Institutional Review Board

Using your own students as research participants

Asking your own students (or the parents of your students) to participate in your research is intrinsically coercive. Parents and students will always feel compelled to participate, in spite of your intentions and assurances, or they may perceive some intangible benefit to participation that does not exist. For this reason, the NYC Public Schools expressly forbid their teachers from using their own students as research participants and TC will only allow it under limited circumstances.

In order to gain approval to use your own students, you need to demonstrate to the IRB that there is no other practicable way to carry out the project. Working with students in another class or having a research assistant handle recruitment, informed consent and data collection are both preferable to using your own students. There may be reasons why neither of these two options is feasible (for example, your study looks at 8th grade health class students, and you are the school’s only 8th grade health teacher), but even once the IRB is satisfied this is the case, you must still demonstrate that the benefits of the study outweigh the risk of coercion.

Many in-service teachers conducting doctoral research may reasonably want to analyze data collected from their students (homework, test scores, class projects, writing samples, portfolios, etc.). Provided no intervention takes place, such research may be approved under exemption #4, analysis of data collected for another purpose. You can submit your exempt application to the IRB even if the data you plan on analyzing does not yet exist. Most “action” research projects can be approved under this exemption. Under this exemption, parental consent and minor assent are NOT required, as long as all data is de-identified when it is reported.

One difficulty applicants have in preparing protocols using their own students and that the IRB has when evaluating them is that the roles of teacher and researcher are difficult to untangle; your rights and responsibilities as a classroom teacher are broader than those of a researcher, whose role is far more restricted. This is especially true of studies that seek to demonstrate the efficacy of a curriculum, a specific pedagogical intervention, instructional technology, or studies of classroom dynamics, group collaboration, etc. Both you and the IRB may have difficulty figuring out whether the introduction of new curricula, technology, etc. is a teacher simply trying something new in the classroom or a research intervention as traditionally understood. In order to help you and the IRB make this determination, ask yourself if the project meets the following criteria:

- The proposed activity/intervention is one I am free to assign in my role as instructor
- The entire class can engage in the proposed activity/intervention, even if I only want to analyze data from a smaller subset of my students
The proposed activity/intervention does not require participation outside the classroom or outside normal class hours (except for homework assignments).

• Data can be de-identified in any report or publication.

If your project meets the above criteria and your principal signs a letter stating s/he has read your proposal and agrees with your assessment, you may submit your application for approval under exemption #4 as above. **Any other research proposing interventions with your own students, especially if it takes place after school, during breaks, or separates a student or group of students from their peers during class time, must be reviewed by the full committee.**

Finally, while it may be possible to minimize the risks to participants involved when working with your own students, working with your own students raises potential research design issues. While research design is outside the scope of IRB review unless changes in the design decreases risks to subjects, we want to raise bias as a general concern in research design here as something all researchers need to be aware of. As a classroom teacher, you want your interventions to work, you are invested in seeing your students succeed, or alternatively, you may be teaching a curriculum or administering an exam you had no role in creating, all of which have a strong potential to bias your research results. We strongly advise doctoral candidates to discuss this potential for bias with his or her adviser prior to preparing the IRB application.
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INSTRUCTIONS: Please include this sheet with your application if you are using your own students as research participants. To determine if your proposal to use your own students meets the requirements of an Exempt study under Category 4, please answer the questions below, in the exact order presented:

1. Is there any other way to carry-out the project? **YES NO**
   *If no, continue below. If yes, please reconsider your proposal prior to submission.

2. Do the benefits of the study outweigh the risks of coercion? **YES NO**
   *If yes, continue below. If no, please reconsider your proposal prior to submission.

3. Does an intervention occur? **YES NO**
   To determine the answer to this question, please ask yourself the following:
   - Are you free to assign the proposed activity in your role as an instructor? **YES NO**
     *If yes, continue below. If no, this is an intervention study that needs full board approval.
   - Can the entire class engage in the proposed activity, even if you’re only analyzing a subset of students? **YES NO**
     *If yes, continue below. If no, this is an intervention study that needs full board approval.
   - Can the data be de-identified in any report or publication? **YES NO**
     *If yes, continue below. If no, this is an intervention study that needs full board approval.
   - Does the activity require participation outside the classroom or outside normal class hours (except for homework)? **YES NO**
     *If no, then you have discovered this is NOT an intervention study and can continue below. If yes, this is an intervention study that needs full board approval.

4. Did your principal sign a letter stating s/he has read your proposal and agrees with your assessment done above? **YES NO**
   *If yes, your proposal is considered an Exempt study under category 4. If no, this is an intervention study that needs full board approval.