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Conducting Research in Early Childhood Education: A Review of Guy Roberts-Holmes' Doing Your Early Years Research Project: A Step-by-Step Guide

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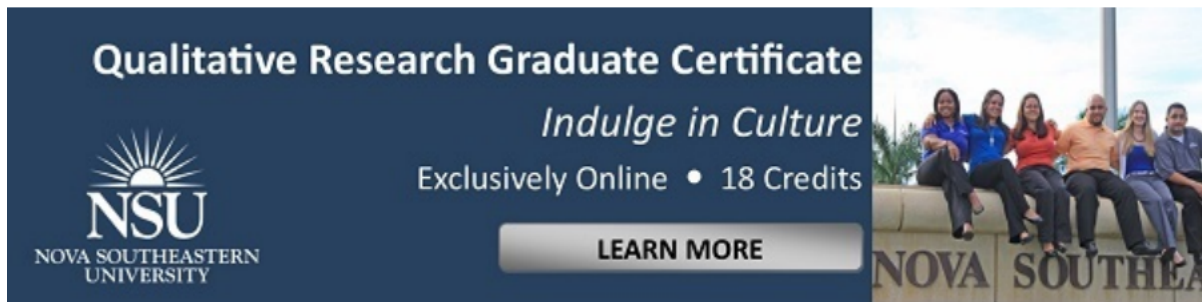
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Abstract

Research should be an important component of courses at the college level. *Doing Your Early Years Research Project* by Guy Roberts-Holmes provides the theory and practice for technical college and undergraduate students to conduct qualitative research in the field of early childhood education. It truly is a step-by-step guide that helps students create a topic that is both personally and professionally meaningful, teaches them how to review the literature, collect data, make meaning of the data, and create the final research project. Researchers will finish this book and project knowing they made a positive difference in children's lives.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Early Childhood, Ethical Issues, Observations, Research Projects

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Conducting Research in Early Childhood Education: A Review of Guy Roberts-Holmes’ *Doing Your Early Years Research Project: A Step-by-Step Guide*

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Research should be an important component of courses at the college level. Doing Your Early Years Research Project by Guy Roberts-Holmes provides the theory and practice for technical college and undergraduate students to conduct qualitative research in the field of early childhood education. It truly is a step-by-step guide that helps students create a topic that is both personally and professionally meaningful, teaches them how to review the literature, collect data, make meaning of the data, and create the final research project. Researchers will finish this book and project knowing they made a positive difference in children’s lives. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Early Childhood, Ethical Issues, Observations, Research Projects

Reviewer’s Statement

Picture a college student who is working on an Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood conducting real-world research in a natural setting with students in early childhood education. As a professor of doctoral level students and a director of human resources for a school system, that image sparked my attention as I read and thought about the power of this research book. *Doing Your Early Years Research Project* by Guy Roberts-Holmes strengthens the rigor, differentiation and real world experiences of college students by providing a step-by-step resource on how to properly conduct research with young students. Colleges and school systems should consider research a fundamental component of what students and professionals do each day. This book challenges the mindset that research is for graduate students, and more specifically, doctoral level students. Roberts-Holmes (2014) states, “...research is simply a tool, and as with any other tool, when you learn what it does, why it has been invented and how to use it, it becomes beneficial to you” (p. 3). Why do colleges not take advantage of resources and books such as this one to make research a common practice in courses?

What does your personal story have to do with research?

Roberts-Holmes (2014) challenges readers/researchers to reflect on their own personal story, the heart aspect, and to combine this passion with the needs of early years and the researcher’s future career, the head aspect, when deciding on a research topic and methodology. According to Roberts-Holmes (2014), methodology “refers to the principles and values, philosophies and ideologies, that underpin your research” (p. 23). He helps new researchers by having actual students/researchers share their personal story and methodology and showing how they are connected. For example, when Lucy was younger, she had a violent father, which resulted in her hating violence. Lucy wanted to gain more knowledge about children’s viewpoint of domestic violence and raise awareness about domestic violence

with the professionals working with children. Because of her personal story, Lucy's methodology included feminism and child-centered education. This is a prime example of a student researcher combining the heart aspect with the head aspect and making a positive difference in the real world. Roberts-Holmes (2014) challenges readers to ask, "How have the researcher's personal and professional issues been combined (p. 24)?"

What do ethical issues look like in early childhood research?

