

Systematic reviews



Gary Jones and Deborah Netolicky

What's the idea?

Evidence-informed practitioners will want to find the best available evidence. While individual studies may be limited in scope or flawed in design, a systematic review can provide a robust overview of research in a particular field.

What does it mean?

Gough et al. (2017) define a systematic review as 'a review of existing research using explicit, accountable, rigorous research methods' (p.4). As the name suggests, systematic reviews analyse and critically appraise evidence on a topic according to one fixed method.

Gough et al. point out that systematic reviews are also:

Explicit. A clear understandable statement of all the detail.

Accountable. Answerable, responsible and justified.

Able to make evidence claims. Statements that can be justified in respect of answering the review question(s) from the research evidence reviewed.

What are the implications for teachers?

The following are examples of different types of systematic review:

» *Meta-analysis* - A technique that combines the results of quantitative studies to provide a more precise effect of the results

» *Qualitative systematic review/ qualitative evidence synthesis* - A method for integrating or comparing the findings from qualitative studies, looking for themes that lie in or across individual qualitative studies

» *Rapid review* - An assessment of what is already known about a policy or practice issue, by using systematic review methods to search and critically appraise existing research

» *Meta-meta-analysis* - A technique which statistically combines the results of multiple meta-analyses

» *Mixed-methods* - Any combination of methods where one significant component is a literature review (usually systematic), often combining quantitative with qualitative research or outcome with process studies.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Connolly P, Keenan C, and Urbanska K, (2018) The Trials of Evidence-Based Practice in Education: A Systematic Review of Randomised Controlled Trials in Education Research 1980–2016. *Educational Research*.
- » Gascoine L, Higgins S and Wall K (2017) The assessment of metacognition in children aged 4–16 years: a systematic review. *Review of Education* 5(1): 3-57.
- » Gough D, Oliver S and Thomas J (2017) *An Introduction to Systematic Reviews* (2nd Edition). London: SAGE.
- » Harrison JR, Bunford N, Evans SW et al. (2013) Educational Accommodations for Students with Behavioral Challenges: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Review of Educational Research* 83(4): 551-597.
- » MacLure M (2005) 'Clarity Bordering on Stupidity': Where's the Quality in Systematic Review? *Journal of Education Policy* 20(4): 393-416.
- » Rousseau D M (2012) *The Oxford Handbook of Evidence-Based Management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.