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Ethical Tensions in the Ethics Review of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Projects: Revealing Values from a Health Faculty in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Abstract

This study employed a case study approach to explore ethical conduct in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) research. Originating within biomedical research, the remit of ethics review bodies now commonly extends to assessing SoTL projects. Set within a health faculty at a university in Aotearoa New Zealand, we examined student and academic perspectives on ethical conduct in SoTL research to gauge how their values align with those who decide on ethical standards of research involving them. Drawing on reflexive thematic analysis, our findings reflect tensions between the relational and cultural values of SoTL and the biomedically based values of ethics review. Conflict within the dual role of the academic as both teacher and researcher, whilst of concern to ethics review bodies and academics, is not recognised as being as problematic by students, who do not feel pressure to participate. A greater focus on the learning opportunities afforded to students through SoTL research participation is warranted.

Keywords

Biomedical, Relational, Cultural Values, Dual-Roles, Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to acknowledge the students and academics who participated in this study.

Ethical Tensions in the Ethics Review of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Projects: Revealing Values from a Health Faculty in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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This study employed a case study approach to explore ethical conduct in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) research. Originating within biomedical research, the remit of ethics review bodies now commonly extends to assessing SoTL projects. Set within a health faculty at a university in Aotearoa New Zealand, we examined student and academic perspectives on ethical conduct in SoTL research to gauge how their values align with those who decide on ethical standards of research involving them. Drawing on reflexive thematic analysis, our findings reflect tensions between the relational and cultural values of SoTL and the biomedically based values of ethics review. Conflict within the dual role of the academic as both teacher and researcher, whilst of concern to ethics review bodies and academics, is not recognised as being as problematic by students, who do not feel pressure to participate. A greater focus on the learning opportunities afforded to students through SoTL research participation is warranted.

INTRODUCTION

Research ethics review has expanded from its origins in medical research, becoming more highly regulated, with arguments this 'ethics creep' has not positively impacted social science research (Gunsalus et al., 2006; Haggerty, 2004; Israel, 2015). While this broadened scope encompasses wide-ranging methodologies and paradigms, there are claims that ethics review decision-making processes remain underpinned by a biomedical foundation, having a colonising effect (Halse & Honey, 2007) and impacting the progression of research in non-medical contexts (Hamilton & van den Hoonaard, 2016). The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is described as "the systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work" (McKinney, 2006, p. 39). It is an example of a non-medical research setting providing a noteworthy focus for exploring these claims. In this paper, we contribute to the critical analysis of research ethics review. We examine ethical tensions between the relational and cultural values associated with good teaching practice in tertiary education and the biomedically based values of ethics review, and discuss the impact of these conflicting values on SoTL relationships and opportunities for student learning.

Historically, there was no requirement for educational research to undergo ethics review (Howe & Dougherty, 1993). Today, while there are some countries where ethics review for SoTL projects is not mandated, its requirement in many countries and institutions is commonplace (Lees et al., 2021). Furthermore, if ethics approval is required for SoTL projects, there are jurisdictional and institutional differences as to whether these would be considered by a specific SoTL ethics review body or whether a single ethics review board assesses all research. Regardless of ethics review requirements, there is consensus that at the core of SoTL research is an ethical responsibility to act in the best interests of students (Ferguson et al., 2006; McGinn, 2018). However, the values underpinning current ethics review processes may not best serve these interests, particularly when an institution reviews all research within a single biomedically informed ethics review body. Values associated with biomedicine, such as objectivity, may be inappropriate for non-medical research (Sikes & Piper, 2010). By comparison, the values underpinning ethical SoTL might be more likely to be shaped by "a relational ethic and guided by principles of partnership, justice, and care" (Bunnell et al., 2022, p. 129). The essence of a relational pedagogy rests on building a culture of relationships within the academy to transform and enhance academic and lifelong success (Felten & Lambert, 2020), suggesting a "more democratic and less hierarchical power structure in the classroom" (Su & Wood, 2023, p. 231). While a culture of relationships may underpin good SoTL practice, relationships are a particular concern for ethics review bodies when considering SoTL projects, revealing a potential ethical tension.

A key ethical tension in clinical research, and therefore a cause for concern for ethics review bodies, centres on dual roles. In medical research settings, there are concerns that the dual role of the clinician as both doctor and researcher can hamper voluntary consent and lead to misunderstandings about the care the patient is receiving (Morain et al., 2019). The nature of SoTL research is that dual roles are also commonplace. The lecturer[1] adopts the additional role of the researcher when investigating aspects of their teaching practice, with their students as potential participants. Ethical concerns centre on conflict within dual roles that create the potential for coercive power relationships between lecturer and student (Shi, 2006), which can lead to students having a poor understanding of the consent process and potentially feeling unable to decline invitations to participate (Regan et al., 2012) partly due to a lack of anonymity (Loftin et al., 2011; Tulyakul & Meepring, 2020). Ethics review bodies often require methods to counteract potential dual role conflicts, such as third-party recruitment or delaying research until the approval of grades and the dual role is no longer in effect. For some, "the best of all situations is for the teacher–researcher not to use their own students" (Loftin et al., 2011, p. 141), which is at odds with SoTL research, where the norm is for inquiry into student learning and application of findings to be based on one's own teaching (Kern et al., 2015).

[1] The term *lecturer* is commonly used in the NZ context to describe an academic who teaches and is often used irrespective of their rank within academia.

