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Novice Researchers Navigating Micro-Ethics and Positionality in Qualitative Research: A Duoethnography

Joanne Cheng[1*], Sonja Mecham[2]

[1*](Corresponding author) PhD Student in Second Language Studies, Department of Linguistics, Languages, and Cultures, Michigan State University, Michigan, USA. *joanne.ycc.lee@gmail.com*

[2]PhD Student in Second Language Studies, Department of Linguistics, Languages, and Cultures, Michigan State University, Michigan, USA. *mechamso@msu.edu*

Article info	Abstract
Article type: Research article Received: 2025/05/02 Accepted: 2025/08/10	Ethics in research have become an increasingly important area in applied linguistics (Yaw et al., 2023). Specifically, there has been greater attention to *micro*-ethics, which are the day-to-day practices undertaken by researchers to manage ethical decisions throughout the research process (De Costa et al., 2019). However, little research exists to understand the processes for how researchers acquire micro-ethical research skills. Our duoethnographic study, which was inspired by Burleigh and Burm's (2022) framework, explores our own experiences as students in a qualitative research methods class that emphasized ethical practices, reflexivity, and positionality. Through our conversations, we identified key practices that enhanced our micro-ethical awareness and attention to positionality. First, we learned to value transparency and effective collaboration with participants as micro-ethical practices. Building positive relationships can mitigate micro-ethical issues and inform our understanding of positionality. We outlined core micro-ethical values, including co-constructing knowledge and navigating power dynamics respectfully, which should be applied throughout all research stages. Second, we explored our understanding of positionality: a researcher's positionality may differ across various research sites and interactions, raising questions about their role in maintaining ethical integrity, especially when teaching while conducting research. Researchers can boost methodological rigor by reflecting on and being transparent about micro-ethical decisions and positionality throughout the research process and by building positive relationships with the participant community. We conclude by emphasizing that professional training, mentorship, hands-on experience, and reflection are essential for novice researchers learning to embed these ethical principles into everyday research practices. ***Keywords:*** micro-ethics, positionality, reflexivity, qualitative research, novice researchers

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1. Introduction

In a field-wide movement to increase quality and trustworthiness in applied linguistics research (Awan et al., 2023; Riazi et al., 2023), ethical research practices are increasingly discussed (De Costa, 2024). Many applied linguistics researchers receive macro-ethical training in graduate school (Sterling et al., 2015). However, little research exists to understand the processes for how researchers acquire micro-ethical research skills. This article focuses on the experiences of novice researchers learning about mirco-ethics in qualitative research in order to better understand how these practices are learned. Specifically, we use the method of duoethnography to explore our own experiences as students in a qualitative research methods class that emphasized ethical practices and reflexivity.

To explore our shared experiences regarding micro-ethics and positionality in qualitative research, we focused on several key areas: our research training backgrounds before starting our doctoral studies, our impressions of the mandatory qualitative research methods course, ethical concerns that arose during a project, and recommendations for both new doctoral students and researcher educators. We aim to cultivate a reflective and ethically informed approach to qualitative research practice, prioritizing transparency, collaboration, and relational engagement as essential components of researcher development and knowledge co-construction through this duoethnography study which was driven by this research question:

1. How do two novice researchers develop their understanding of micro-ethics and positionality during a qualitative research methods course?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Qualitative Research Ethics in Applied Linguistics

In a research timeline piece by Yaw et al. (2023), the authors demonstrated that the last few decades have shown a sharp increase in emphasis on research ethics as a topic of applied linguistics scholarship. This scholarship includes work related to ethics in specific research methods, such as narrative inquiry (De Costa et al., 2021) and ethnography (Copland & Creese, 2016), as well as general attention to ethics reporting in methodological reviews (Ghanbar et al., 2024).

Copland and Creese (2016) emphasize that researchers should consider both macro (e.g., the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB)) and micro (e.g., communicating with participants with sensitivity and care) ethics from the beginning of study design, through data collection, and to the last draft revision before submitting the manuscript for publication. Specifically, Yaw et al. (2023) noticed a shift in the field from focusing only on macro-level concerns to considering micro-ethics. Micro-ethics are defined by De Costa et al. (2019) as “practices that are customized to manage ethical dilemmas in an emergent manner” (p. 123) and are typically the responsibility of individual researchers (De Costa, 2024).

