

# **ETHICAL STANDARDS OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION**

## **FOREWORD**

Educational researchers come from many disciplines, embrace several competing theoretical frameworks, and use a variety of research methodologies. AERA recognizes that its members are already guided by codes in the various disciplines and, also, by organizations such as Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). AERA's code of ethics incorporates a set of standards designed specifically to guide the work of researchers in education. Education, by its very nature, is aimed at the improvement of individual lives and societies. Further, research in education is often directed at children and other vulnerable populations. A main objective of this code is to remind us, as educational researchers, that we should strive to protect these populations, and to maintain the integrity of our research, of our research community, and of all those with whom we have professional relations. We should pledge ourselves to do this by maintaining our own competence and that of people we induct into the field, by continually evaluating our research for its ethical and scientific adequacy, and by conducting our internal and external relations according to the highest ethical standards.

The standards that follow remind us that we are involved not only in research but in education. It is, therefore, essential that we continually reflect on our research to be sure that it is not only sound scientifically but that it makes a positive contribution to the educational enterprise.

### **I. Guiding Standards: Responsibilities to the Field**

**A. Preamble.** To maintain the integrity of research, educational researchers should warrant their research conclusions adequately in a way consistent with the standards of their own theoretical and methodological perspectives. They should keep themselves well informed in both their own and competing paradigms where those are relevant to their research, and they should continually evaluate the criteria of adequacy by which research is judged.

### **B. Standards**

1. Educational researchers should conduct their professional lives in such a way that they do not jeopardize future research, the public standing of the field, or the discipline's research results.
2. Educational researchers must not fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent authorship, evidence, data, findings, or conclusions.
3. Educational researchers must not knowingly or negligently use their professional roles for fraudulent purposes.
4. Educational researchers should honestly and fully disclose their qualifications and limitations when providing professional opinions to the public, to government agencies, and others who may avail themselves of the expertise possessed by members of AERA.
5. Educational researchers should attempt to report their findings to all relevant stakeholders, and should refrain from keeping secret or selectively communicating their findings.
6. Educational researchers should report research conceptions, procedures, results, and analyses accurately and sufficiently in detail to allow knowledgeable, trained researchers to understand and interpret them.
7. Educational researchers' reports to the public should be written straightforwardly to communicate the practical significance for policy, including limits in effectiveness and in generalizability to situations, problems, and contexts. In writing for or communicating with non-researchers, educational researchers must take care not to misrepresent the practical or policy implications of their research or the research of others.
8. When educational researchers participate in actions related to hiring, retention, and advancement, they should not discriminate on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, physical disabilities, marital status, color, social class, religion, ethnic background, national origin, or other attributes not relevant to the evaluation of academic or research competence.
9. Educational researchers have a responsibility to make candid, forthright personnel recommendations and not to recommend those who are

manifestly unfit.

10. Educational researchers should decline requests to review the work of others where strong conflicts of interest are involved, or when such requests cannot be conscientiously fulfilled on time. Materials sent for review should be read in their entirety and considered carefully, with evaluative comments justified with explicit reasons.
11. Educational researchers should avoid all forms of harassment, not merely those overt actions or threats that are due cause for legal action. They must not use their professional positions or rank to coerce personal or sexual favors or economic or professional advantages from students, research assistants, clerical staff, colleagues, or any others.
12. Educational researchers should not be penalized for reporting in good faith violations of these or other professional standards.

## **II. Guiding Standards: Research Populations, Educational Institutions, and the Public**

**A. Preamble.** Educational researchers conduct research within a broad array of settings and institutions, including schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, and prisons. It is of paramount importance that educational researchers respect the rights, privacy, dignity, and sensitivities of their research populations and also the integrity of the institutions within which the research occurs. Educational researchers should be especially careful in working with children and other vulnerable populations. These standards are intended to reinforce and strengthen already existing standards enforced by Institutional Review Boards and other professional associations. Standards intended to protect the rights of human subjects should not be interpreted to prohibit teacher research, action research, and/or other forms of practitioner inquiry so long as: the data are those that could be derived from normal teaching/learning processes; confidentiality is maintained; the safety and welfare of participants are protected; informed consent is obtained when appropriate; and the use of the information obtained is primarily intended for the benefit of those receiving instruction in that setting.

