DRAFTING ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR TEACHER RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

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In this chapter I will present a statement of ethics developed for a school system in Frederick County, Virginia. I drafted the statement with the help of an assistant superintendent, a building administrator, and a group of high school teacher-researchers. My emphasis, however, will be less on the draft itself and more on the process of writing and learning that produced it.[1]

EXPLORATORY WRITING

For the moment, my class of 10th graders was quietly writing. They were not an easy group to work with, but I looked forward to seeing them each day. Teaching them was like reading an interesting book and wondering what would happen next, wondering how it would happen and how the writer would show it happening. It was also like writing a book. I was the managing editor of the text we wrote together, and chapters developed day by day, not always as I expected.

I sometimes revised my plans in midlesson as I observed my students' responses. When something seemed noteworthy, especially a particularly wise comment by a student, I grabbed my research log from my desk and wrote it down. They had grown used to my interest in how they progressed through their learning. Occasionally one would even say to me, "You need to write this down." In oral and written evaluations of our work, we continued our dialogue about teaching and learning.

I taught, and I rethought. I acted, and I observed at the same time. I was not a stage actor perfonning before my students; I was myself as a thinker

and learner. My students were not my human subjects; they were more like coworkers—all were necessary to the research. The kind of personal interaction we relied on demanded and depended on my teaching them responsibly and acting toward them ethically. They were teenagers required by law to be in school. I was employed by the community to teach them and to evaluate and grade what they learned.

My values and theirs, my power and theirs, my personality and theirs, my background and theirs—all were present in our classroom. The improvement of my teaching and their learning was the goal of my research; teaching and learning did not exist to further my research. As I learned how to teach them and they learned how to learn from me, we were drafting the ethical guidelines of my research. The process begins in dialogue in the classroom.

DEVELOPING IDEAS WITH COLLEAGUES

When I am in a discussion with other teacher-researchers, they describe experiences similar to mine with the 10th graders, and we learn from each other ways to integrate our teaching and researching. We talk about writing observations of our classes and examining our students' behavior as data. We compare letters we have written to parents about our research or notes we have composed asking permission to quote a student's work. One teacher might share the names her students have suggested for themselves to be used in her forthcoming article. We ask each other for sources of ideas that we know did not originate with us, and are lost in our memories, files, and bookshelves of professional reading.

To many teachers, what I have described will sound familiar—normal practice—and it will sound like teacher research, but not like an exploration of ethical issues. I think that is because, historically, teaching has not been viewed as research any more than research has been viewed as something a teacher would do. When teachers are viewed merely as conduits, research ethics are irrelevant to their practice. Even when teachers begin to conduct research, it is sometimes difficult to see ethics as an issue. To discuss it seems to be participating in criticism of teachers, as if they are not ethical people in their relationships with students, along with everything else they are thought to do wrong.

Ethical issues may also be overlooked when teacher-researchers are thought by their school district to be doing something right. At present, many school districts with complex requirements for outside researchers desiring to conduct research in their classrooms do not require the same procedures for teacher-researchers. It is only when teacher research comes to be valued as research that ethical questions emerge. Thinking about the ethics of teacher research, therefore, requires rethinking the meaning of both teaching and researching. On a recent journey to extend my understanding of ethics, I came to understand this need for redefinition.

REDEFINING AND REVISING

Having just shifted from over 20 years of high school teaching to working as a researcher in a grant-funded teacher research program in my school system, I became a new member of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). It is not a coincidence that I came to AERA only after I stopped teaching high school. Teachers in grades K-12, or in community colleges, may not see what happens at AERA as pressing. I had long been active in conferences concerning my own discipline, English teaching, but AERA was new territory.

At my first AERA conference, I heard Yvonna Lincoln (1995) speak about ethics and standards of quality for qualitative research. She could have been talking about teacher research when she carefully described "critical subjectivity" to heighten self-understanding. She could have been talking about teacher-researchers when she spoke about the importance of "voice," hearing from the "unheard from" rather than speaking for them. I appreciated her emphasis on the idea that research takes place within a community and must serve that community. I could picture many teacher-researcher classrooms, mine included, when she described the "intense sharing" that may go on between the researcher and the researched.

