**Literature review for the Experienced Teacher action research project**

A literature review may be defined as **a search and evaluation of the available literature in a given subject area.** It involves:

* **surveying,** searching and obtaining the literature in your chosen area of study
* **synthesising** the information gathered into a summary
* **critically analysing** the information gathered to
  + identify areas of controversy
  + formulate questions for further research.
* **presenting** the literature according to an organised style.

**The process**

Before writing a literature review, you will need to:

1. Define the topic, or research questions (i.e. what are the key concepts?) and compile a list of the keywords (and synonyms). This will help in developing a search strategy.
2. Identify and select relevant information sources to search for your literature, this may include:
   * library catalogues
   * databases
   * the internet.
3. Conduct searches.
4. Interpret and evaluate search results, and if required, modify search strategy.
5. Locate and obtain relevant references found in search results, this may require you to
   * search a variety of library catalogues
   * visit and use other libraries.

**Reasons for conducting a literature review**

**Bourner (1996, p.8) states that prior to commencing a research project the first step is to review the field**. He provides a **number of reasons for conducting a literature review**, including:

* to identify gaps in current knowledge
* to avoid reinventing the wheel and it can stop you from making the same mistakes as others
* to carry on from where others have already reached (reviewing the field allows you to build on the platform of existing knowledge and ideas)
* to identify other people working in the same and related fields (a researcher network is a valuable resource)
* to increase your breadth of knowledge of your subject area
* to identify the seminal works in your area
* to provide the intellectual context for your own work, enabling you to position your project relative to other work
* to identify opposing views
* to put your own work in perspective
* to demonstrate that you can access previous work in an area
* to identify information and ideas that may be relevant to your project
* to identify methods that could be relevant to your project

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| Bourner, T. 1996, 'The research process: four steps to success,' in *Research methods: guidance for postgraduates*, edited by T. Greenfield. Arnold: London, pp. 7-11. |

**Goals of a literature review**

**The goals of a literature review have been defined by Neuman (2003, p. 96) as:**

1. ***To demonstrate a familiarity with a body of knowledge and establish credibility***.  
   A review tells a reader that the researcher knows the research in an area and knows the major issues. A good review increases the reader's confidence in the researcher's professional competence, ability, and background.
2. ***To show the path of prior research and how a current project is linked to it***.  
   A review outlines the direction of research on a question and shows the development of knowledge. A good review places a research project in a context and demonstrates its relevance by making connections to a body of knowledge.
3. ***To integrate and summarize what is known in an area***.  
   A review pulls together and synthesizes different results. A good review points out areas where prior studies agree, where they disagree, and where major questions remain. It collects what is known up to a point in time and indicates the direction for future research.
4. ***To learn from others and stimulate new ideas***.  
   A review tells what others have found so that a researcher can benefit from the efforts of others. A good review identifies blind alleys and suggests hypotheses for replication. It divulges procedures, techniques, and research designs worth copying so that a researcher can better focus hypotheses and gain new insights.

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| Neuman, W. Lawrence. (2003). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, 5th ed, Allyn and Bacon, Boston. |

Some points to remember as the writer of a literature review:

* It ***is not*** a descriptive list of the information gathered
* It ***is not*** a summary of one piece of literature after another
* the review ***must***be defined by a guiding concept e.g. research question or hypothesis
* your purpose is to convey to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic - what are the strengths and weaknesses
* organise the information gathered into sections that present themes.
* ***do not*** attempt to list all published material, but rather synthesise and evaluate the literature according to your guiding concept.

**Bibliography**

Some of the information contained herein has been adapted from the following:

1. RMIT University Learning Lab. *Literature Review Overview* <https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/literature-review-overview> RMIT Australia (available online – accessed 9 January 2018)
2. QUT. *Writing a Literature Review* <https://www.citewrite.qut.edu.au/write/litreview.jsp>  QUT (available online – accessed 9 January 2018)
3. The University of Sydney Learning Centre. *How Do I Write a Literature Review?* <http://sydney.edu.au/stuserv/learning_centre/help/thesis/th_litReview.shtml>  University of Sydney  (available online – accessed 9 January 2018)
4. UNSW. *Literature Review*   <https://student.unsw.edu.au/literature-review>  UNSW (available online – accessed 9 January 2018)
5. University of Kent Student Learning Advisory Service. *Literature Reviews*<https://www.kent.ac.uk/learning/resources/studyguides/literaturereviews.pdf>  University of Kent  (available online – accessed 9 January 2018)

**A literature review structure**

**Applicants: use the following to structure your literature review**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Section | What you need to do | Extra notes |
| Introduction | * Define the topic, providing an appropriate context for reviewing the literature. * Establish your reasons for reviewing the literature. * Explain the organisation and sequence of the review. * State the specific focus and scope of the literature. | You may define the specific and relevant words and terms. |
| Body | * Group the literature according to common themes. * Provide an explanation of the relationship between the research question and the literature reviewed. * Proceed from the general, wider view of the research under review to the specific area being targeted. * Include information about the usefulness, recency and major authors or sources of the literature. | You might include:   * the relationship of the literature to your specific focus area: student learning, wellbeing or engagement. * how the literature will inform the implementation. * findings provided by the literature. * benefits of investigating the topic and barriers to success. |
| Conclusion | * Summarise major contributions of the literature. * Point out major flaws, or gaps in research if appropriate or why you are investigating this area in your context. * Explain the link between the project and the literature reviewed. |  |

**Applicants and supervisors can use this checklist prior to the literature review being uploaded**

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes/no | Comments |
| The literature review includes an introduction, body and conclusion |  |  |
| The introduction includes:   * a definition of the specific chosen topic and important terms and words * your reasons for reviewing the literature as it relates to the context of your project * an explanation of the organisation and sequence of the review * a statement as to the specific focus and scope of the review. |  |  |
| The body includes:   * a grouping of the literature according to common themes * an explanation of the relationship between the research question and the literature reviewed * a structure that moves from the general, wider view of the research under review to the specific area being targeted * information about the usefulness, recency and major authors or sources of the literature. |  |  |
| The conclusion includes:   * a summary of the major contributions of the literature * an evaluation of the literature reviewed in terms of its usefulness to the project * if appropriate, the major flaws, or gaps in research * a link to the project and an explanation of how it assists you to replicate existing findings or to build on other research. |  |  |
| The document has been proof read for correct and accurate spelling and grammar. |  |  |
| The literature review includes headings that assist the reader to navigate through the literature review |  |  |
| The referencing is consistent and follows an approved system. |  |  |