### **B. Standards**

1. Participants, or their guardians, in a research study have the right to be informed about the likely risks involved in the research and of potential

consequences for participants, and to give their informed consent before participating in research. Educational researchers should communicate the aims of the investigation as well as possible to informants and participants (and their guardians), and appropriate representatives of institutions, and keep them updated about any significant changes in the research program.

2. Informants and participants normally have a right to confidentiality, which ensures that the source of information will not be disclosed without the express permission of the informant. This right should be respected when no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. Researchers are responsible for taking appropriate cautions to protect the confidentiality of both participants and data to the full extent provided by law. Participants in research should be made aware of the limits on the protections that can be provided, and of the efforts toward protection that will be made even in situations where absolute confidentiality cannot be assured. It should be made clear to informants and participants that despite every effort made to preserve it, confidentiality may be compromised. Secondary researchers should respect and maintain the confidentiality established by primary researchers. In some cases, e.g., survey research, it may be appropriate for researchers to ensure participants of anonymity, i.e., that their identity is not known even to the researcher. Anonymity should not be promised to participants when only confidentiality is intended.

3. Honesty should characterize the relationship between researchers and participants and appropriate institutional representatives. Deception is discouraged; it should be used only when clearly necessary for scientific studies, and should then be minimized. After the study, the researcher should explain to the participants and institutional representatives the reasons for the deception.

4. Educational researchers should be sensitive to any locally established institutional policies or guidelines for conducting research.

5. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, unless otherwise constrained by their official capacities or roles.

6. Educational researchers should exercise caution to ensure that there is no exploitation for personal gain of research populations or of institutional settings of research. Educational researchers should not use their influence over subordinates, students, or others to compel them to participate in

research.

7. Researchers have a responsibility to be mindful of cultural, religious, gender, and other significant differences within the research population in the planning, conduct, and reporting of their research.

8. Researchers should carefully consider and minimize the use of research techniques that might have negative social consequences, for example, experimental interventions that might deprive students of important parts of the standard curriculum.

9. Educational researchers should be sensitive to the integrity of ongoing institutional activities and alert appropriate institutional representatives of possible disturbances in such activities which may result from the conduct of the research.

10. Educational researchers should communicate their findings and the practical significance of their research in clear, straightforward, and appropriate language to relevant research populations, institutional representatives, and other stakeholders.

11. Informants and participants have a right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected when no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. Researchers are responsible for taking appropriate precautions to protect the confidentiality of both participants and data. Those being studied should be made aware of the capacities of the various data-gathering technologies to be used in the investigation so that they can make an informed decision about their participation. It should also be made clear to informants and participants that despite every effort made to preserve it, anonymity may be compromised. Secondary researchers should respect and maintain the anonymity established by primary researchers.

### **III. Guiding Standards: Intellectual Ownership**

**A. Preamble.** Intellectual ownership is predominantly a function of creative contribution. Intellectual ownership is not predominantly a function of effort expended.

#### **B. Standards**

1. Authorship should be determined based on the following guidelines, which are not intended to stifle collaboration, but rather to clarify the credit appropriately due for various contributions to research.
  - a. All those, regardless of status, who have made substantive creative contribution to the generation of an intellectual product are entitled to be listed as authors of that product.
  - b. First authorship and order of authorship should be the consequence of relative creative leadership and creative contribution. Examples of creative contributions are: writing first drafts or substantial portions; significant rewriting or substantive editing; and contributing generative ideas or basic conceptual schemes or analytic categories, collecting data which require significant interpretation or judgment, and interpreting data.
  - c. Clerical or mechanical contributions to an intellectual product are not grounds for ascribing authorship. Examples of such technical contributions are: typing, routine data collection or analysis, routine editing, and participation in staff meetings.
  - d. Authorship and first authorship are not warranted by legal or contractual responsibility for or authority over the project or process that generates an intellectual product. It is improper to enter into contractual arrangements that preclude the proper assignment of authorship.
  - e. Anyone listed as author must have given his/her consent to be so listed.
  - f. The work of those who have contributed to the production of an intellectual product in ways short of these requirements for authorship should be appropriately acknowledged within the product.
  - g. Acknowledgement of other work significantly relied on in the development of an intellectual product is required. However, so long as such work is not plagiarized or otherwise inappropriately used, such reliance is not ground for authorship or ownership.
  - h. It is improper to use positions of authority to appropriate the work of

others or claim credit for it. In hierarchical relationships, educational researchers should take care to ensure that those in subordinate positions receive fair and appropriate authorship credit.