I had heard the characteristics Lincoln attributed to quality research discussed in slightly different terms many times in my years of working with fellow teacher-researchers. We had discussed role tensions—the tugs between the various "communities" our research involves. We also had discussed dilemmas—the unsolvable problems that must be weighed and balanced by inquirers into their own practices. We are doubly bound to ethical behavior, I thought, as teachers and researchers. How we treat our students and colleagues is a measure of the quality of both our teaching and our researching.

Lincoln, however, did not seem to be including teachers in her definition of researcher. Nevertheless, her talk helped me redefine research in a way that permitted me to connect standards of quality and ethical behavior. I went to Lincoln's presentation in the first place because my colleagues and I had learned the methods of qualitative research from her, among others, in order to conduct our classroom studies. We had needed to go beyond our original ideas about research—statistical studies and bell-shaped curves of data far removed from our daily lives as teachers. I planned to attend other sessions by authors of die books I had read to extend my definition of research.

One panel presentation about ethics had an emphasis on quantitative research. I picked up a large stack of documents describing standards from various institutions including AERA and the Department of Education. Because they had not addressed the subject in their remarks, during the question period I asked if any of the speakers had ideas about ethical standards for teacher research. The chair of the panel said that for an answer to my question I need only read the current issue of the *Educational Researcher,* an AERA monthly journal.

I was stunned because, as an eager new member, I had already read the article and knew that the author, E. David Wong (1995), asserted that researching and teaching are not compatible. He believes that each requires a different kind of knowledge—one theoretical and one practical—and generates a different kind of inquiry—one contributing to a theoretical knowledge base and the other limited to an understanding of one's own practice. He refers to his own stance as that of a "researcher/teacher" and describes his sometimes difficult experience in the classroom as a university researcher who spends time in schools.

A few months later another article appeared in response to Wong's, as exciting as a new installment of a serial novel. Suzanne M. Wilson (1995), also a university researcher, asserted that research and teaching are not two different roles, but a relationship. As a teacher-researcher, she uses the skills and knowledge of both teaching and researching, looking intentionally and in different ways at what she does as a teacher.

Although her remarks came much closer to describing my own experience, I also have felt the tensions described by Wong. I see connections between teaching and researching, but the connections raise questions about the nature of each. The questions are challenging; they are political, ethical, and epistemological, as well as practical. They hover around a central question: How do teachers learn?

Most teachers begin their formal learning about teaching in colleges and universities. After they learn to do research in graduate programs, are teachers incapable of conducting it in their classrooms? Are they only to consume the knowledge produced by knowledge producers? What if that knowledge turns out to be false to what they observe in their classrooms? If that happens, is it because the teachers either misunderstood the research or are incompetently appropriating the findings?

If teachers learn by this appropriating process, is teacher research only a staff development effort? Do teachers' research findings matter beyond their own classrooms? What if teachers began conducting their own staff development based on their research? What will happen to university research and researchers if teachers begin conducting research that matters?

My thinking was full of such questions and connections. Is practical knowledge of lesser value than theoretical knowledge? Are the knowledge producers all university researchers? Does the status of the producers demand such separation between research and practice? Or is it Aristotle? Are separate knowledges harmful to our understanding of how teaching and learning take place? Do teachers, having only practical knowledge, teach students only practical knowledge?

My thoughts suddenly turned to my students. What is the quality of the relationship between teacher-researcher and student? Will their new relationship add to the definition of teaching or to the understanding of student learning? Are teacher-researchers pulled in too many directions to be effective? Or are they given direction by their research stance? Does their power over students

make their data suspect? Or are they able to forge a research partnership with their students that teaches them how a learner behaves?

The more I thought about what I had learned at the AERA conference, the more I knew that in seeking to understand the ethics of teacher research, I was changing my ideas of both research and teaching. One evening a few weeks later at a teacher-researcher group meeting, we were each trying to represent our current research thinking in a diagram and sketch. Mine looked like the parting of the Red Sea, itself labeled "Research Ethics." One side was the past, with old definitions of teaching and research; the other was the present and future, with revised definitions. I wrote a term on the "Past" side and tried to redefine it on the "Present and Future" side. (See Figure 1.1.) When I showed my primitive sketch to the rest of the group, they could see the connections. When I asked how, aside from help from Moses, we could arrive at ethics that include these changes, one teacher said, "By having lots more discussions like this."

WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT

At this point I knew that rethinking and revising would always be needed to establish ethical principles for teacher research and that teacher-researchers, their students, and their colleagues who are school administrators and university researchers must share the decision making. Also, in all efforts of this kind, someone would have to write the first draft.
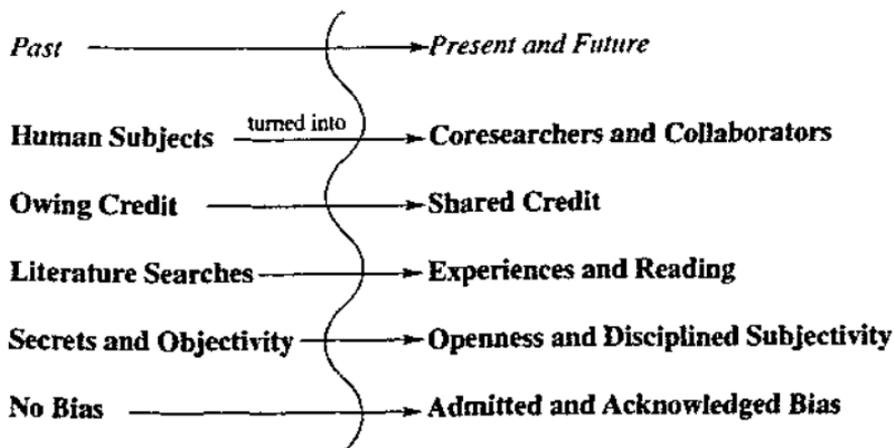

FIGURE 1.1. Research Ethics

The draft presented in this chapter originated because a group of teachers in Frederick County, Virginia, and I were conducting classroom research with the support of the district and the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Patricia Taylor. After discussion with Taylor and the research group from James Wood High School—Lisa Byers, Jane Campbell, Fran Jeffries (a building administrator), Theresa Manchey, Vicki Pitcock, Victoria Santucci, and B. J. Westervelt—I wrote a first draft. We all discussed it, and revisions were incorporated. Eventually, a statement was decided upon and adopted for use in the Frederick County schools. The research group agreed that I could circulate this version to other teacher-researchers seeking to write guidelines of their own.

After the original drafting process, members of the Fairfax County Public Schools Teacher-Researcher Network made suggestions to be incorporated. Teacher-researchers of the Prince William County Institute (of the Institute of Educational Transformation of George Mason University) also contributed suggestions. As an AERA member, I joined the Teacher Research special interest group and circulated the draft in their newsletter with permission to copy and revise as necessary. Responses received from this group were duly added. The whole process took place over two to three years and gradually led to some consensus among the contributors.

One point on which all agreed was the need for a background statement that explained teacher research, particularly how it both resembles and differs from more conventional research in schools. Everyone also agreed that an explanation of how a teacher both teaches and conducts research would be helpful. The explanations included in the draft below attempt to describe the value of teacher research to schools and its function as an extension of teaching. Our goal was to support and encourage ethical teacher research of high quality.

This draft may not be new to those who belong to any of the teacher research networks mentioned above. Occasionally, I see part of the statement in another document or publication, and my colleagues and I are pleased that it has provided other teacher-researchers with a basis for developing their own ideas. The draft that follows is the version of the statement that I prefer at the time of this writing.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER STATEMENT OF ETHICS

Background

Classroom research is conducted by many teachers as part of their day-to-day work and is seen by them as an integral part of their teaching and as a way to increase and improve their students' learning. They are formalizing, as researchers, what they already do, as teachers, by systematically documenting and ana-

lyzing their work and that of their students. Their students are collaborators in their research and may help to plan data collection, conduct data analysis, and draft findings based on the analysis.