At this micro level, concerns may arise such as how to use language or how to interact with participants. In multilingual research settings, for example, it is necessary to consider how language proficiency can impact researcher-participant interactions. Norova and Gutiérrez’s (2024) duoethnography specifically noted that English-only policies “denied their [participants’] rights to use their first language” (p. 120). Schembri and Jahić Jašić (2022) similarly ask researchers in multilingual settings to consider power dynamics and how to represent participants’ responses. These authors recommend reporting linguistic practices of data collection for transparency and being inclusive of non-English data in publication. When doing research with one’s own students, Urdal (2023) suggests considering proximity and distance and how these inform the research process and interpretations. These kinds of micro-ethical decisions and considerations may cause tension during the research process; however, Mosselson (2010) reframed dilemmas and tensions as “ethically important moments” (p. 493) and viewed these moments as validity-enhancing rather than validity-threatening. For more examples of micro-ethics in context, see De Costa et al. (2024).

2.2 Reflexivity and Positionality

One mirco-ethical practice that has been particularly emphasized is reflexivity. Consoli and Ganassin (2021) defined reflexivity this way:

> Broadly speaking, reflexivity refers to the sets of dispositions and activities by which researchers locate themselves within the research processes whilst also attending to how their presence, values, beliefs, knowledge, and personal and professional histories shape their research spaces, relationships, and outcomes. (p. 1)

This locating of oneself can include a scale of how much the researcher considers themselves an insider (emic perspective) or outsider (etic perspective) (Friedman, 2012).

Positionality statements have become a popular manifestation of researcher reflexivity. Bucholtz et al. (2023) encourage researchers to consider things such as their relationship to the participants and community, power, language dynamics, and personal and professional backgrounds when addressing their positionality. King (2024) adds that while positionality statements are a promising way to increase reflexivity, one must be wary of performativity. According to King, meaningful positionality statements “engage with the aspects of the author’s identity that are most relevant to the study and what these aspects of identity mean for the execution of the research" (p. 6). Norova and Gutiérrez (2024) explain the relationship between positionality and reflexivity by noting that positionality is fluid and shifts depending on the research, whereas reflexivity is a prolonged practice that leads to self-awareness of positionality.

2.3 Novice Researchers Learning Ethical Practices

In order to develop micro-ethical practices such as attention to positionality, novice researchers often receive ethics training, and this training has increased over time in applied linguistics (Sterling et al., 2015). Several scholars have argued that experiential learning and reflection can be valuable parts of ethics training (Meyer & Willis, 2019; Sajedi et al., 2021). For example, Sterling (2024) found that his understanding of best practices surrounding consent forms shifted with actual research experience with multilingual students—after checking their reading comprehension of a consent form, he learned that many of them had signed it without understanding what they had agreed to. This experience altered his conception of ethical consent form processes. As the importance of research ethics becomes increasingly foregrounded in applied linguistics, ethically formative moments like these provide insight into how researchers learn ethical practices. The current study aims to explore researcher learning about ethics in qualitative applied linguistics research from the perspectives of the novice researchers, us. The research question for our study is: How do two novice researchers develop their understanding of micro-ethics and positionality during a qualitative research methods course?

3. Method

3.1. The Design of the Study

Duoethnography, a research method similar to autoethnography, involves two researcher-participants collaboratively reflecting on a topic. This method aims to explore two people's experiences of the same phenomenon in conversation with each other in order to expand each person's understanding and find new meanings together (Werbińska, 2020). Similarly to other authors of duoethnographies (Davis & Yan, 2025; Norova & Gutiérrez, 2024), we chose this method for the benefits of reflecting in dialogue with another person; by generating data in conversation with each other, we automatically contextualize our reflection and provide space to learn from each other in the process.

Sawyer and Norris (2003), the first users of the term duoethnography explain that "duoethnography is underpinned by the hope that we can learn to be with each other, not just in tolerance and understanding but in dialogic growth" (Sawyer & Norris, 2015, p. 3). In Burleigh and Burm's (2022) methodological piece on duoethnography, Burleigh posits that the data analysis process in duoethnography differs from traditional findings or results formats because data generation and analysis are integrated rather than separated:

> In this more traditional format, the data is presented separately from the analysis or results section and is often done so for the purposes of clarity in writing and adherence to common stylistic expectations. But with duoethnography, I find the flexibility offered in the writing allows for a closer representation of how data and analysis realistically interact throughout the research process. Data is often both generated and analyzed at the same time and new insights emerge over time, in the case of duoethnography, through dialogue. (p. 5)

In our duoethnography, inspired by Burleigh and Burm's framework, our data collection and analysis are interwoven through reflective discussions—both synchronous and asynchronous—centered on our research question and the research context, which is described below.