- i. Theses and dissertations are special cases in which authorship is not determined strictly by the criteria elaborated in these standards. Authorship in the publication of work arising from theses and dissertations is determined by creative intellectual contributions as in other cases.
  - j. Authors should disclose the publication history of articles they submit for publication; that is, if the present article is substantially similar in content and form to one previously published, that fact should be noted and the place of publication cited.
2. While under suitable circumstances, ideas and other intellectual products may be viewed as commodities, arrangements concerning the production or distribution of ideas or other intellectual products must be consistent with academic freedom and the appropriate availability of intellectual products to scholars, students, and the public. Moreover, when a conflict between the academic and scholarly purposes of intellectual production and profit from such production arise, preference should be given to the academic and scholarly purposes.
3. Ownership of intellectual products should be based upon the following guidelines:
    - a. Individuals are entitled to profit from the sale or disposition of those intellectual products they create. They may therefore enter into contracts or other arrangements for the publication or disposition of intellectual products, and profit financially from these arrangements.
    - b. Arrangements for the publication or disposition of intellectual products should be consistent with their appropriate public availability and with academic freedom. Such arrangements should emphasize the academic functions of publication over the maximization of profit.
    - c. Individuals or groups who fund or otherwise provide resources for the development of intellectual products are entitled to assert claims to a fair share of the royalties or other profits from the sale or disposition

of those products. As such claims are likely to be contentious, funding institutions and authors should agree on policies for the disposition of profits at the outset of the research or development project.

d. Authors should not use positions of authority over other individuals to compel them to purchase an intellectual product from which the authors benefit. This standard is not meant to prohibit use of an author's own textbook in a class, but copies should be made available on library reserve so that students are not forced to purchase it.

#### **IV. Guiding Standards: Editing, Reviewing, and Appraising Research**

**A. Preamble.** Editors and reviewers have a responsibility to recognize a wide variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives and, at the same time, to ensure that manuscripts meet the highest standards as defined in the various perspectives.

##### **B. Standards**

1. AERA journals should handle refereed articles in a manner consistent with the following principles:
  - a. Fairness requires a review process that evaluates submitted works solely on the basis of merit. Merit shall be understood to include both the competence with which the argument is conducted and the significance of the results achieved.
  - b. Although each AERA journal may concentrate on a particular field or type of research, the set of journals as a whole should be open to all disciplines and perspectives currently represented in the membership and which support a tradition of responsible educational scholarship. This Standard is not incompatible with giving serious consideration to innovative work and should not be used to discourage perspectives not yet fully established in traditional scholarship.
  - c. Blind review, with multiple readers, should be used for each

submission, except where explicitly waived. (See #3.)

- d. Judgments of the adequacy of an inquiry should be made by reviewers who are competent to read the work submitted to them. Editors should strive to select reviewers who are familiar with the research paradigm and who are not so unsympathetic as to preclude a disinterested judgment of the merit of the inquiry.
  - e. Editors should insist that even unfavorable reviews be dispassionate and constructive. Authors have the right to know the grounds for rejection of their work.
2. AERA journals should have written, published policies for refereeing articles.
  3. AERA journals should have a written, published policy stating when solicited and non-refereed publications are permissible.
  4. AERA journals should publish statements indicating any special emphases expected to characterize articles submitted for review.
  5. In addition to enforcing standing strictures against sexist and racist language, editors should reject articles that contain *ad hominen* attacks on individuals or groups or insist that such language or attacks be removed prior to publication.
  6. AERA journals and AERA members who serve as editors of journals should require authors to disclose the full publication history of material substantially similar in content and form to that submitted to their journals.

