



TEACHER

Self-Developed Teacher Education Research Ethics Competency

Context Mapping Executive Summary

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Ethics in Education Research: A context mapping report of the TEACH-er project

Executive Summary

24 November 2025

Citation:

Quesada-Pallarès, C., Contreras-Benítez, A.B., Ion, G., Ciraso-Calí, A., Sánchez-Martí, A., and Brennan, A. (2025). *Executive Summary: Ethics in Education Research: A context mapping report within the TEACH-er project*. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.17902445](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17902445)



Introduction

The *Self-Developed Teacher Education Research Ethics Competency (TEACH-er)* project is an eighteen-month Erasmus+ small-scale partnership (KA210-SCH) led by the Marino Institute of Education (MIE), Dublin, in collaboration with the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) and St Joseph's Secondary School, Dublin. Funded under the Erasmus+ Partnerships in School Education (2025–2026), the initiative addresses a gap in professional learning for teacher-researchers.

Teachers who undertake classroom-based research frequently do so without access to formal ethics training, advice or oversight. As practitioner inquiry and evidence-informed practice become increasingly central to teaching practice, educators encounter complex ethical dilemmas and would benefit from ethical guidance. The project team work with teachers to generate resources to enable teacher-researchers to assess their own skills, knowledge and needs with regards to education research ethics; to build the capacity of teachers to engage in classroom-based research in ways that are ethically sound in the absence of ethical oversight; and to produce resources which will be informed by the real-world unique ethical dilemmas facing teachers-as-researchers.

This report is developed as part of Activity 2, entitled ERE Context Mapping, aiming at reviewing relevant scholarly literature, professional ethics oversight in other professions, and ethics policy and guidelines across the EU to generate an in-depth understanding of ERE competence for teacher research. While the term *practitioner-researcher* encompasses a broad range of professionals engaged in systematic reflection on their own practice, this report deliberately narrows its scope to teachers acting as researchers within school settings. Our aim is to explore the ethical dimensions that emerge when teachers investigate their own classrooms, including how they manage issues of consent, assent, student voice, confidentiality, anonymity, data analysis and reflexivity.



Context and Rationale

It was a decade ago when the European Network on Teacher Education Policies (ENTEP) signalled a shift in the teaching profession toward a more dynamic, reflective, and research-oriented model (Schratz, Pecek & Lucu, 2014). This new model envisions teachers as multifaceted professionals: capable of adapting to diverse contexts, using and generating knowledge, and making informed decisions to improve student learning and school experiences. This aligns closely with the 2021 UNESCO report, which conceptualizes teachers as “reflexive practitioners and knowledge producers, they contribute to growing bodies of knowledge needed to transform educational environments, policies, research, and practice, within and beyond their own profession” (UNESCO, 2021, p.85), actively contributing to the transformation of educational environments, policies, and practices.

For authors such as Griffiths (1985), Goswami and Stillman (1987), and Glesne (1991), a ‘practitioner-researcher’ is a reflective professional who systematically investigates their own practice to better understand and improve it. As la Velle (2024) argues, this reflective, iterative model -understanding, preparing, instructing, assessing, and reflecting- underpins quality teacher education. Through this process, they enhance their ability to critically analyse and contextualise situations, reduce impulsive judgments, and make more informed decisions. European and international policy frameworks emphasise the teacher’s role as a reflective practitioner and knowledge generator (European Commission, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

Research literacy has been established as a broad view on the function of research-based teacher education and is defined as “the ability to judiciously use, apply, and develop research as an intrinsic component of one's teaching” (Evans et al., 2017, p.404). The goal is for teachers to not only be knowledgeable research consumers but also to be able to conduct their own research to examine treatments and educational methods (Menter & Flores, 2021).

Despite this, most teacher-researchers operate outside university structures and lack access to ethics committees or professional advisory bodies. This absence contributes to inconsistency in how key ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality and positionality are applied in classroom research. The TEACH-er project redefines research ethics as a form of professional practice based on reflection, care and accountability rather than procedural compliance.



Methodological Approach

To explore how ethics are addressed in school-based teacher research, we carried out a scoping review following the PRISMA guidelines for scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018). This approach was selected because of its capacity to map a wide and heterogeneous body of literature and to identify key themes and gaps in the field. The search was limited to studies conducted between 2014 and 2025 across three main databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS) and Dialnet. Search strings combined keywords related to ethics, teacher-researchers and classroom-based methodologies. Examples of the string used, including the Boolean query, was:

(ethic* AND action-research AND teach*) OR (ethic* AND "classroom-based research") OR (ethic* AND autoethnography AND teach*) OR (ethic* AND teacher-researcher*) OR (ethic* AND action-research AND teach*) OR (ethic* AND "student voice")

