

meNet Ethical Statement

Principles Underpinning the Guidelines

meNet considers that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for:

- The Person
- Knowledge
- Democratic Values
- The Quality of Educational Research
- Academic Freedom

In guiding partners on their conduct within this framework meNet sets out its guidelines under the following headings:

- Responsibilities to Participants
- Responsibilities to Sponsors of Research
- Responsibilities to the Community of Educational Researchers

Hereafter, the words ‘partner’ or ‘partners’ refers to the active partners within meNet and not to associated partners.

Guidelines

Responsibilities to Participants

1. The participants in research may be the active or passive subjects of such processes as observation, inquiry, experiment or test. They may be collaborators or colleagues in the research process or they may simply be part of the context e.g. where students are part of the context but not the subjects of researchers consideration of practice.
2. MeNet considers that its partners will operate within an ethic of respect for any persons involved directly or indirectly in the research they are undertaking, regardless of age, sex, race, religion, political beliefs and lifestyle or any other significant difference between such persons and the partners themselves or other participants in the research. This ethic of respect implies the following responsibilities on the part of the partners.

Voluntary Informed Consent

3. In situations where empirical study such as videoing of classrooms, teachers or students takes place, MeNet takes voluntary informed consent to be the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway. In countries where national/local expectations are different to this practice, these national/local principles will apply in place of this responsibility.
4. In situations where empirical study such as videoing of classrooms, teachers or students takes place, head teachers of any schools involved will be informed about the goals, expected outcomes and significance of the research and their consent sought.

5. In situations where empirical study such as videoing of classrooms, teachers or students takes place, researchers will take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported. Partners engaged in action research must consider the extent to which their own reflective research impinges on others, for example in the case of the dual role of teacher and researcher and the impact on students and colleagues. Dual roles may also introduce explicit tensions in areas such as confidentiality and these will be addressed accordingly.
6. Careful consideration will be given to linguistic or cultural barriers to the consent process.

Deception

7. In situations where empirical study such as videoing of classrooms, teachers or students takes place, the securing of participants' voluntary informed consent, before research gets underway, is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Partners will therefore avoid deception or subterfuge. Partners will seek consent on a post-hoc basis in cases where it was not possible to seek it before undertaking the research.

Right to Withdraw

8. In situations where empirical study such as videoing of classrooms, teachers or students takes place, partners will recognize the right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time, and they will inform them of this right. In all such circumstances partners will examine their own actions to assess whether they have contributed to the decision to withdraw and whether a change of approach might persuade the participants to re-engage. In most cases the appropriate course of action will be for the partners to accept the participants' decision to withdraw. Decisions to persuade them to re-engage will be taken with care. Partners will not use coercion or duress of any form to persuade participants to re-engage with the work.

Children, Vulnerable Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9. In situations where empirical study such as videoing of classrooms, teachers or students takes place, MeNet requires partners to comply with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3 requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration. Article 12 requires that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity. Children will therefore be facilitated to give fully informed consent.
10. meNet considers that the spirit of Articles 3 and 12 above will also apply in research contexts involving young people and vulnerable adults.
11. In the case of participants whose age, intellectual capability or other vulnerable circumstance may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to undertake their role, partners will fully explore alternative ways in which they can be enabled to make authentic responses. In such circumstances, partners will also seek the collaboration and approval of those who act in guardianship (e.g. parents) or as 'responsible others' (i.e. those who have responsibility for the welfare and well-being of the participants e.g. social workers).

12. Written consent will be obtained from parents, guardians or 'responsible others' for any photographic or video data that includes children. In countries where national/local expectations are different to this practice, these national/local principles will apply in place of this responsibility.
13. Partners will ensure that they themselves, and any collaborators or research assistants and students under their supervision, comply with legal requirements in relation to working with school children or vulnerable young people and adults.
14. In situations where empirical study such as videoing of classrooms, teachers or students takes place, partners will recognize that participants may experience distress or discomfort in the research process and will take all necessary steps to reduce immediately from any actions, ensuing from the research process, that cause emotional or other harm.
15. Partners will recognize concerns relating to the 'bureaucratic burden' of research and will seek to minimize the impact of their research on the normal working and workloads of participants.

Cultural and Social Diversity

16. meNet partners recognise that their work will involve looking through the lens of their own personal values at the experiences of others that may be shaped by different values. The overall ethical aim is that all people involved in the research will be treated respectfully and with appropriate cultural sensitivity at all points in the research.
17. Partners will be sensitive to cultural and social diversity in the treatment of participants and information concerning them.
18. There will be partner reflexivity concerning the impact of differences in values and social or cultural experience on the research and transparency about any effects in collecting, processing and reporting the outcomes.
19. Partners will seek appropriate support to understand significant cultural or social differences and to enhance researcher sensitivity.

Privacy

20. The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Partners will recognise the participants' entitlement to privacy and must accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, unless they or their guardians or responsible others specifically and willingly waive that right; in such circumstances, the partner will obtain this waiver in writing. Conversely, partners will also recognise participants' rights to be identified with any publication of their original works or other inputs, if they so wish.
21. It will be made clear that any video data will not be used for non-commercial purposes and that schools and students will not be identified unless this is either the national practice or written consent has been obtained.