3.2. Research Context

3.2.1. Required Doctoral Course: Qualitative Research Methods

Serving as the backdrop to this duoethnography is the Qualitative Research Methods course taught by Dr. Peter I. De Costa. We took this course together over fifteen weeks during the first semester of our PhD program in 2024, which we are reflecting on nearly a year after it started. This course was required for all students in our program, in addition to a quantitative methods course. Before enrolling in this course, students were expected to possess foundational training in research methods. The curriculum involved a broad foray into various qualitative methods in applied linguistics (e.g., critical discourse analysis, case study, ethnography, narrative), with one week specifically dedicated to ethics. The assignments from this course included weekly readings, three online discussion posts, one interview report with transcript and analysis, and a narrative with fieldnotes from an observation at a potential research site for a final full-blown research project. This was the first course either of us had taken that specifically focused on qualitative methods, and we both noted that the strong emphasis on ethical practices was also new to us.

3.2.2. Positionality

Besides taking the qualitative research methods course together, we were concurrently admitted to the same doctoral program. Prior to our PhD studies, we each earned master's degrees in Teaching English to Speakers of

Other Languages (TESOL) from different universities in the U.S. As part of our graduation requirements, we both chose to complete original research—Joanne using mixed methods and Sonja using qualitative methods. Additionally, we both possess experience teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to international college students and adults in community settings, and we are accustomed to interacting with international individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

3.3. Data collection

3.3.1. Interviews

After we constructed five interview questions (see Appendix A), two 45-minute interviews were conducted via Zoom on consecutive days. The interviews were both video and audio recorded for data analysis purposes. Following the completion of the interviews, Joanne transcribed the recordings, and the transcripts were subsequently uploaded to a shared Google Drive for Sonja to validate the content.

3.3.2. Journal Reflections

Our journal reflections originate from both of us, as we have maintained our research and learning journals since the inception of our doctoral studies. We meticulously reviewed these entries and extracted those pertinent to the topics of ethical considerations, positionality, and reflexivity.

3.3.3. Online Discussion Post

Throughout the qualitative course, three reflection discussion posts on the course online platform were submitted by each student as part of the required assignments. Peers were expected to respond to the instructor's questions and engage with the perspectives of their classmates. We reviewed our classroom discussion posts and extracted our own responses or feedback related to the topics of ethics and positionality.

3.4. Data Analysis

For this qualitative duoethnography study, we approached data analysis differently than methods that use traditional deductive and inductive coding. We first independently read our interview transcripts multiple times, highlighting key concepts from our dialogues. Then, we collaboratively reviewed each other's highlights and added comments on a shared document. Concurrently, we discussed emergent themes asynchronously via WhatsApp and supplemented our thoughts with data from our journals and discussion posts on a shared file to help one another understand our individual perspectives. Finally, we met on Zoom again to finalize our collective interpretations from our overall communication. This iterative, dialogic process allowed data generation and analysis to interact realistically throughout the research, aligning with Burleigh and Burm’s (2022) approach to duoethnography.

4. Results and Discussion

Through our duoethnographic reflections on conversations, discussion posts, and journal entries, we reached a consensus that transparency and effective collaboration with participants are two key components for enhancing awareness of micro-ethics. Building positive relationships with participants can help mitigate potential micro-ethical issues and inform our understanding of positionality that we aim to address.

We first identified core micro-ethical values: co-constructing knowledge, disclosing intentions, and navigating power dynamics in transparent and respectful ways. These principles should be actively applied throughout all stages of research, extending beyond research design, data collection, and publication. Micro-ethical awareness must be integrated into the entire research process—not limited to the inquiry phase. To reach this goal, have professional training and a mentor who focuses on fostering understanding of ethical considerations and practical strategies for embodying these principles in everyday research practices.

Meanwhile, we explored how a researcher's positionality can vary across different research sites and when interacting with diverse participants, even within the same project. For example, what is a researcher’s positionality like when conducting research in a classroom while simultaneously teaching? How might a researcher's role create tensions between participants and themselves?

4.1. Micro-ethics Training: Collaboration and Transparency

In both of our previous education, we had received training on macro-ethical practices in research. However, in our QRM class, we began to see the micro-ethical side as well.

