



Making The Grade: Conducting Nursing Research In The School Setting (Abstract Only)

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Abstract

Background: Traditional nursing research textbooks and training describe research methods, ethics and applications well. However, these resources provide little information on how to understand and gain access to research settings including community settings such as schools. Schools can provide access to cross sections of a community that can strengthen interpretation and application of research findings. Access to diverse groups is a potential benefit of research in schools. Early career researchers need information on navigating the complexity of research in academic settings. Social network theory describes the strength and function of relationships with the term centrality. Centrality can be described as degree, having the most connections; betweenness, individuals that function as a bridge between groups or individuals; and closeness, individuals who have close relationships with others in the network. An analysis of the relationships between individuals and groups at the single rural elementary school from the case example demonstrates how theory can guide understanding of roles and relationships within the complex school research setting. *Purpose/Methods:* We provide research guidance with two case examples illustrating real-world experience with access to and completion of research in the elementary and high-school setting. *Findings:* These cases demonstrate respecting the school/community's priorities and values, identifying key informants and building relationships with gatekeepers, recognizing resource scarcity and allocation, engaging ethically, and communicating findings. *Conclusions:* School nurses have first-hand understanding of local problems, priorities, strengths and concerns. This valuable role provides an important frame of reference to help identify research questions and support research endeavors within the context of the school setting. The benefits of conducting nursing research in the school setting have been well established including access to a diverse population of children and adolescents in an environment that is familiar, safe, and appropriate for data collection. Conducting research in the school setting is identified to be a time-intensive endeavor requiring considerable up-front planning. As the case examples demonstrate, research in the school setting is balanced with the realities of complex systems, multiple gatekeepers, and the increased time needed to engender cooperation, navigate access, and obtain consent/assent. The outlined strategies, the use of social network theory and SWOT analysis provide useful tools for novice and experienced researchers to gain access and conduct research in schools. While considerable uncertainty related to the planned large-scale in-person reopening of schools continues at all levels, planning ahead by doing your homework, allowing time for cultivating relationships, being well prepared, remaining flexible, following the rules, and giving back when possible, continue to be important factors to help researchers successfully navigate the identified challenges of conducting school-based research.

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