## **V. Guiding Standards: Sponsors, Policymakers, and Other Users of Research**

**A. Preamble.** Researchers, research institutions, and sponsors of research jointly share responsibility for the ethical integrity of research, and should ensure that this integrity is not violated. While it is recognized that these parties may sometimes have conflicting legitimate aims, all those with responsibility for research should protect against compromising the standards of research, the community of researchers, the subjects of research, and the users of research.

They should support the widest possible dissemination and publication of research results. AERA should promote, as nearly as it can, conditions conducive to the preservation of research integrity.

## **B. Standards**

1. The data and results of a research study belong to the researchers who designed and conducted the study, unless specific contractual arrangements have been made with respect to either or both the data and results, except as noted in II B.4. (participants may withdraw at any stage.)
2. Educational researchers are free to interpret and publish their findings without censorship or approval from individuals or organizations, including sponsors, funding agencies, participants, colleagues, supervisors, or administrators. This understanding should be conveyed to participants as part of the responsibility to secure informed consent.
3. Researchers conducting sponsored research retain the right to publish the findings under their own names.
4. Educational researchers should not agree to conduct research that conflicts with academic freedom, nor should they agree to undue or questionable influence by government or other funding agencies. Examples of such improper influence include endeavors to interfere with the conduct of research, the analysis of findings, or the reporting of interpretations. Researchers should report to AERA attempts by sponsors or funding agencies to use any questionable influence.
5. Educational researchers should fully disclose the aims and sponsorship of their research, except where such disclosure would violate the usual tenets of confidentiality and anonymity. Sponsors or funders have the right to have disclaimers included in research reports to differentiate their sponsorship from the conclusions of the research.
6. Educational researchers should not accept funds from sponsoring agencies that request multiple renderings of reports that would distort the results or mislead readers.

7. Educational researchers should fulfill their responsibilities to agencies funding research, which are entitled to an accounting of the use of their funds, and to a report of the procedures, findings, and implications of the funded research.
8. Educational researchers should make clear the bases and rationales, and the limits thereof, of their professionally rendered judgments in consultation with the public, government, or other institutions. When there are contrasting professional opinions to the one being offered, this should be made clear.
9. Educational researchers should disclose to appropriate parties all cases where they would stand to benefit financially from their research or cases where their affiliations might tend to bias their interpretation of their research or their professional judgments.

## **VI. Guiding Standards: Students and Student Researchers**

**A. Preamble.** Educational researchers have a responsibility to ensure the competence of those inducted into the field and to provide appropriate help and professional advice to novice researchers.

### **B. Standards**

1. In relations with students and student researchers, educational researchers should be candid, fair, non-exploitative, and committed to their welfare and progress. They should conscientiously supervise, encourage, and support students and student researchers in their academic endeavors, and should appropriately assist them in securing research support or professional employment.
2. Students and student researchers should be selected based upon their competence and potential contributions to the field. Educational researchers should not discriminate among students and student researchers on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, marital status, color, social class, religion, ethnic background, national origin, or other irrelevant factors.
3. Educational researchers should inform students and student researchers concerning the ethical dimensions of research, encourage

their practice of research consistent with ethical standards, and support their avoidance of questionable projects.

4. Educational researchers should realistically apprise students and student researchers with regard to career opportunities and implications associated with their participation in particular research projects or degree programs. Educational researchers should ensure that research assistantships be educative.
5. Educational researchers should be fair in the evaluation of research performance, and should communicate that evaluation fully and honestly to the student or student researcher. Researchers have an obligation to report honestly on the competence of assistants to other professionals who require such evaluations.
6. Educational researchers should not permit personal animosities or intellectual differences vis-à-vis colleagues to foreclose student and student researcher access to those colleagues, or to place the student or student researcher in an untenable position with those colleagues.

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The *Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association* were developed and, in June 1992, adopted by AERA to be an educational document, to stimulate collegial debate, and to evoke voluntary compliance by moral persuasion. The Ethical Standards were revised in 1996 and in 2000. Accordingly, it is not the intention of the Association to monitor adherence to the Standards or to investigate allegations of violations to the Code.