J: During my master’s program, I read "Research Methods in Second Language Acquisition" by Mackey and Gass, which explains various research methods, design, analysis, and data collection (Mackey & Gass, 2011).

S: I read something very similar.

J: We covered chapters throughout the semester, guiding my research journey. While preparing for my thesis, I completed the IRB training, watching videos and passing quizzes. This training, along with the class, formed the basis of my understanding of research. The research training I received focused primarily on designing good research and protecting participants' rights. However, I was unfamiliar with micro ethical concerns and researcher positionality. During QRM, Peter highlighted the importance of being part of the community rather than just an outsider collecting data. This perspective was new to me; I had always assumed my interactions were limited to the research period, without considering ongoing engagement to improve the community.

4.1.1 Navigating Participant Partnership Relationships

J: We've been discussing that participants are like our partners at QRM, so I see them as someone I know, not just labels like "Participant One, Two, or Three." That's a new perspective for me. Speaking of partnership, I want to bring up the notion of member checking. In my previous research, if there was something I wasn't sure about during the transcription process, I'd reach out to my participants for their input, but it was only limited to part of the transcript, I never shared any final transcripts with my previous participants. I thought, "It's my research; although it's not a secret, I wanted to protect my unpublished work from others." Then, at QRM, Peter really emphasized the importance of including member checking. Suddenly, I felt convicted. After that, I started sharing my cleaned interview data with my participants. For example, before submitting my QRM final draft to Peter, I emailed my participants to show them how their data was utilized. I also invited them to provide feedback if I interpreted anything incorrectly or anything I needed to clarify, as long as they were willing. I began to be more mindful of this step because it's all about ethics. Now, I see them as human beings—like partners, you know? They're not just consented participants or samples for me to collect data from for my own project.

S: Yeah, I agree. I feel like I'd never thought about what Peter described, the micro-ethics as kind of the day-to-day decisions that you make as the researcher and not that an institution has decided you should make. And yeah, this is kind of my first time thinking about that too. And we talked about how it could be a good practice to make sure that you're part of the community or have a relationship with the people. And it's been emphasized in our program a lot to collaborate with people and make sure you're looking for things that they need and they are interested in it as well. What you mentioned makes me think about how possibly one way to try and make sure things are coming from their perspective more is to develop the research questions with the people or the community that you're in which so far I haven't really practiced that but I feel like that would make it so that the data you have is not trying to fit questions that you have as much as it's very naturally those questions because those questions are maybe partially from those people as well, that's the first thing that makes me think of. It also makes me think of how we talked about member checking, which we learned about in QRM as a good practice.

J: I really like your idea about developing the research questions with the participants. By doing that, we're incorporating their views into our project, which is so important. One obstacle I can see is that, to reach out to participants, we always need to create a proposal first. So, by the time we're working on the proposal, we already have our research questions set and we're outlining how we're going to reach out to these participants. That makes me wonder—how can we involve them in this early stage? I think if we can get our initial proposal and IRB approval saying, "Okay, you're good to go reach out to your participants," that would open the door for us to recruit them. Then, when we're giving them the consent form and discussing our research design, we can also share the research questions with them. Since I'm new to qualitative research, I'm not entirely sure if research questions need to be included in the consent form or not. But if we share our research questions with the participants, they'll know what we're interested in observing. I'm not sure if that would impact how they behave because they might think, "Oh, they're looking for this, so I need to act a certain way." Do you have any insights on that?

S: I don't think including research questions to the consent form is necessary, but definitely the topic seems important to include.

J: So, it's really about finding the right balance between being transparent and not influencing their behaviors because of the research questions. Honestly, I'm not quite sure how to manage that.

S: Yeah, maybe that is a question we can keep exploring as we develop in our research skills. Something you were saying about when you go to the community, you need your proposal to give them an idea of what you want to do. Maybe there are two orders you can do it in: you can make your proposal and then find a community for it or you could also start with the community, by talking to them, you start thinking about questions based on your experiences and conversations with them. I believe if it went that direction, it would be a lot easier to be collaborative. Maybe not exactly the wording of the questions, but communicating what types of ideas you and your participants both care about. But yeah, this is a confusing and tricky area. I think it's hard.

J: I agree. With training from the institute or professors, we could benefit from more examples on navigating these situations. If we merely observe pre-existing behaviors without intervening, it may seem easier; however, this primarily serves my interests as a researcher. In the past, I did not get this much training related to micro-ethics, so being part of the community to contribute to the research site wasn't on my radar. I thought that sharing my final project with the public after publication would be my way of giving back to society. After QRM, I definitely started to include both macro– and micro-ethical concerns whenever I am dealing with my participants.

