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SOCL 345

Reflection

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Throughout the course of this research project, I have learned many things about academic research. At the beginning of my Fall 2023 semester, I had very little knowledge on conducting research aside from doing informal interviews and surveys before starting college. This course has taught me how to conduct research properly and think more like a researcher.

When the semester first began, I was unsure of what exactly I was getting into; all I knew was that in the class, we were going to study the topic of family involvement. I first assumed this would entail interviews or surveys that simply asked how involved families felt after the activities provided. I had already learned how to take quantitative data from surveys and find the mean, median, and standard deviation in order to examine results and the successes and failures of the study. However, analyzing qualitative data was something I had never done before, though I had heard of it. I had to learn new ways to analyze the data presented to me, using a technique called coding to find similarities between open-ended questions to determine the participants’ thoughts on the activities. I also learned how to use programs such as RStudio that made graphs and tables based on collected data, which will be helpful going forward. Lastly, I learned more in depth on how participants of studies should be treated by becoming certified to conduct human research.

When I first began my literature review, I decided that I wanted to focus on how parental involvement affected a child’s life in different areas, such as in their education or behavior. I focused on sources that either talked about family involvement in schools and at home, and how children with involvement behaved. I made sure that all my sources came from credible journal articles and stayed close to the topic that I was going to study. My first bibliography, however, was not my final bibliography. After beginning the course research project, I decided that I wanted to find a correlation between family involvement and education level. There were not many sources on this, so I used socio-economic status to operationalize this. Therefore, I had to do further research in order to find sources that wrote about socio-economic statuses and their level of family involvement.

After sending out the activities and corresponding surveys, the research team ran into a problem: the response rate was very low. The group that I was a part of, for example, only received one 3 out of 17 surveys back from participants. To combat this low response rate, the research team decided that we would create a longitudinal study using what few responses we did receive along with previous classes’ research, from the years 2019 and 2022. After we combined all of the completed surveys from all three years, there were 66 completed responses in total for us to analyze. This provided us with much more information to complete a fuller study.

After learning how to properly conduct academic research over the course of the semester, I have grown more confident in my abilities as a researcher. I used to be intimidated by the concept of research, as it had many, many different parts that I had to learn and keep track of. However, I found that splitting it up into smaller parts and working on it over time is extremely helpful and makes the project much more manageable. For example, I would write each section as its own essay before I combined them all into one research paper. Despite my reservations coming into this project, I have come out of it knowing that I am capable of conducting academic research and doing it well.

To “think like a researcher” is to think about how the research conducted is going to answer a question that will advance the knowledge of a certain topic. It is finding gaps in previous research and attempting to fill them in with new information and new studies. It also means to consider every angle, starting with the participants, then with the specifics of the research and data collection methods. Finally, thinking like a researcher means applying the findings of the study to a larger picture and to the group of people it applies to help solve a problem.