

ARP 2024-5 Ethical Action Plan

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I have also shared draft versions of the following:

- Participant information sheet
- Interview questions for the semi-structured interviews
- PPT slides for the semi-structured interviews

Updates highlighted in yellow.

1. What is your project focus?

Project title: Is it safe to share?

Overview: As part of my PgCert Academic Practice in Art, Design and Communication, I would like to conduct an action research project that focuses on the role of psychological safety when it comes to sharing creative work online. I would like to get feedback from current or former UAL students who have had some experience of studying online, as the online context adds an additional barrier to sharing that might not be present in residential courses. I would also like to explore the nature of tacit pedagogies in the creative arts context and talk to tutors to ask them what they think about such pedagogies (i.e., the crit) and how they approach getting students to share work, both in-person and online.

Research objective: To investigate how students' perceptions of psychological safety in online learning environments act as either enablers or barriers to their willingness to share creative work.

The project is split into three phases:

Phase 1: Phenomenological study – exploring lived experiences with regards to psychological safety in online learning environments (through a questionnaire and semi-structured interview)

Phase 2: Developing a strategy – creating strategies that facilitate and enhance psychological safety based on findings from a thematic analysis conducted on the outputs from Phase 1

Phase 3: Putting it into practice – adopting a co-creation approach to incorporate the guidelines and strategies identified from Phase 2 into curriculum design.

As my project focuses on psychological safety, it's important that my ethics approach reflects this and prioritises co-researchers feeling safe and supported throughout the research process.

2. What are you going to read about?

- Psychological safety frameworks
- Phenomenological approaches to data
- Positionality in qualitative research
- Thematic analysis

- Decolonising research methods
- Trauma-informed pedagogy
- Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2024)

3. What action are you going to take in your teaching practice?

The goal of the action research project is to develop practical strategies for UAL Online tutors to enhance psychological safety and encourage collaborative sharing in creative disciplines online. Through this project, I will:

- **Facilitate** the safe sharing of lived experiences of the student partner co-researchers with regards to psychological safety
- **Collaborate** with colleagues to co-design strategies that encourage students to share creative work online in a way that makes them feel psychologically safe
- **Create and develop** resources and materials or guidelines that support UAL Online tutors to foster a sense of trust and safety in their courses.

4. Who will be involved and how?

The co-researchers for my action research project fall into two groups.

UAL Online Student Partners

This group have been contracted to work with UAL Online. They are currently employed through ArtsTemps and are paid for their involvement on an hourly basis. This group of students are involved in the co-design, support and feedback of a range of online projects. I will be asking them if they would like to take part in my action research project, following the advice of Caroline Lenette (2024) in the recorded talk where she highlights that you can afford to dive into the research based off pre-existing relationships, prior engagement and trust with a group of people. I would like to ask this group of co-researchers to complete a questionnaire and take part in a semi-structured interview. I am aware that this group falls into the 'incentive' category as they are being paid, but I believe that this 'does not impinge on the free decision to participate' (BERA Ethical Guideline 33).

UAL Online colleagues

The second group will be various colleagues from UAL Online. I would like to collaborate with my colleagues to gain insights into their perspectives on psychological safety. They will provide feedback during the **co-creation phase**, helping to shape practical strategies for improving psychological safety in UAL Online courses. I will aim to organise a workshop or series of meetings with colleagues from UAL Online and course tutors from UAL. I will adopt a co-creation approach to incorporate the guidelines and strategies identified from Phase 2 into curriculum design.

5. What are the health & safety concerns, and how will you prepare for them?

Sensitive topics

As I may be asking students about times where they might have felt psychologically unsafe in a learning environment, I need to ensure that trigger warning is in place. I will inform co-researchers at the start of the interviews or questionnaires that the discussion may involve sensitive topics, allowing them to withdraw or skip questions if they feel uncomfortable. **Additionally, I would love to incorporate the idea of visual**

elicitation into the interviews (as suggested by my tutor, John). To this end, I would like to ask students to generate visuals that represent their perception of psychological safety (or its absence). I think that this would give students more control in expressing their thoughts, which aligns with my ultimate aims for the project of fostering a sense of trust and collaboration. It also aligns with PAR (participatory action research) principles by involving people with 'direct experiences of, or interest in, the research topic (...) in all or some aspects of the process, including research design, data collection and analysis, and reporting and dissemination. (Lenette, et al. 2019)