The initial search retrieved **562 records** from Scopus, WoS and Dialnet. After removing 84 duplicates, **478 records** were screened based on title and abstract. Of these, **80 reports** were selected for full-text assessment against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Eligible publications were those that (i) reported on teachers conducting research within their own classroom settings; (ii) explicitly addressed ethical dimensions such as dilemmas, reflexivity, consent or related issues; and (iii) were published between 2014 and 2025 in either English or Spanish. Conversely, studies were excluded when they focused exclusively on university or medical contexts, when they were purely theoretical without a clear discussion of ethical aspects, or when they dealt with forms of research unrelated to school-based teaching practice. Ultimately, **39 studies** met the inclusion criteria and were retained for in-depth analysis.

Alongside academic publications, **42 grey literature resources** were added, including guidelines, networks, policy statements and international frameworks related to research ethics. While few of these documents specifically target school-based teacher-research, many offer transferable principles relevant to ethical decision-making in educational contexts. After applying the exclusion criteria, **19 documents** were retained for analysis.

Key sources include BERA (2024), AERA (2011), EERA (2019), ENRIO (2020) and national ethics codes in Ireland and Spain. The findings revealed that limited frameworks directly address teacher-researchers, with most existing ethics guidance assuming a university-based context, while emphasizing highly academic terminologies.



Findings

The need to develop ethical competence within teacher education emerges as a central concern for the quality and legitimacy of both educational practice and research. As Honan (2007) asserts, the quality of practitioner research rests upon the quality of the ethical dimensions that are understood and emphasised. This recognition positions ethics not as a peripheral consideration but as a foundational element of professional practice and inquiry.

Ethical practice in research, and particularly in school-based research, can be characterised by competing demands: the need to ensure quality and rigour, to situate the work within a participatory and democratic frame, to acknowledge that one is working within a system of morality, and to manage the challenges of objectivity, access, and informed consent in the workplace, all while maintaining a commitment to improving educational action. These tensions underscore the complexity of ethical engagement in educational contexts and the need for professionals who can balance moral reasoning with research integrity and practical judgment. Ethical competence thus encompasses more than adherence to institutional codes or procedural compliance. It involves the cultivation of moral sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and reflective judgment, capacities that enable teachers to identify, analyse, and respond appropriately to the complex ethical dilemmas that arise in educational settings.

Four recurrent ethical dimensions were identified across the reviewed literature and policy frameworks. First, *reflexivity and positionality* require teacher-researchers to maintain awareness of power and bias in their dual professional roles (Andrew, 2017; Hopman, 2021). Second, *sensitive topics*, especially those concerning inclusion and wellbeing, present challenges of consent, safeguarding and vulnerability (Mitra et al., 2017). Third, *procedural challenges* persist around data management, authorship and anonymity (Mueller et al., 2023). Finally, *the overlap between professional and research ethics* remains a significant area of uncertainty (Rubio-Moreno et al., 2024). Together, these dimensions position ethics as an active, situated competence, which enables teachers to make sound professional judgements even in the absence of formal oversight.

Conclusion

Key findings reveal that ethical practices are deeply embedded across all stages of the research cycle - from design to dissemination - and are particularly salient in methodologies such as (Participatory) Action Research, Student Voice Research, and Autoethnography. These approaches foreground the importance of informed consent, reflexivity, power negotiation, and the inclusion of marginalized voices. The report also emphasizes the transformative potential of ethically grounded research to foster professional growth, institutional change, and educational justice.

The review also identifies notable limitations in the existing literature. Despite the increasing emphasis on ethics in educational research, there remains a lack of empirical studies that explicitly address the development of ethical competence in teacher-researchers. This highlights the need to embed ethics research competence within teacher initial education programs. Furthermore, literature often treats ethics as an implicit or secondary concern, rather than as a central component of research training.

There is also a scarcity of frameworks that support teachers in navigating the ethical dilemmas that arise from their dual role as educators and researchers, particularly in contexts lacking formal ethics oversight. The report advocates for the institutionalization of ethical competence as a lifelong learning goal for educators. This includes creating spaces for peer mentoring, professional dialogue, and community-based research that reinforce ethical awareness and collective responsibility, such as (online) Communities of Practice.

The TEACH-er project will advance the European agenda for the professionalisation of teacher research through the development of ethical literacy and reflective autonomy. We hope that by providing teachers with access to clear ethics guidelines and well-documented case studies, that the project can significantly strengthen teacher-research practice. The resources generated by TEACH-er aim to help teachers make informed decisions about consent, confidentiality, power dynamics and other common dilemmas faced, increasing the rigor and integrity of their research. For further information or to participate, contact **TEACHER@mie.ie** or visit www.mie.ie/TEACHER.



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