S: Throughout QRM, I was talking to Peter about my project, and he gave me a suggestion to work with my participant, one of the instructors of a class, in a more collaborative way. So as more of a collaborative project together, which follows what we learned in the course. But it was good for me to have experience with this, too. Like you were saying as well, we're not here to just come in and be a researcher, we're here to have a relationship with the people, and understand things from their perspective, which I wasn't thinking about it in that way before. That was a really good wake-up call for me to even design my project differently so that I was thinking about this context in terms of the people in it instead of just my curiosity and intellectual questions. Who is in this space? What do they care about, too? Because talking to that instructor, she cared about different things.

J: And then before you reached out to the supervisor, did you have a previous relationship with her, like did you know her personally already?

S: Good question. Yeah, I had met her before, but we did not have a relationship, and thank you for bringing up because I feel that was another thing that I learned. Peter said, "you know, it would be really great if you could get to know the instructor of the class and build a relationship with them." So from that point on, that was something that I started to prioritize. Because of that, it was much a better experience because I learned to prioritize having a positive partnership with my participant.

J: Yeah, I also learned the importance of establishing a respectful and transparent relationship with potential research sites. For my QRM project, I sought to collect data at an ESL class in a church setting. Initially, I felt intimidated about how to approach the participants, but I still wanted to give it a try. So I contacted the ESL program director, introducing myself as a doctoral student and sharing my ESL background. I started by being transparent about my project and motivation, while also sharing my Christian background and ministry experience. I genuinely wanted to be part of their community, and since he was a native speaker with experience working with international students, communication flowed easily. However, I felt uncertain when it came to connecting with the international students. Initially, I didn't meet any Chinese or Taiwanese students, only others spoke languages I wasn't fluent in, like Korean, Japanese, or Spanish. I thought, "I want to be their friend," but deep down, I knew I wanted to invite them to participate in my project later on.

4.1.2 Language Practices in Multilingual Research Settings

S: Wow, so what did you do?

J: At first, I hesitated to tell them, thinking, "should I say, 'I'm conducting research, and I want you to be my participant'?" Instead, I decided to build friendships without any expectations. I was genuinely interested in their stories and wanted to help them as a conversational partner, perhaps even teach some pronunciation skills. Eventually, after about six weeks, when I was preparing to observe the director who was my focal participant, I approached the students and explained my project with simplified English, like “I will record the director, but your voice might be in it. Would you be willing to be recorded, or can I interview you later?” I provided them with the consent form, answering any questions they had, and reassuring them that if they weren’t comfortable, they could refuse to participate, also because I knew my main participant was the director. So, it was totally fine if no students were willing to participate. When I finally asked for participants, six agreed, while one declined due to personal comfort. I learned to approach participants with sensitivity and to be transparent about my motivations. Overall, this experience has strengthened my commitment to fostering relationships in research while valuing and respecting the voices of those involved no matter what languages they speak.

S: Right, I agree. I feel like we've learned a lot about the importance of taking on the perspective of your participants because that’s who we are here to try to understand. Going back to the member-checking process you shared earlier, have any of your multilingual participants ever given you feedback?

J: Good question, well, I guess they might have trusted me or they might have hesitated to ask me, thinking, "Oh, she’s the researcher, an expert." So far, no further questions or feedback from my international participants after I emailed them the final manuscript. Given the cultural context, where I am bilingual and pursuing graduate studies while they are learning English, I wonder if this influences our dynamics. I wish I could have followed up with some of them before their return to Korea since we still have each other's emails. On the other hand, I've contacted another participant who speaks my first language; he mentioned, "Oh, yeah, I skimmed through a little bit," but I have yet to receive substantial feedback. Also, another big concern I have is the manuscript I share with my participants is written in English. I know they can always use any translation tools they prefer to read what I shared with them, but what if they don’t? Or what if there’s a mistranslation in between? For my focal participant who is a native speaker of English, there’s no language problem with him, but for most of my international participants, this is something I have been thinking about. Also, having good communication with participants, especially if we don't speak the same language, is really vital.