22. The teams of partners have exclusive responsibility for analysis and writing up of data. However respondent validation will normally be sought from any individuals who are the main focus of accounts which are intended for publication.
23. The Data Protection Act of each country will be followed.
24. In situations where empirical study such as videoing of classrooms, teachers or students takes place, partners will comply with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data as set down by their country's data protection act and any subsequent similar acts. In essence people are entitled to know how and why their personal data is being stored, to what uses it is being put and to whom it may be made available. Researchers will obtain participants' permission to disclose personal information to third parties and will ensure that such parties are permitted to have access to the information. They are also required independently to confirm the identity of such persons and will keep a record of any disclosures. Disclosure may be written, electronic, verbal or any visual means.
25. Private citizens will have the right to access to any personal data that is stored in relation to them - this is generally a principle within data protection acts.
26. Partners must ensure that data is kept securely and that the form of any publication, including publication on the Internet, does not directly or indirectly lead to a breach of agreed confidentiality and anonymity.

Disclosure

27. At all times the decision to override agreements on confidentiality and anonymity will be taken after careful and thorough deliberation. In such circumstances it is in the researchers' interests to make contemporaneous notes on decisions and the reasoning behind them, in case a misconduct complaint or other serious consequence arises.
28. meNet considers it good practice for partners to debrief participants at the conclusion of the research; as such, those schools which have made a substantive contribution to the meNet work will be given access to the outcomes, at the end of the project.

Responsibilities to Sponsors of Research

29. meNet will bring its Ethical Guidelines to the attention of sponsors of the work.
30. Partners will fulfil their responsibilities to sponsors to the highest possible standards.

Methods

31. Partners will employ methods that are fit for the purpose of the research they are undertaking.
32. Researchers will, within the context and boundaries of their chosen methods, theories and philosophies of research, communicate the extent to which their data collection and analysis techniques, and the inferences to be drawn from their findings, are reliable, valid and generalisable.

Publication

33. Partners will have the right to publish the findings of their research under their own names (but see 'Authorship' below). meNet recognizes, however, that there are conditions under which this right might not hold including circumstances in which the researchers have failed, without reasonable justification, to report findings in a manner consistent with these ethical guidelines e.g. failure to report findings honestly and accurately.
34. Partners have the right to dissociate themselves publicly from accounts of the research that they consider misleading or unduly selective.
35. Partners will endeavour to communicate their findings, and the practical significance of their research, in a clear, straightforward fashion and in language judged appropriate to the intended target groups.

Responsibilities to the meNet Team and to the Community of Educational Researchers:

Partners

36. Individual partners will take full responsibility for the work that they agree to carry out within their teams and will be punctual in meeting deadlines.

Misconduct

37. Partners will protect the integrity and reputation of educational research by ensuring they conduct their research to the highest standards. Researchers will therefore not bring research into disrepute by, for example:
 - Falsifying research evidence or findings;
 - 'Sensationalizing' findings in a manner that sacrifices intellectual capital for maximum public exposure;
 - Distorting findings by selectively publishing some aspects and not others;
 - Criticizing other researchers in a defamatory or unprofessional manner;
 - Undertaking work for which they are perceived to have a conflict of interest or where self-interest or commercial gain might be perceived to compromise the objectivity of the research;
 - Undertaking work for which they are not competent;
 - Using work carried out with co-researchers as the basis of individual outputs without the agreement of the co-researchers concerned.
38. Where partners become aware of examples of malpractice or potential malpractice they will present their concerns, in the first instance, to the partners involved. If their concerns are proven correct and if the researchers in question do not move to correct the situation, the matter must be reported to the Marina Gall, chair of the steering committee.
39. Subject to any limitations imposed by agreements to protect confidentiality and anonymity, partners will make their data and methods amenable to reasonable external evaluation. The assessment of the quality of the evidence supporting any inferences is an especially important feature of any research and must be open to evaluation.

40. Partners will accord due respect to all methodologies and related methods. They will contribute to the community spirit of critical analysis and constructive criticism that generates improvement in practice and enhancement of knowledge.

Authorship

41. During and after the time of the project, partners will not produce personal academic papers or articles/materials of any kind without the permission of all colleagues who have made a substantive contribution to the work to be reported upon.
42. The authorship of publications is considered to comprise a list of everyone who has made a substantive and identifiable contribution to their generation. Examples of substantive contributions include: contributing generative ideas, conceptual schema or analytic categories; writing first drafts or substantial portions; significant rewriting or editing; contributing significantly to relevant literature reviewing; and contributing to data collection, to its analysis and to judgements and interpretations made in relation to it.
43. During and after the time of the project, when an individual/group wish/wishes to report on findings of meNet as a publication of any kind, they should inform the steering committee, via Marina Gall, chair of steering committee, before beginning the article/publication. This should take the form of a title and 3-5 sentences about the focus/content of the article. Should there be any issues/problems with this publication request, the steering committee has the right to delay/stop the writing of the publication.
44. During and after the time of the project, when an article is written, it should be forwarded to the steering committee, via Marina Gall, chair of steering committee, before it is sent to the publisher/placed on any website.
45. Academic status or other indicator of seniority will not determine first authorship; rather the order of authorship will reflect the relative leadership and contributions made by the researchers concerned.
46. The 'Learning Outcomes' and the glossary of terms will not carry the names of the individuals but will be texts of the 'project group'.
47. Where articles/reports or any other publication are translated into another language, the author's or authors' name(s) are presented as those on the publication in the original country.
48. Where articles/reports or any other publication are translated into another language, publication rights must be requested from the publishers in the country of origin.

Responsibilities to the meNet Team: Associate Partners

49. In their role, Associate Partners will not make use any of the materials or findings from the meNet platform for personal research or other educational purposes; the final outcomes and materials of the meNet project will be presented to the general public at the end of the project period (October 2009) and, at this point, the standard referencing system is expected to be used.

meNet – Steering Committee, March 2007