Teacher-researchers' data grows dynamically as the research progresses. They identify their own assumptions and biases as they work, seeking a disciplined subjectivity and a clear statement of the research context. Their research is part of their professional development, and they work with respect for their students, their educational colleagues, and the community.

Teacher-researchers may conduct studies as assignments in university classes, through grants funded from outside the school system (by a professional organization, for example), as school-sponsored efforts to benefit their district, or as self-sponsored projects to answer their own questions about teaching and learning. Each of these situations involves slightly different ethical responsibilities.

Whatever the context, teacher-researchers' primary responsibility is to their students, and they and their students are the primary beneficiaries of their work. When teacher-researchers have a commitment to the professional world beyond their classroom—to their school districts and to education in general—they take on additional responsibilities common to any researcher.

In summary, teachers' research contributes to improved teaching and learning in classrooms and provides much-needed information to educational research in general. Teacher-researchers take part in the discourse of their profession. Because of the public nature of teachers' responsibilities and the nature of teacher research itself, ethical standards for the research require cooperative discussion. The five statements mat follow have been developed by teacher-researchers and school administrators in an effort to encourage teacher research while maintaining the highest ethical standards.

Statement of Ethics

1. The Teacher-Researcher Role. Teacher-researchers are teachers first. They respect those with whom they work, openly sharing information about their research. While they seek understanding and knowledge, they also nurture the well-being of others, both students and professional colleagues.

2. Research Plans. Teacher-researchers consult with teaching colleagues and appropriate supervisors to review the plans for their studies. They explain their research questions and methods of data collection and update their plans as the research progresses.

3. Data Collection. Teacher-researchers use data from observations, discussions, interviews, and writing that are collected during the normal process of teaching and learning. They secure the principal's permission for broader surveys or letters to solicit data. They also secure permission if they need to use

data already gathered by the school to which they would ordinarily have access as part of their teaching responsibilities such as standardized test scores.

4. Research Results. Teacher-researchers may present the results of their research to colleagues in their school districts and at other professional meetings. When they plan to share their conclusions and findings in presentations outside the school or district, they consult with their local supervisors. They are both honest in their conclusions and sensitive to the effects of their research findings on others.

5. Publication. Teacher-researchers may publish their reports. Before publishing, teacher-researchers obtain written releases from the individuals involved in the research, both teachers and students, and parental permission for students 18 years old or younger. The confidentiality of the people involved in the research is protected.

The draft status of this statement is to accommodate as many ideas from teacher-researchers in various teaching situations as possible. Draft circulation also acknowledges that such statements are not owned, but exist as documents for all to revise and make use of to support and encourage the best teacher research. Particular school systems or organizations supporting teacher-researchers in their work may wish to add more specific guidelines to meet their needs.

GOING PUBLIC

There are many questions to be answered about teacher research, so the drafting process continues; but there are also school districts where teacher research has been conducted, used as staff development, published in professional journals, and consequently where ethical and quality decisions have been and are being made. I purposely couple the words *ethical* and *quality* because I think that in teacher research the quality of the study is highly dependent on the ethics with which the study was conducted. In every part of the research process—from revising the question to analyzing and writing about the data—the ethical stance of the researcher has an impact on the results.

For example, a research question such as "Why won't my students do their homework?" differs ethically from a question such as "What happens when I assign my students homework?" The latter question could lead to a study of homework, to useful staff development for the school and community about

issues relating to homework, and possibly even to some ideas about using it more successfully as a help in learning.

Even when teacher research is accepted as normal practice, as it makes its way into the life of the school, new issues arise. What kind of relationship exists between teachers in a school who are conducting research and those who are not? What is the best way for a principal and faculty to make good use of the teacher research conducted in their school? How will the parent community react to the teachers' research? Collected teacher research in a school can become the basis for decision making, planning, and program evaluation.

In the high school where I taught for many years, each year's first faculty meeting opened with a new attendance policy. In some cases, more paper work was required; in others, the point was to have less. Some years, teachers were required to call the homes of absentees; other years, we were not to call home. Sometimes absenteeism was to be reflected in students' grades, other times not. I never heard anyone speak of research that had been conducted to try to understand why the absenteeism existed or what might be an effective way to reduce it. We were simply switching systems because some statistics indicated that we had an absentee rate that some other statistics determined was too high.