Importantly, there are claims of a lack of evidence that social science research has replicated the harms in biomedical research that ethics review aims to protect against (Hammersley, 2009; Schrag, 2011), including in educational settings (Scott & Fonseca, 2010; Whitney, 2016). As a result, concerns have arisen that ethics review bodies may require that researchers build incommensurate protective measures into their research (Pritchard, 2002). In medical research, dual roles can create harm as patients struggle to distinguish between the doctor's therapeutic role and that of a researcher. The trust underpinning the therapeutic relationship may lead the patient to assume they can discuss aspects of their treatment, resulting in both parties feeling vulnerable (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). However, in educational settings, questions arise about whether sufficient participatory harms exist beyond the expectation of everyday teaching and learning practices to warrant approval conditions commensurate with more invasive research (Hack, 2015). While dual roles exist within SoTL research, the extent to which they might create ethical tensions warrants further examination. Although studies are few, a consensus is growing that students participating in tertiary-based educational research may not view ethical issues in the same way as ethics review bodies (Forester & McWhorter, 2005; Innocente et al., 2022; Sarpel et al., 2013). Specifically, they do not necessarily feel pressure from lecturers to participate (Bunnell et al., 2022; Lees et al., 2024).

The site for our research is a tertiary institution in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) with a single ethics review body. While some types of research involving animal studies or human health require additional external ethics approval, all research with human participants is assessed within the same committee using the same processes and policy. Hersch (2018) argues that a heightened awareness of the potential similarities between bioethical and SoTL research may aid SoTL researchers in addressing ethical considerations. While we, too, were interested in potential similarities, we were also focused on whether there were unintended implications for SoTL research and the subsequent impacts on students when ethics review processes have their origins in biomedicine.

Our paper reports on one component of a broader, international, multi-site, nested case study that explores ethical conduct and ethics review in SoTL research. Set in a health faculty[2] within one NZ-based university, this component of our project sought to explore underlying values relating to student and academic perspectives on ethical conduct in SoTL projects. We were particularly interested in ethical tensions between values underpinning SoTL practice and those informing ethics review processes. We sought perspectives not from members of ethics review bodies who have historically applied standards of ethical research practices, but from those most directly involved in research – the participants and researchers. Illuminating the views of students and academics can provide a foundation for a better understanding of the values students and lecturers ascribe to SoTL research participation, including the degree to which their values align with those associated with the biomedical underpinning of ethics review processes and /or SoTL practice.

Values, however, are complex. On the surface, it may appear that certain values are shared. For instance, Thomas et al. (2019) raise the point that practitioners may agree that the values of 'autonomy' and 'respect for persons' are important, yet the ways these values are interpreted by different people or the same person in a different situation may differ. Individuals may disagree on how best to show respect or uphold autonomy. Furthermore, values may be in conflict. For example, Fulford (2011) describes a situation in which the values of autonomy and best interests can both be seen as important. Yet, in a specific situation, both cannot be upheld (perhaps the best interest of an individual will only be attained if their autonomy is disregarded). In this latter example, both values are important, but in that specific instance, they cannot easily co-exist.

The values within these examples stem from the provision of health care. As today's institutional ethics review body at our study site has its origins in biomedical practice and research, we argue that the same arguments apply when exploring values within the ethics review process and in the ethical decision-making processes of our participants. Taking a values-based approach aims to reveal the range of values present, yet often hidden, within the situation (Fulford et al., 2002). Seeking ways to illuminate people's perspectives and reveal the presence of values, as well as how they are being prioritised, can contribute to understanding the complexity and nuances of decisions.

CASE STUDY APPROACH

We adopted a case study approach in which 'the case' reflected a system bound by time, place and context (Simons, 2009; Stake, 2006). Case study stems from a curiosity to understand a phenomenon better, in this instance, ethical conduct in SoTL research. We considered our case study as instrumental, as we hope to enable readers to gain an appreciation of the case beyond the individual study site (Stake, 1995). Limiting the focus to data collected through 2020-2021 from a health faculty in NZ achieved a bounded system. A greater understanding of the case is possible by considering the broader historical, cultural, and socio-political context (Stake, 2010). So, we first present the cultural-historical context underpinning tertiary teaching and research ethics in NZ.

The case: Bounded by the cultural-historical context

The NZ tertiary student community is diverse. In 2021, the NZ Ministry of Education (the Government's lead advisor on raising educational standards) reported that approximately 63% of domestic students identified as European, 21% Māori (Indigenous people of NZ), 17% Asian, 10% Pacific Peoples and 5% as Other ethnicities, with some identifying as belonging to more than one ethnic group (Ministry of Education, 2023). Education should reflect "sociocultural characteristics" of the local context and its people (Gay, 2013, p. 63). As a result, recognition by the lecturer of the cultural identities of students lays a foundation for students to feel empowered as learners through a culturally responsive and relational pedagogy that can be "seen, heard and felt" (Macfarlane, 2015, p. 27). Research points to relational or "educultural" pedagogies benefitting Māori and Pacific students (Blackberry & Kearney, 2021, p. 113), which is important when, traditionally, the dominance of Anglo-European systems of education has often disadvantaged these groups of learners (Kersey et al., 2018).

Furthermore, it is becoming commonplace for Māori values to underpin education in NZ. Examples include tika, pono and aroha (translated as relating to integrity, respect and compassion), which are prominent and promoted as underpinning university

[2] In NZ, a faculty refers to a group of departments within a university with a shared disciplinary foundation.

life at more than one institution (Auckland University of Technology, 2024; University of Canterbury, n.d.). As a flow-on effect is the argument that centring the academy educulturally aims not only to positively impact Māori educational outcomes but "what is good for Māori is good for the institution as a whole, enabling the fulfilment of higher goals and aspirations" (Durie, 2005, p. 12).