S: Hmm. That's a really good point. I had a similar experience when I did a project with my students where language barriers were an important issue. Similarly, I tried to explain the project, like “I'm not gonna share your name” or things like that would be on the consent form but in a much more simple way. It's really good for me to hear your story of how you navigated that. I feel like I'd like to see you do that or see someone do that. Something that would help me be more prepared to face these micro-ethical issues would be watching people's examples or reading about examples of how people went through and made these decisions because that's not always included in research articles, even if it says "informed consent" or something like that. Obviously, you don't have space for all the details in your research article, but it'd be really cool to read about some detailed examples of how more experienced researchers or how other researchers went through these decision-making processes, and how they position themselves at the research sites.

4.2. Positionality: Navigating the Power Imbalance

During our discussion, we started to be clear that positionality varies across projects, reflecting distinct contexts and relationships. As one of Bucholtz et al.'s (2023) recommendations states, researchers should be aware of "areas of unequal power within the research relationship and how these are addressed." The imbalance of power dynamics, such as that between teacher and student, can lead to participants feeling pressured to engage in the study. This hierarchical structure may influence their willingness to provide honest feedback or express dissent.

J: From the researcher's point of view, I learned that shifting my researcher identity to become a learner is a must, also not to force or lure my participants to be involved in my study, nor should I judge the research sites based on what I see. Moreover, when I analyze the data, I should consider both emic and etic perspectives to gain a more nuanced understanding.

S: Right, and I also found it difficult to fit myself into the role of "researcher" in my classroom. In the past, I have gone to class either as a student, teacher, or an observer to learn about teaching methods, so it was a little confusing to feel like I was doing all of these things at once: learning, teaching, and researching simultaneously.

4.2.1. Understanding the Teacher-Researcher Position in Research

J: I wonder if my focal participants are the students instead of the director. How am I going to handle the relationship? Because of the language barrier, because of my positionality, I don't know how to balance that dynamic.

S: Yeah, that's a really big question that I also have. The research project in my own class where I was the ESL teacher I mentioned earlier, I had my students who were my participants. And I feel like in a similar way, I did not talk to my students about my research at the beginning of the semester. I brought that up later. And I guess my reasoning behind that also was to be, in my case, their teacher first and a researcher second. Because I believe I definitely have an obligation to be their teacher, and later on, I felt like I wanted to try out being their teacher and a researcher at the same time. But I think it definitely changed the relationship a little bit.

J: Can you think of any differences? How has the balance shifted? Do you find that because you're a researcher, when you're teaching, you focus more on eliciting good data rather than just teaching the language for the sake of your students?

S: Thank you for saying that because that's one of the things exactly that happened. At one point I was recording class discussions, and so we were having a class discussion and I remember thinking at one point, you know, I have my recorder recording the whole class and people are saying really interesting things. And I was thinking, only one person is getting to talk at a time, though. And if I was normally planning an English lesson, I would have them talk about this question in groups or in partners so that everyone could participate. But I couldn't record all of that. And so I ended up changing my lesson format for data purposes rather than teaching purposes. And I felt very conflicted about that and I still do. And so, yeah, it's complicated. We were talking about the ethical importance of having a relationship with participants or with the community you're doing research in and how that makes you more of an insider because you start to care about similar things. I feel like with positionality, it makes it more complicated … coming in as a researcher when you're also a teacher or when you're also a friend or community member with them.

J: So, because of your identities, like being their teacher, now when you shift to your research role, your students aren't just students anymore. They become participants.

S: Yeah, so I'm thinking about them differently. I'm not just thinking about them as students. But I'm thinking about them as participants too. I've learned that it's complicated.

J: I can relate to the challenges of balancing my role as both teacher and researcher during my thesis on the board game ESL project. Initially, I focused on teaching board games and facilitating English dialogue. Once my research began, I struggled with whether to encourage quieter participants or to allow organic interactions to unfold without interference. This tension raises questions about data integrity: does my encouragement alter the authenticity of the observed behavior? As I navigate these complexities, I recognize the need for further training in action research methodologies to clarify my positionality and its impact on data collection.

S: Yeah, I haven't done training on that either, but I've started to think about qualitative research in a way that's not as much trying to get like pure data as it is creating data together, and thinking about what does that mean, how do I interact in this space? Because I want to be part of it because that feels more ethical to me now. I feel like I learned to think about, as a researcher, not just trying to get information but it's also a social practice.

4.2.2. The Tension of Subjectivity and Interpretation

S: And considering our own positionality during the data analysis process and thinking about how we are part of it because we're the interpreter. We're kind of like the instrument doing the analysis and the coding. So, it has to go through us. And so being aware of our positionality in the analysis process as well would not necessarily make it more accurate to the participants, but at least more transparent about where our analysis is coming from. What about you? What are your thoughts on analysis and data coding?