Trauma-informed pedagogy

I also need to ensure that I am not 'mining' for responses that suit my agenda just for intellectual curiosity (Lenette, 2024). I will signpost co-researchers to UAL's student support services to ensure they have access to any emotional or psychological support they may need after reflecting on their experiences. I will adopt a trauma-informed approach, ensuring that co-researchers who may have experienced traumatic events feel safe and supported, avoiding exploitative practices and ensuring the data gathering phase is a mutual exercise driven by researcher and co-researcher in a non-coercive way. This is crucial to avoid a trauma-pornography approach, where traumatic stories are sensationalised rather than handled with care and respect. (Lennette, 2024).

6. How will you protect the data of those involved?

Voluntary informed consent

Co-researchers will be fully informed about the data collection, storage, and use during the consent process. They will be provided with a **Participant Information Sheet** that outlines their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. This also details what is involved in the project, including why their participation is necessary, what they will be asked to do, what will happen to the information they provide and how that information will be used (BERA Ethical Guideline 9). They will also be provided with a link to a **Participant Consent Form** to complete before they take part in the project.

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Storing data

All digital data (recordings, transcripts, survey responses) will be stored on password-protected devices and a password-protected folder in UAL's OneDrive which is hosted on a secure, encrypted cloud storage platform. Access will be limited to the practitioner researcher. All data will be stored in a manner that is GDPR compliant and in keeping with UAL's own policy on data retention. I will mention that any identifying data will be kept until **July 2025** at which point it will be permanently deleted.

7. How will you work with your participants in an ethical way?

Honest conversations

I don't envision having more than five co-researchers from the UAL Online Student Partners for the semi-structured interviews, so I want to make the most of the affordances that a smaller group brings. I will talk to co-researchers on a case-by-case basis to see how we can best negotiate an environment that facilitates psychological safety. I will ensure that they understand their right to withdraw or decline to answer any questions at any time without negative consequences.

Anonymity

I am conscious that anonymising stories and data can have a depersonalising effect which might be problematic (Lenette, 2024). I had assumed that anonymity as a default would mean an ethical approach as a proxy, but I will strive to get co-researcher input on this where possible to make sure that I am not disempowering co-researchers by erasing their voices.

Semi-structured interviews

Using semi-structured interviews as a format should allow co-researchers the flexibility to guide the conversation in a way that is tailored to their interests and what they feel comfortable to share and talk about. Inviting them to have a say in how the dialogue plays out is important to me in my role as a researcher and facilitator. This format also ensures that I am not 'mining' for responses that suit my agenda just for intellectual curiosity (Lenette, 2024).

I will strive to uphold the four guiding principles of the Code of Practice on educational ethics and the principles of participatory action research and use these as guardrails within which to frame my action research project.

The four guiding principles of the ethics of care are: **an ethics of care, respect for persons, social justice, and beneficence.**

I have detailed how I intend to uphold (or perhaps, attain?) each guiding principle.

1. Ethics of care

I will prioritise creating a supportive and safe space for co-researchers by ensuring that they feel comfortable and valued throughout the research process. I will adopt a trauma-informed approach, providing trigger warnings for sensitive topics and offering co-researchers the option to skip questions or withdraw without any negative consequences. I will invite co-researchers to disclose feelings and thoughts in their own idiom through generating visual material, giving them power over the language they use to communicate about the research subject.

2. Respect for persons

I will ensure that co-researchers' autonomy is respected by obtaining informed consent and providing clear information about their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Additionally, I will involve co-researchers in decisions about how their data is used and whether they wish to remain anonymous.

3. Social justice

I will aim to highlight and provide solutions to the inequalities in online learning environments by focusing on how power dynamics and institutional structures impact marginalised students' willingness to share their creative work. I will actively involve underrepresented voices in the research process to make sure that their experiences and concerns are heard.

4. Beneficence

The research should lead to positive outcomes for co-researchers by ultimately developing a set of guidelines or principles that enhance psychological safety and improve learning experiences. I want to **do good by** and for all UAL Online students – by contributing to the creation of a safer online environment for students to share their work.

The principles of Participatory Action research are:

1. **Disruption of traditional research approaches**
2. **Reciprocal benefits**
3. **Trust**
4. **Deep engagement**
5. **Social change**
6. **Intersectionality**