In addition to culture, a legacy of unethical events in healthcare history underpins how research is considered and conducted in NZ. Perhaps the most pivotal historical event, and a clear example of the ethical implications of dual roles, took place at National Women's Hospital (NWH), where, between 1966 and 1987, gynaecologist Dr Herbert Green withheld treatment from some women in his care to prove a hypothesis that carcinoma in situ would not progress to malignancy. There was no participant consent process (Cartwright, 1988). The blurring of medical treatment and research was seen as on par with the well-known Tuskegee study in the United States of America, which withheld treatment from African American men with syphilis. One of Green's whistleblowing colleagues later claimed that the events at NWH "rates, with Tuskegee, as one of the worst examples of known experimentation, outside of war, in the twentieth century" (Jones, 2017, p. 164), noting that both studies were "driven by powerful men supported by senior colleagues" (p. 157). In Green's case, senior colleagues included members of the hospital medical committee who had approved the study.

While NWH had a resident committee that approved Green's study, the resulting inquiry introduced new levels of research ethics management. Of specific note for our study, and the exploration of 'ethics creep' beyond biomedical origins, was establishing the legal requirement for ethics review committees for university-based and health and disability research. However, provision for ethics committees to manage research ethics in other settings was never provided (MacDonald, 2018). As a result, the university setting determines the requirement for ethics review for SoTL research.

METHODS

Recruitment

Within the chosen faculty, a range of degree programmes are offered in health-related fields, such as nursing, public health and oral health, along with a range of sport and exercise specialities. Students enrolled in degree programmes within the faculty were eligible to participate. The only exclusion criterion stipulated by our ethics committee was that they were not current students of the primary researcher, who visited classes to inform students of the study. Participant information sheets were provided to prospective student participants, explaining that the study was inviting them to share their perspectives on examples of research that lecturers might undertake to assess aspects of teaching and learning. Visits to eight classes resulted in the recruitment of thirty-four students from paramedicine[3], oral health, public health, sports coaching, and general health or sports science courses. Academics were also recruited to offer a comparative opportunity, thus providing a fuller, holistic view of the case site whilst honouring the predominant student focus of the broader study. A third party provided study information and invited academics from the health faculty active in SoTL research to participate. We recruited five academics from health-related disciplines with experience in SoTL research spanning four to 20 years. All had experience applying for institutional ethics approval for SoTL projects. All participants received a participant information sheet and gave written informed consent. The primary researcher's institutional ethics committee granted ethics approval (approval no. 19/48).

Data Collection

Each student focus group and academic interview began with a period of casual conversation before participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and consent was checked. Four vignettes were shared to prompt discussions, reflecting summaries of SoTL research designs commonly found in the literature and drawn from a cross-sectional review undertaken during an earlier study phase (Lees et al., 2021). The vignettes comprised an anonymised questionnaire with a monetary or course credit remuneration, an individual interview, a quasi-experiment with control and intervention groups and a teaching intervention paired with grade correlation (See Supplementary Material). Participants were presented with each vignette and, through an informal period of free-flowing discussion, were invited to discuss why they would or would not consider participating in or conducting the research depicted in each example and whether it mattered whether the researcher was the lecturer or someone else. This free-flowing discussion was supplemented with some more structured questions where, for each vignette scenario, participants considered the extent to which concepts such as vulnerability, consent, and power imbalance were relevant. This two-pronged discussion method enabled a bottom-up focus on participants' perspectives of ethical considerations within each vignette, coupled with gauging their perspectives on the types of ethical considerations held by ethics review bodies and commonly documented in the literature.

The primary researcher conducted all the student focus groups, which took place in the classroom immediately following a scheduled class. This strategy meant that focus groups comprised students who, as classmates, were already familiar with one another. The rationale for this approach stemmed from our pilot study, where student participants discussed issues of convenience as a contributing factor to the decision to participate in research and familiarity with one another as a factor leading them to prefer focus group discussions over individual interviews. A further rationale for focus group discussions was that the classroom setting and collaborative group activities emulated a key case study principle to undertake research "in a 'real-life' context" (Simons, 2009, p. 21). Student focus groups ranged from four to ten participants, were audio-recorded, and lasted between 42 and 64 minutes. On completing the focus group, student participants received a $20 store voucher as koha[4].

[3] In NZ, paramedicine is a three-year undergraduate degree. Graduates provide pre-hospital emergency and urgent medical care, assessing, treating, and transporting to hospital. NZ Tertiary Education Commission. (2025). *Paramedic*. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from www.careers.govt.nz/jobs-database/health-and-community/health/paramedic/

[4] Koha is an acknowledgement of knowledge and/or hospitality traditionally offered by tangata whenua (host) to manuhiri (guest). In a NZ research context, koha is an accepted practice offered to participants by a researcher to acknowledge their contribution to the project. Koha can take many forms, but a modest monetary gift or store voucher are commonplace. Jones, R., Crengle, S., & McCreanor, T. (2006). How tikanga guides and protects the research process:

Given academic schedules and availability, we utilised a pragmatic approach and conducted individual interviews for each academic. Furthermore, we wanted to specifically garner academics' views on ethical conduct in SoTL research rather than host a conversation potentially dominated by academics' specific experiences dealing with ethics committees. Individual interviews helped to keep conversations focused on the nature of the research project, with time available after the vignette discussions for academics to share their personal experiences. All academic interviews took place online, by the primary researcher, using video-conferencing technology and ranged from 79 to 114 minutes. Only the audio component of the interview was retained. All student and academic sessions were transcribed and deidentified prior to analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Applying Braun and Clarke's (2022b) reflexive thematic analysis, the primary researcher was responsible for the coding of the process, beginning with familiarising themselves with the data, noting casual observations, and then shifting to a more methodical coding process. It is good practice in reflexive thematic analysis to have one person undertake the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). As part of a larger case study project, the coding of student and academic data had been undertaken separately to address earlier focal points. In this phase of the study, students and academic codes were combined for analysis as part of a nested case study within one specific tertiary location. Reanalysing datasets with a different focus is "entirely acceptable within qualitative frameworks" (Braun & Clarke, 2022b, p. 101). In this nested case, we were specifically interested in how each theme helped us understand the values underpinning student and academic perspectives. Fortnightly research meetings provided regular opportunities for the research team to discuss and reflect on the data, collaborating on the later phases of the thematic analysis to refine, rename and write up the themes. Presenting at an international conference provided an opportunity to seek feedback on early theme development.