J: When I was interpreting the data, I tried to set aside my own perspective because I wanted to be as objective as possible. I'm not entirely sure if that was the best approach, but through our training on positionality, I've started to think about who I am and why I'm in this role. I've begun to focus more on the relationships involved. I also try not to see myself as an expert just because I can speak Chinese; that doesn't automatically mean I understand the cultural backgrounds of other Chinese or Taiwanese speakers. Speaking the same language doesn't guarantee that I grasp everyone's experiences, especially since we all grew up in different places and come from distinct family experiences. I've come to realize that sharing a language doesn't equate to having a shared understanding of individuals. That's something new I've learned. So, whenever I'm writing or reflecting on my positionality, I always ask myself: besides language and educational background, what are the relationships between me and my participants? What commonalities do we share, and what differences exist between us? I want to pay more attention to those differences because they could lead to misinterpretations down the line. I don't want to interpret things solely based on my own experiences. I need to put myself in my participants' shoes so that my analysis can be more accurate and reflective of their perspectives.

S: Yeah, I agree. I feel like we've learned a lot about the importance of taking on the perspective of your participants because that's who we are here to try to understand. I feel like at the same time this reminds me of something that another professor said: "it's always your story too, because you're there and you're writing it," and so it's the story of the participants, but also, I feel like it's inescapable that it's also interpreted by you and partially your own story as well. I don't know. What do you think about that?

J: I feel like when each researcher takes on a personal research topic, one that's not driven by job requirements, it's usually because we're passionate about it. We connect with the subject matter, and that drives our desire to learn more. You mentioned something similar, and I can really relate to that. I mean, my involvement with ESL ministry comes from my own experience as an ESL student. I benefited from that ministry, and now I want to advocate for it. So, it's true that I'm part of the story. During my interview practice, when I was interviewing my participants, I found that they often asked me questions, and I ended up sharing my own experiences. This made the conversations flow more naturally. Even though I was writing down what my participants said, I was also very much part of the dialogue, and everything felt intertwined.

4.3. Final Thoughts: Recommended Practices

J: So, for novice researchers or first-year PhD students to incorporate ethical concerns and their positionalities into their research, what are some suggestions or recommendations you would tell them?

S: I feel like it was really helpful for us to read examples of positionality statements—a lot of the articles we read had them. I think we would have discussions about how their positionality affects things. We read an article where the teacher was interviewing the students, and we discussed the positionality and how that would be. Having a discussion about that was really helpful, especially for my QRM project. As we learned about different things in QRM, I think a couple of times we had to think about it in terms of our own projects, so that was really helpful to have continuous reflection and discussion with peers and discussion with Peter, and then reading examples, having more experienced researchers to look at, and then also continually thinking about our own research was a really helpful practice for me. What about you?

J: I think you already said it all, like reading the examples really helpful, but I want to emphasize the importance of hands-on practice. If we only receive information without applying it, we'll forget it quickly. Integrating practical experience into our research projects and discussing with peers is crucial. I really appreciate the discussion forum in our assignments, even though it's not weekly. We engage three times throughout the semester—at the beginning, middle, and end. This setup allows us to not only reflect on our own thoughts but also respond to others. It creates a double layer of reflection: first, we think about our beliefs, and then, seeing how others interpret the same questions really deepens our understanding. By the way, before our interview, I was taking the researcher mandatory CITI[1] training, which covers a lot of ethical issues. However, it often feels abstract. After completing the quiz, I thought, "Okay, I passed!" But those complicated regulations seem just like information. My goal is to avoid violating policies, yet micro-ethical concerns demand more than just checking boxes. We must genuinely care about our participants and ensure that every decision respects them, without taking advantage of their trust.

S: I totally agree with what you are saying. It's a different experience when you have your own participants that you care about, versus just taking a quiz about ethics. I feel like on the quiz, I can remember the information long enough to take the quiz, but in the class project, it sticks in my head a lot deeper, and also I have more detailed, more micro questions like, “what do I do when my participants don't speak English?”

In summary, we highlighted how structured micro-ethical learning can empower novice researchers to embody and reflect on collaborative and transparent values—not only during research activities but also in their broader roles as scholar-practitioners. Through our discussion, we noticed that we continued to experience tensions and questions as we thought about mirco-ethics. Reflecting through our class discussions and assignments, as well as together in this duoethnography, was beneficial for working through some of these thoughts and growing as researchers.