Although I tried not to be cynical about the various systems, I had a hard time remembering which one was currently in use, and besides, I had a system for my own classes that I thought worked pretty well. No one had asked me or any other teacher in the school what system we thought might work, and no teachers had done any research on the question. I want to teach in a school where decisions are made on the basis of carefully analyzed data—teacher- and student-collected data that tells why and how things happen. In this school, decisions about policies would be made with the help and knowledge of teachers, students, and their parents.

But if that is the kind of school I desire, I must also advocate ethical standards for teacher research that are developed through the participation of the people involved. The quality that unites all educators is not cynicism, but a belief in the possibility of change. When we learn something new, we are changed. Teacher-researchers are working to achieve this kind of learning for themselves and their students, and their participation in the decisions that affect their ability to teach and learn is an ethical requirement.

My own participation in the explorations and revisions that have been discussed has left me with another set of guidelines about the process itself. They don't qualify as a final draft, I know, but in any endeavor when the collaborators are this different and distant, the first draft writers don't own the final drafts that emerge. I have learned that the talking, writing, and reviewing in different contexts—classrooms, schools, meetings of colleagues, and professional meetings—and the draft guidelines put out for the professional community to use and revise are all parts of an essential process. When I participate in discussions

of teacher research ethics I can offer that process and these basic assumptions about how it works:

1. Teacher research ethical guidelines are the same basic ethical guidelines followed by any researcher in any situation, but they exist in a different context—the classrooms and schools in which teachers teach and conduct research—and that context cannot be ignored by the guidelines.

2. Ethical guidelines need to define both *teaching* and *researching* in relation to teacher research. A good way to begin is by describing how teacher research concepts of teaching and researching differ from those the readers might be familiar with from their education or the media.

3. Effective guidelines are written for a wide audience, including the school board and parent community as well as professional colleagues. Guidelines are more easily understood by those unfamiliar with teacher research if they are written with a limited amount of educational jargon and without condescension.

4. Research colleagues outside of the K-12 public school systems need to educate themselves about teacher research so that they can use their experience in colleges, universities, and educational institutes to assist in the development of ethical guidelines. Teachers in graduate programs are often interested in teacher research and are also in a good position to help draft ethical guidelines.

5. A framework that follows and describes the process of teacher research is a useful way to write the guidelines because those who read them can then understand what happens when teachers conduct research in their classrooms and how research should be conducted in an ethically responsible manner.

6. Ethical guidelines need to recognize the public nature of teacher research and anticipate both its local uses and the possibilities of professional publications and presentations.

My assumptions about ethics are themselves based on the idea that the most important quality of teacher research is its emphasis on understanding teaching and learning in classrooms. Schools that encourage their teacher-researchers send, to both students and teachers, a valuable message of respect for and interest in their learning. In the face of editorial pronouncements, political threats, reform demands, and harsh judgments of schools by those who know little of life within them, such a message is itself an ethical statement.

NOTE

1. All references to people and places in this chapter use their real names to recognize their contributions to my thinking.

International ethical guidelines for health-related research involving humans. iii. CONTENTS. Â The final draft replaces all previous versions of the CIOMS ethical guidelines, both in the domain of biomedical and epidemiological research. At the same time, research projects that have been ethically assessed on the basis of previous versions of the guidelines may be continued on the terms and conditions as set out in those previous versions. Reactions to the Guidelines are welcome and should be addressed to the Secretary-General, Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland; or by email to info@cioms.ch. The human ethics guidelines for schools: Ethical Practice When Doing Research: Guidelines for Students and their Supervising Teachers (2009) are for students and teachers in classrooms in New Zealand who are engaged in school research and other projects that involve people, such as other students, family, and members of the community, as Rosemary De Luca and Bev Cooper, both from University of Waikato Â An assumption was made, understandably by teachers in schools, that science fair entries that involved human participants also required ethics approval and this became de facto policy and practice. Â The draft guidelines were critiqued by the MOE and posted on the NZASE website in May 2009.