Our reflexive thematic analysis generated two themes that told the story of what we saw in the collective data. Participant quotes were selected to support each theme. Braun and Clarke (2022a) caution against equating frequency with importance, stressing that in reflexive thematic analysis "a large number of participants may say or write things that are not relevant to the research question, while a small number may say or write things that are crucial" (p.20). While we often chose extracts that reflected commonly shared perspectives, we also drew on less frequent yet crucial points our participants made. Where possible, we provided context by including examples of dialogue between participants when presenting quotes from the student focus groups (Kitzinger, 2005). Therefore, when citing student quotes, we include a focus group identifier to denote the five focus groups (Student 1 to Student 5), followed by an assigned participant number.

FINDINGS

We developed two themes from the collective analysis of student and academic participant data: the power of caring relationships and acting with integrity.

Insights from the Hauora Tane project. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand,* 29, 60.

The power of caring relationships.

The presence and impact of a power imbalance were identified as a common concern in all academic interviews, underscoring the importance of addressing and rectifying any power issues to ensure a fair and balanced research environment. Academics acknowledged that undertaking SoTL research was essential to evaluating teaching practices and progressing disciplinary knowledge. However, addressing an assumed power imbalance between the student and researcher was needed to reduce "vulnerability."

> I've been teaching for a very long time, and I value the contributions that students can make to research, but this is still always a relationship where you're the teacher and they're the student. Even when the work is more collaborative, the most important aspect is that the students aren't coerced in any way and that they're able to freely participate without that power imbalance. (Academic 2)

By contrast, discussions within the student focus groups reflected a sense of agency rather than a feeling of coercion. An invitation to participate was just that—an invitation which could be accepted or declined. Several students felt that their particular discipline and place of study fostered positive relationships between students and lecturers, which mitigated any potential negative impacts of power dynamics. However, students noted that this positivity may not extend to other degrees at other institutions.

> Obviously, they're doing the teaching, but I don't feel the power imbalance…It might be different elsewhere. Like, I know in medicine…there's huge power and hierarchy… I think that in that situation, there would be that imbalance because you would be expected to take part. (Student1P6)

Some student participants agreed in principle with the role of a third party for recruitment or data collection. They saw such a role as creating a safety buffer to protect their relationship with their lecturer. These students acknowledged that lecturers could, in theory, develop a bias against students if they had declined to participate, but this was quickly followed up with doubts that their specific lecturer would act differently if they opted not to participate.

> [The lecturer] might be like 'You did the study, but you didn't do the study'. Like I don't want them to have a bias against us as students, but I don't think that would be the case for [our lecturer]…but you know, it might for some others. (Student2P2)

Academics demonstrated their protective care for students through an 'at arm's length' approach to research design. They discussed employing strategies such as third-party recruitment or refraining from teaching the specific student cohort directly to safeguard the lecturer-student relationship. Creating a clear distance between lecturers and their students, especially around recruitment, was considered an effective way to conduct research while mitigating concerns of power.

> Recruitment might be better from a generic advertisement like posters or notices on their online platforms. Something that is without a face...if it's faceless, and there's no push from somebody that they know …then that would probably seem a safer process, a better process…Is there any reason why they wouldn't feel comfortable with an outside lecturer? (Academic 4)

In contrast to academic views of undertaking 'faceless' research, one student participant used the same imagery of the 'face', reflecting how the primary researcher had been invited by their lecturer to visit their classroom to inform them of the study and in doing so, established a connection, which they appreciated. Others recognised the primary researcher from previous classes they had taught and drew on that connection.

> Yeah, you created a face by coming in, introducing yourself, putting your face to a name, that makes a huge difference. (Student3P4)

In general, most students noted the positive relationship they had with their lecturer. As a result, most did not necessarily feel they needed protection from them when considering whether or not to participate in research. These students strongly preferred SoTL research, where personal connections were present. Some students indicated they would be less likely to participate if such connections were absent, a position that was in stark contrast to the 'at arm's length', more "generic" approach valued by academics.

> If I just saw this [invitation to participate] online, I would have been like, yeah nah. (Student3P2)

In addition to preferences for invitations to participate to be as personal as possible, the importance of recruitment by those with whom the students had existing connections over strangers was expressed. Many students reported feeling less likely to consider research opportunities if introduced by people they did not know. For some, this was specifically because of a lack of a direct connection, which meant they were much less "willing" to participate and more likely to "forget" about the research invitation, as depicted in this specific focus group exchange.

> If you don't know the person…I don't think I'd put my hand up. (Student5P4)

> If it was our own lecturer, we'd definitely participate in the study. If it was someone we didn't know, we'd think more about it. (Student5P3)

Some students linked their valuing of caring relationships as a reflection of transferable capabilities acquired through their studies, particularly through engagement with and modelling from their lecturer. Students talked of being enrolled in degrees relating to the caring professions. They noted that the mechanisms for helping others had been modelled within the curriculum and through good teaching practice. As a result, they recognised that electing to participate in their lecturer's SoTL research reflected the helping curriculum they had been taught. Academics, however, were cautious about students' decisions to participate being underpinned by a desire to help.

> [Students say] 'we're happy to help if you'd like us to'...but it was more they wanted to help me as opposed to helping the research process and I thought, gosh, there's a fine line there. (Academic3)

> We're literally in a degree about helping people and we're learning how to help people and by helping to teach us how to help people we just want to help people. [. . .] Everyone wants to help each other. It's not that I have to help you it's that I want to help you. I want to help the lecturers do their study. I don't feel obligated. (Student2P5)

Furthermore, as this focus group peer reflects, there was a sense of wanting to help lecturers who go the extra mile for their students. These students strongly desired to support their lecturer, manifesting a willingness to participate. Students across several focus groups reflected "just genuinely wanting to help".

