children in the absence of a written non-consent being returned by parents. Furthermore, people should not be expected to identify themselves for the sole purpose of denying consent, ie they should only be asked to return a consent or participation form if they are consenting.
- 2.3 Information letters must request parents to discuss the research invitation with their child and state that where parents consent to their child participating in a research project, the final decision will be the child's.
- 2.4 Parents and students are to be assured in the information document that participation or nonparticipation will not affect their school assessment.

3.0 Recruitment and participation

- 3.1 Recruitment and participation of school students must be conducted in a manner which does not make participants or non-participants conspicuous by their decision. For example, asking students who do not wish to participate to leave the classroom could cause them embarrassment. Where the research involves completion of questionnaires it would be preferable to request non-participating students to return a blank questionnaire at the same time completed questionnaires are returned. That way, only they will know if they are participating or not.
- 3.2 Where it is necessary to group consenting students together, prior arrangements should be made with the school to provide alternative activities for those students for whom written parental consent is not received.
- 3.3 If the research topic is of a sensitive nature, then it must be demonstrated that a protocol exists which identifies and caters for students who might be

emotionally harmed by the research procedures, eg distressed, anxious etc, are in a situation which raises duty of care issues, eg child abuse, or who might be a danger to themselves or others, eg depressed or suicidal.

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