5. Conclusion and Implications

We believe that ethical research is high quality research. Throughout our dialogue, we emphasized that professional researchers should prioritize both macro– and micro-ethical concerns in their interactions with participants especially when building relationships with those in the participant community. Since micro-ethics vary in each research situation, we recommend, with Riazi et al. (2023), making this attention to ethical quality transparent. Researchers can do this by including their etic and emic perspectives in their positionality descriptions to offer transparency regarding their stance and presentation throughout data collection and analysis. While these practices may initially seem intimidating or challenging for novice researchers, they can be effectively established through guidance from a professional mentor or participation in a qualitative methods course that incorporates this crucial topic into its curriculum.

To echo Sajedi et al.'s (2021) call for research methods courses that provide hands-on experience and emphasize research ethics, we suggest that qualitative methods course instructors consistently advocate for the importance of ethical considerations, provide students with hands-on experience, and encourage them to engage in reflexive journaling regarding their positionality in class projects, facilitated by ongoing class discussions throughout the semester, to foster students' reflexivity. They should not only read example articles but also maintain ongoing conversations with peers and keep reflection journals to enhance their capacity for ethical reasoning and reflexive practice.

J: Again, I really like those required reading articles and optional resources like books or articles provided by Peter. By reading those required articles, it helped me to get familiar with how the positionality section should look like, and some ethical concerns I need to pay attention to. Also, discussing the topics among the peers is really, really helpful. Peter did not introduce this concept to the class because it's just part of the syllabus, he really cares about it from the beginning of the lesson to the last day of the class. No matter what article we're reading, he always brings up, "Oh yeah, so this is the positionality, this is the ethical concerns." It's kind of repetitive, but each week we are getting more and more familiar with this concept. It's not just a single lesson or a separate topic, it's engraved into the whole structure of the class. So providing reading, facilitating a conversation, and emphasizing this part multiple times would really help.

S: Yeah, I totally agree. I think that's a really good point about it being part of the class from the beginning to the end. And everything we read, since it was a methodology class we focused a lot on the methodology, but I feel like positionality and ethics were always part of the methodology discussion about the article. And so, yeah, you're totally right. It was really helpful to have that be a continual aspect of the class; and not just one part of the method—that's it—but it's always there as part of the method from design to presentation every step of the way. Also, we already talked about it as well, having the project was really helpful to have our own experiences dealing with issues and practicing the methods. It was a really good learning activity for me.

J: It's so interesting to see that not only during this duo-interview, but when we were chatting about this topic, I feel like you speak my thoughts, and sometimes you mentioned that I was saying something you were about to say. I guess this means that the instructor did a good job.

S: Yes, coherence!

J: Because even though we come from different backgrounds in terms of research or our culture, after this training we're on the same page, right?

S: That's a really good point.

In this duoethnography, reaffirming Norova and Gutiérrez's (2024) orientation, we encourage aspiring qualitative scholars to "provide students with opportunities for auto/duoethnographic" (p. 127) studies. As novice qualitative researchers in this field, our duoethnography not only provided a chance to learn from each other but also created a unique space for us to cultivate reflexivity in a practical way. We hope our personal experiences will benefit any emerging scholars entering this qualitative research biome and further encourage researcher-educators and programs to consider how structured, formative experiences can support novice researchers in nurturing micro-ethical practices.

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suggestions that inspired us to undertake this duoethnography project, allowing us to share our insights and research experiences with our readers.

***Notes*.**
1. QRM refers to the Qualitative Research Methods course
2. Sonja created the first five questions, and Joanne created the following five questions.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What research training did you have prior to taking QRM?
2. What research practice/experience did you have prior to taking QRM?
3. What was your overall impression of qualitative research before QRM (if you remember), and what about after?
4. Tell me about a time during your QRM project that you had to pay attention to ethical issues.
5. Tell me about a time during your QRM project that you had to pay attention to your positionality.
6. In your opinion, why is it important to include positionality as part of your project?
7. What are some challenges that you have encountered in terms of ethical issues during your qualitative research if any?
8. During the data coding process, how can researchers ensure that the analysis is conducted according to the participants' thoughts, rather than twisting their words to fit the research questions?
9. What practices do you recommend for novice researchers or first-year PhD students to incorporate ethical concerns and their positionality into their research?
10. What suggestions would you like to provide for professors or instructors teaching a qualitative research methods class regarding ethical issues and research positionality construction?