> We are so willing to help our lecturers because they help us so much. Lecturers go out of their way to help us, So, we're willing to reciprocate. (Student2P2)

Theme summary

Care for others underpinned relationships in SoTL research, but the way academics and students exhibit care differed. Academics took a protective stance, acknowledging the risks their role potentially posed to students engaging in SoTL research opportunities and opting to create distance between lecturers and students. By contrast, students demonstrated care for relationships with their lecturers through a general preference for close personal connections in the SoTL research space.

Acting with integrity

Academics reflected an explicit acknowledgement of the need to advance knowledge and a genuine desire to do this in the best way possible. As academics involved in SoTL research, they were committed to challenging the status quo and researching to ensure learning and teaching practices were advancing or at least being done the "best way for now" to avoid stagnating disciplinary knowledge.

> I want that sense of feeling that you can hold your head up and feel proud that you've done the best you could and with the resources you have and ensuring that somebody is going to benefit from it and that you've treated everyone well along the way. And if I was questioned, I would think, well, I did it with the best of integrity. (Academic 3)

Students and academics agreed that ethical conduct in SoTL research starts with well-designed research. Shared values within and between the two groups focused on ensuring prospective participants were sufficiently informed of the study's purpose, the methods involved, and what would happen with the findings. In addition, students and academics were clear that SoTL participants should be free to choose whether they participate. All academics saw benefits in a written consent process.

> I think it's important that they read the consent and have an understanding because it gives them some context to be able to refer to at a later stage…so that they can understand the expectations of the research or be removed from the research. (Academic 4)

While some students also saw value in information being available in written form, consent could be low-key for many as long as they felt informed. For students, the consent process should be commensurate with the risks involved. Students want some information but not too much. They want the "choice" to refuse to participate if the conditions are unsatisfactory. They valued simple, honest messaging from researchers rather than complicated processes and paperwork. Students felt equipped to make participatory decisions with a relatively high degree of informality.

> [Consent] means having all that information about the research and everything, and then after you actually under-

> stand everything, then make your own choice about it. (Student1P4)

> Just have the lecturer [explain the study]. That's enough for me. It doesn't need to be a big shebang. It's not that much of an issue. (Student2P2)

A fellow student who also did not think the process of considering research opportunities was a big issue felt the terminology of 'consent' was off-putting and overemphasised risk.

> All it means is you have a choice to participate. It's not like you're signing your life away or your mortgage. It's very, very corporate, real legal speak. (Student1P7)

Both students and academics reflected common views on building fairness into all SoTL research designs. There was little appetite for designs where only some students would benefit or where some may be negatively affected. All participants needed to be offered the same opportunities, to be "in the same boat". For instance, experimental design methodologies involving control and intervention groups were not viewed favourably due to the risk of some students not benefitting.

> So that is a very interesting scenario…in terms of them both being in the same class yet the teaching and learning practices are different. Therefore, some students may be disadvantaged or advantaged over others. I don't think that really is ethical in terms of fairness and equity for all students in that class. (Academic 1)

> No one should get a leg up by a random flip of a coin. (Student1P5)

Students, in particular, had an additional focus on fairness with notable concerns for the fair treatment of their peers. Student participants across multiple focus groups commented on their hesitancy to participate in studies where they may benefit themselves, yet their peers may miss out, as might be the case with experimental research designs. For some, the "close bonds" with their peers helped create a "sense of community" where they were focused beyond themselves.

> I would personally be like, oh, great for me, thanks but I'd feel bad for anyone who didn't have the opportunity to participate. (Student4P8)

> Like, what if I missed out or they missed out? (Student5P2)

Both academics and students recognised the value of a modest form of monetary remuneration as a fair approach to show appreciation for the time given up participating. One academic spoke of always providing food to student participants as a way of "acknowledging and saying thank you" in a way that offered a fair recompense of time and "comfort" while participating. However, all academics and students opposed receiving course credits and a potentially boosted grade merely because of participation.

> I think that it's important that the students get something from participating, either in getting a summary of the results, or are involved in the design of the project, or are given a koha. I think there should be some form of exchange in some way. It doesn't have to be monetary. Otherwise, it's kind of very much like the researcher is taking something from the participants, which is a very Western way of doing research. (Academic 1)

For academics, offering course credit undermined the integrity of the research due to the coercive nature of additional marks. Almost all academics were concerned that students would be enticed into participation because of the grade-related incentive, thus "blurring" boundaries between teaching, learning and research.

> Students might be keen to get any course credit that gets them across the line or helps them to achieve the grade they want. So they are vulnerable in that it seems they may be taking part in the research not so much because they want to, but because they feel they need to- it's probably going to highly influence them deciding to participate and almost coercing them into doing so. (Academic 5)

However, students were strongly opposed to being offered course credit. They did not see it as an incentive. Almost all students felt that course credit for participation ran the risk of resulting in graduates who had not necessarily passed the course legitimately, which might have implications for the integrity of healthcare practice or a sense of an individual lack of integrity as viewed by others or oneself. Overall, passing on one's own merit was highly valued, with almost all student participants completely shunning the idea of credits. While academics assumed such research designs would elicit a desire by students to participate, students were very clear that this did not entice them to take part.

> If this person is going to pass because of these credits, then there's a little bit of a problem. Do you really want someone going out [into practice] that has just passed by some credits from participating in a study? (Student2P4)

> Yeah, I'd feel a bit bad about [course credit]. You know, I want to be proud of my grade. (Student4P6)

Theme summary

Underpinning discussions with academics and students was a desire to act with integrity, whether one's role was planning and implementing research or as a potential participant. Acting with integrity related to various aspects of the research process, including building the best SoTL research designs and acting authentically.