According to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), "children have the right to hold an opinion about issues concerning them...children have the right to be included in research which affects them" (Article 12). Although researchers are conducting a study with children, it is imperative that researchers respect the relationship and considers the child's perspective as valid and worthwhile. One challenge with children is the "disparities in power and status between adults and children" (Roberts-Holmes, 2014, p. 55). If the power is abused and not used correctly, this may affect the quality and reliability of the data and the study. Another challenge when working with children is that informed consent is an ongoing process that may change based on the child's desire, and the researcher has to respect this decision. Most importantly, researchers must find the balance between the participation of children and the protection from risk of children. If researchers are going to involve children in a study, the results and conclusions should benefit children.

Why are observations important in early childhood research?

One key purpose of qualitative research is to see the world from someone else's perspective, worldview, and mental model. Observations allow researchers the emic perspective of observing students in their natural setting while completing routine activities and events in social situations. Since researchers are the main instruments in qualitative research, it is imperative that they recognize and share their "assumptions, beliefs, and values derived from...previous experiences...age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class all help to form...experiences of life" (Roberts-Holmes, 2014, p. 97). Researchers' previous experiences influence their perceptions and interpretations of the observed events in the classroom. For example, does the researcher have young children? Did the researcher's children attend a school at an early age? Roberts-Holmes (2014) discusses the differences between unstructured and structured observations with structured observations using prior literature and research questions to guide exactly what the researcher wishes to look for in the classroom. The researcher may even decide to become a participant and join the teacher and students in classroom activities and daily routines. This form of data collection helps with understanding but may change the actions of the teacher and students. It is recommended that researchers spend as much time as possible in the natural setting of the classroom to improve the quality of the data. Not only are observations an important part of data collection, the author details interviewing and questionnaires in early childhood research. A combination of these methods helps researchers with triangulation of data collection and more valid results.

How do I analyze and present my findings?

Roberts-Holmes (2014) provides an excellent introduction to coding and displaying data. He teaches students to use a computer or marker pens to color code the data and observe patterns as they emerge from the data and to combine these into four to six themes. When

generating topic codes and themes, researchers may induce or deduce from the data. With inducing, "...there are no pre-specified codes that you will impose upon your data, you will simply let the data suggest the codes and themes" (p. 175). Deducing codes and themes has the researcher using "pre-specified codes that you have already decided are important and you will then impose these upon the data and put those data into the pre-established themes or topics. These topics might come directly from the literature..." (p. 175). To add rigor and relevance to the process and to connect the themes with the research process, students are asked to reflect how the themes are related to their research questions and to the literature. To teach students how computer software may benefit the research process, there is an overview on Excel and NVivo and how the software helps researchers organize, analyze, and display data. For example, NVivo provides codes to data and connects them with a tree structure.

What format do I use to write the research project?

One of the greatest strengths of this book is the last chapter titled "Writing Up Your Research Project." It is very common for students to work hard on reviewing literature, collecting data, and analyzing data, but they struggle with the final report/project. Students who are new to research need a model to guide and support them as they create the final project. Roberts-Holmes (2014) provides the necessary support in this final chapter. For example, there is a "Research Project Checklist" on page 206 that guides students through the different sections of the final project. Then, the author explains each of the sections and the specific requirements for that section. "The first chapter within a research project is called the Introduction and Literature Review. This introduction...introduces the rationale for your study and sets the context...the main purpose of the introduction is to orient readers to your study" (p. 210). There is a sample introduction published in the book with explanations of different key parts. Students/researchers will thank Roberts-Holmes for the specificity and clear understanding of writing the final research project.

Final Thoughts

Doing Your Early Years Research Project by Guy Roberts-Holmes is a quality introductory research book for a technical college or undergraduate degree in early childhood education. Students who have no prior knowledge of research can read and apply this new knowledge very easily. This book is a nice mixture of theory and practice and does not go too deeply into research verbiage and methods. Since a professor in London wrote the book, a few parts of the book may not be familiar with American college students, but it is important that students have a global view of research and life. For example, Roberts-Holmes discusses the Children Act that the British government passed in 1989 that encourages children's participation in the research process because they have a right to be heard in matters that affect them. As a professor of doctoral level graduate students, I would not use this book at that level because of the simplicity of the writing and concepts, but I believe students should conduct research at all levels of schooling and this book fits that need at the undergraduate level. All college students can make a positive difference in the world through research, and I hope this becomes a greater focus in college courses!

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Author Note

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