DISCUSSION

Our thematic analysis of student and academic perspectives on ethical conduct within SoTL research generated two comparative themes: The power of caring relationships and acting with integrity. These findings provided us with a foundation to identify underlying values present within their perspectives. The following discussion begins by considering commonly shared values among participants when it comes to participating in or conducting SoTL research. We then proceed to explore ways in which the values underpinning the ethics review process might be impacting students and how the perspectives of our participants can inform ethical research in SoTL.

Commonly valued by students and academics were preferences for avoiding harm, voluntariness, and being informed. The area of greatest consensus among academics and students in our study was that participation in SoTL research should not impact student grades. This finding supports similar studies (Forester & McWhorter, 2005; Innocente et al., 2022; Sarpel et al., 2013). For everyone in our study, this was the key area where a potential harm was identified, and there was consensus between both

groups that such designs were to be avoided, either as a potential participant or SoTL researcher.

We also found agreement among students and academics that SoTL participation must be voluntary and accompanied by an informed consent process. However, there were differences in how these principles could be upheld and enacted. This consensus reflects the mandate to protect participants and for participants to gain an enhanced understanding of participatory risks and benefits (Coleman & Bouësseau, 2008). A voluntary, informed consent process also allows a potential participant to opt not to participate. Historical biomedical research settings "featured powerless and profoundly marginalized individuals and groups in contact with powerful and high-status professionals" (Jacobson et al., 2007, p. 2). There are arguments that educational research does not pose the same level of risk to participants as medical research (Eikelboom et al., 2012). However, the importance of the consent process extends beyond protecting participants from harm. Even in seemingly innocuous situations where participation may not pose a harm, for instance, an anonymous survey on classroom practices, the student, unaware they are a research participant, has been "wronged" (Butz, 2008, p. 242). Transparency, enacted through a voluntary, informed agentic process commensurate with the nature of the research, aims to avoid wrongs through respect for the student, their autonomy and agency.

Not all students agreed that the process must be formal and written, but academics felt this was necessary. Academics agreed that provisions to gain consent needed to follow the guidance of the local ethics committee. Consent should be in writing, and where the academic was the researcher, recruitment should utilise third parties. Academics had concerns that the student participant was potentially vulnerable, so informed consent and voluntariness were important tools to mitigate vulnerability. While identifying research participants as vulnerable is commonplace in the literature, depictions of participant vulnerability within SoTL research do not align with how students regard themselves, which is more agentic than vulnerable (Innocente et al., 2022; Lees et al., 2024).

By comparison, most students were content with a low-key approach, one where they felt informed but in ways commensurate with the nature of the research. Murphy and Dingwall (2007) describe the legal nature of consent's biomedical origins and the necessity in clinical settings for written documentation, given that participants were agreeing to be subjected to specific medical experimentation. However, in the SoTL setting, there may be scope for less formal consent approaches that still ensure participation is informed and voluntary but better reflect the nature of the likely benefits and risks involved. Some students in our study intimated that being advised by the lecturer would be sufficient for some types of research rather than an overly formal administrative process. Wynn and Israel (2018) argue that nothing magical happens to informed consent merely because the participant has signed a form. It is plausible that the seriousness of the written form may be either disproportionate to the gravity of participation or offensive to existing relationships between the researcher and participant.

Focusing on health research with adolescents, Faruqui et al. (2024) found that the informed consent process can create rather than mitigate a power imbalance between the researcher and the participant. Our findings indicate the potential for this paradox within SoTL research. For students, there seemed to be an expectation that the consent process would involve sufficient information pitched at an appropriate level of formality and with high transparency. From this, students would exercise their agency to decide whether to participate. Rather than being a mechanism to mitigate the harms of vulnerability, students regarded the consent process as a transparent inquiry underpinned by mutual respect and perhaps no different than any negotiated transaction between competent adults. In summary, students used the consent process to exercise their right to choose, while academics used it to protect students from coercive practices. Students did not voice feeling pressured to participate to the extent assumed by the academics in this study. Ironically, the consent process and possibly the term 'consent' may over-inflate supposed risks, including introducing the power dynamic as a 'problem'.

While power dynamics are present between students and their lecturers, our research indicates that students generally feel capable of navigating these relationships. Even within clinical research ethics, there is a call for greater nuance with a recognition that the dual role is not always fraught with ethical tensions (Crowden & Gildersleeve, 2019; Morain et al., 2019). Certainly, in the context of SoTL research, we concur. Assumptions of harm have been normalised without important input from the participant community. We offer two fresh perspectives on the ethical complexity of relationships in SoTL research. Firstly, we consider the possible harm for lecturers and students in ascribing the 'dual role' label to academic researchers. Secondly, we raise the prominence of the potentially more important but less visible dual role, that of the student as both learner and research participant.

Our findings point to the mitigations to counteract asymmetrical relationships between researchers and participants being incommensurate with the likely harms of the study and unjustified in many cases. Some measures to mitigate the impact of the academic dual role may hamper SoTL research, label the academic in a negative light, and put students off participating. While we agree with Bunnell et al. (2022) that not all students have intrinsic trust in their lecturers, there were indications from our study that students were able to evaluate trustworthiness and make agentic choices about whether SoTL research invitations came from academics with whom they had trusted relationships. In our study, academics reported taking an 'at arm's length' role in SoTL research to separate their teacher and researcher roles. The rationale was that creating distance and a protective buffer ensured that students could voluntarily consent to participate without undue pressure (Martin, 2013). However, while academics saw this as a protective and necessary measure to counter potential power imbalances, our study revealed that students seemed less inclined to participate in research where the researcher was unknown. Many preferred an established personal connection. Students may be much more likely to base participation on their relationship with the lecturer because of the relational groundwork that has already taken place to build and maintain ethical relationships. Students in our study spoke of lecturers who did not take the time to get to know or care for them as people. They voiced the unlikelihood of students wanting to help a lecturer who did not care for them, reinforcing that "students want their teacher to help them develop as a person" (Noland & Richards, 2014, p. 15).

While students understood the concept and consequences of a power imbalance, they appeared to possess the confidence to assess their existing relationships with academics and make participatory decisions, based in part on the strength of that relationship and other factors such as convenience and ability to

make a useful contribution. Students, perhaps less aware of how the ethics review process creates a division in the academic's role, may make participatory decisions based on reciprocity and respect, having had these values modelled by the academic within usual learning and teaching activities. This would align with expectations of a growing trend in medical education to adopt more humanistic, relational pedagogies (Healey et al., 2020; Milligan & Woodley, 2009), whilst also reflecting contextual factors such as the specific relational Māori values adopted by universities and in NZ more broadly. For example, the value of manaakitanga, translated as "caring for those around us in the way we relate to each other" (University of Auckland, n.d.), enacted through "reciprocal mutually beneficial exchanges" (Auckland University of Technology, n.d.). Hudson and Russell (2009) explain that Indigenous cultures, including Māori, consider the value of reciprocity to be significant given that they "have a tendency towards a beneficence-oriented approach to ethics rather than the autonomy-oriented evaluations favoured in contemporary Western bioethics" (p.62). They add that while respect can be shown in the moment, reciprocity is a value and goal that comes through more sustained relational engagement. For students in our study, explicit willingness to reciprocate their lecturers' beneficence may reflect contextually appropriate actions and reactions from the lecturer and the students. However, doing so contradicts ethics review expectations for an 'arm's length' approach to SoTL research. Our research, therefore, exposes important ethical tensions between the values of a biomedically informed ethics review process when applied to a genre of inquiry primarily underpinned by relational values.

De Luca (2012) reminds us that within the NZ context, there are expectations that Māori practices will be recognised by researchers, including involving the community and nurturing relationships with reciprocity and respect. Ethical guidelines explicitly aimed at educational research in NZ include the principle that "researchers should develop relationships based on trust and mutual respect" (New Zealand Association for Research in Education, 2010, p. 3). Our study highlights tensions between the remnants of biomedical ethics still underpinning the ethics review process, such as positivism's valuing of the "disembodied researcher and the faceless subject"(Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 15) and education's relational and culturally embedded values. These tensions reveal academics in our study, in researcher mode, being drawn towards the ethics committee's values of research, while the students adhered more consistently to the values of the learning environment, irrespective of whether they were in student or participant mode.

There are arguments that ethics review processes can paint researchers in a negative light. These processes can reflect a lack of respect for researchers (Halse & Honey, 2007), portraying some as untrustworthy (Tolich & Tumilty, 2014), from which participants need protecting (Bell, 2016). With SoTL research, constructing the academic as a source of risk is a disservice to academics, as it assumes that switching roles from lecturer to researcher is accompanied by some Jekyll and Hyde-esque transformation. Academics in our study appear to have adopted the stance of the ethics review process, which considers the academics' dual role as one underpinned by potential risks, coercion, and power imbalances. The risks associated with the academic dual role dominate the literature and underpin ethics review processes, with the ethics committee serving as an arbiter between the researcher and participant to ensure that research conduct is 'ethical'. However, there are claims that ethics review bodies act paternalistically towards researchers (Neville & Haigh, 2003; Tierney & Blumberg Corwin, 2007). The interplay between the researcher and the ethics committee reflects a just as important power dynamic to consider (Juritzen et al., 2011). Dyck and Allen (2013) suggest the majority of researchers have a "sufficient awareness of and engagement with ethical principles and practices, and sufficient understanding of the consequences of unethical practices, to ensure that their research is conducted ethically" (p. 518), thus calling into question the extent to which the 'risky researcher' narrative is warranted.

The negative framing of research and researchers may also spill over into how academics view the integrity of student participants. One example identified in our study was that some academics made assumptions about students' ability to weigh up participation opportunities and motivations concerning the provision of partial course credit. Partial course credit is a mechanism for compensating university students for research participation (Bowen & Kensinger, 2017). While offering partial course credit was not practised at the case study site, academics in our study commonly assumed that the promise of extra credits was likely to incentivise participation. However, among students in our study, there was no appetite for taking credits. Instead, there was a strong preference for the integrity and pride of earning one's grades. The majority of academics misjudged students' resounding shunning of this opportunity.

An explanation for why academics misjudged student integrity might be that the ethics review process sets the researcher up as someone who is potentially untrustworthy and at risk of coercing participants, so unintentionally, this rhetoric may contribute to academics having a general negative sense of the research process that, without the guidance of the ethics committee to determine ethical actions, research is by default unethical and risky and participants untrustworthy. We recommend integrating mechanisms that enable students and academics to share their views on SoTL research designs, thereby increasing academics' understanding of students as core contributors to research. A more active role for students would see a shift away from the tradition of the participant as a passive subject in SoTL research (Bunnell et al., 2022; Innocente et al., 2022) whilst also enhancing educational practice through "authorizing student perspectives" (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). At the same time, such a shift may provide opportunities for academics to recognise the role of pedagogical and cultural values in the SoTL research space and trust in these values to guide ethical SoTL research.

In exploring how the ethics review process identifies concern for the academic dual role, we have shed light on the lesser-explored but potentially more important dual role of the student as both learner and participant. We found that students in our study viewed research participation as a multifaceted end in itself. Focusing on the student dual role illuminates the learning potential of SoTL research participation. As a result, this shift in view allows a more balanced weighing of benefits over the traditionally dominant lens of risk within ethics review (Whitney, 2016). We argue that the ethical examination of SoTL research in settings where there is no access to a bespoke ethics review panel for SoTL projects needs to be reframed to emphasise the myriad of beneficial student learning opportunities, as depicted in Figure 1. Such opportunities are embedded within the various phases of

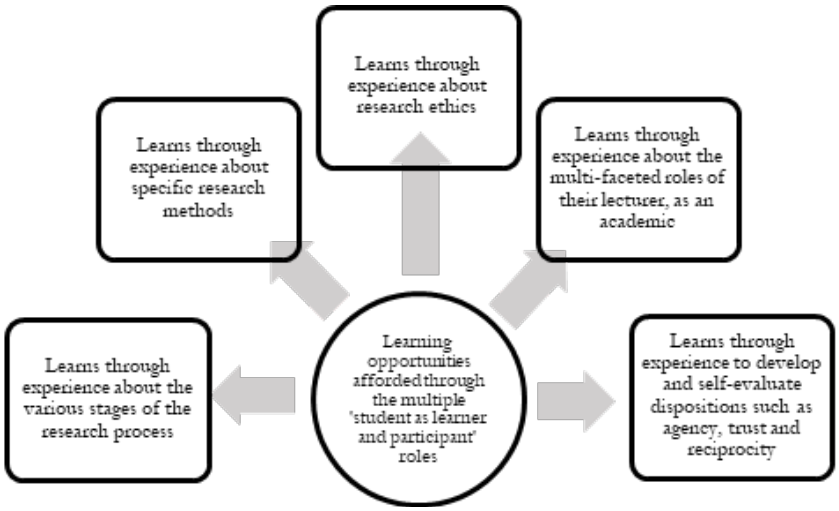

Figure 1. Depicting the outcomes of the 'student as learner and participant' roles

research participation, from recruitment to weighing the likely benefits and costs of participation, navigating existing relationships, managing the consent process, learning firsthand how others conduct research, and identifying and working through ethical issues. Where the focus of the ethics review process emphasises the risks associated with an academic's conflict of interest, this shift in perspective opens up an avenue to consider the benefits of mutual interest among students and academics. Creating the space for mutual learning and development would also help facilitate relationships with greater equality, thus helping address actual or perceived power imbalances (Matthews et al., 2018).

By contrast, academics attribute more instrumental value to SoTL research. For them, the research acts as a means to an end, a view that the biomedical construction of the academic's dual role may influence. Research serves as a mechanism to assess, explore, and evaluate teaching practices, advancing disciplinary or pedagogical knowledge. The 'end' is the research findings and the related outcomes, such as informing teaching practices and publishing. There is a clear realisation that without research, teaching practices cannot advance or advance in an evidence-based manner. Connected to this view of research is a conceptualisation by the academics of the participant that is instrumental to the research findings, reflecting the biomedical research values of the participant as a subject in the researcher's study. Reimagining SoTL research with the student dual role front and centre will require recalibrating the role of ethics review, but has the very real potential to reinvigorate academics as ethical researchers while optimising the rich student learning opportunities within and stemming from SoTL research.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

A strength of our study was eliciting views on ethical conduct from students and academics, enabling us to ascertain how these groups conceptualised ethical SoTL research, the values underpinning their perspectives, and the ways ethics review for SoTL projects could be reimagined to give greater consideration to the benefits for students. Our use of vignettes was novel and also worked as a strength. A dominant narrative in the literature is academics' frustrations with ethics review processes. We were keen to drill down into the values shaping views of ethical conduct rather than seek views on the ethics review process per se. At the same time, most students had no direct experience with the institutional ethics committee. Vignettes helped us gather views on ethical conduct rather than on ethics committees, enabling students and academics to make valuable contributions. Our study also reflected limitations. We did not collect demographic data from students. It would have also been helpful to include discussions with academics that might have elicited the values informing their teaching practice, thereby better understanding the impact of biomedical values on their research practice. Finally, we note that the NZ context may differ greatly from other countries. Future research should explore student and academic perspectives on ethical values for SoTL projects in other contexts.

CONCLUSION

In response to scholars such as Dingwall (2016) and Israel et al. (2016), who argue that there has been an unexamined uptake of a medically based view of research ethics in non-medical settings, we have utilised the SoTL environment to explore the impact and appropriateness of this expansion. Our findings shed light on a specific case study site, but we envisage they have instrumental value and resonate with other SoTL sites and non-medical research settings. Drilling into the SoTL setting has revealed a mismatch with applying biomedical values to a pedagogical environment. We argue this ethical tension negatively impacts academics and students. On the one hand, academics, particularly within health-related degree programmes, are attuned to patient and client-centred care and are therefore familiar with working in partnership with others (Barradell & Bell, 2021). However, ethics review processes constrain the academic's role despite the research process potentially expanding opportunities for student learning. Medical values enmeshed in the ethics review process create a pedagogical paradox: relational teaching built on trust and reciprocity, and in the particular setting of our case study, reinforced by embedded cultural values, is simultaneously valued within the academy but cautioned against when it comes to SoTL research.

We have argued for rethinking how the dual role is depicted in SoTL research, giving greater prominence to the student's dual role as both learner and participant. Our critique of dual roles does not suggest that SoTL is risk-free for the student participant or that power imbalances do not exist. However, it appears that the current ethics review process overlooks the dual role of the student and their agency, while at the same time may unfairly

label the academic as potentially untrustworthy. It is important to recognise that students are wronged if they are unnecessarily or unfairly deprived of situations where they could exert agency, especially mindful that ethics review bodies can "infantilize" participants (Sikes & Piper, 2010, p. 208). We argue for the focus in SoTL research ethics to switch from the dual roles of the academic to those of the student. From this change, we believe that the values reflected by the student community could inform SoTL research, creating greater opportunities for ethically conducted research and learning and, as a result, be more empowering for all.

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