

Title: Understanding and using diverse evidence synthesis methods

Background: Diverse methods are needed to synthesize different types of evidence and to address the wide range of questions that are of interest to funders, policy makers, practitioners, consumers, and researchers. However, stakeholders are now faced with a bewildering array of review and synthesis products, including: systematic reviews, meta-analyses, network meta-analyses, overviews, rapid reviews, realist reviews, qualitative evidence synthesis, scoping reviews, and evidence and gap maps. Existing typologies of research reviews are incomplete and inconsistent, and there is considerable confusion about the terms used to describe reviews (Littell, 2018). I want to explore the utility of a new, inclusive conceptual framework for classifying diverse synthesis methods.

Objectives: Published as a Campbell Methods Discussion Paper, this new framework aims to 1) promote understanding of a wide array of evidence synthesis methodologies and 2) identify the goodness of fit between review questions and synthesis methods (Littell, 2018).

Description: An inclusive framework for classifying evidence synthesis methodologies includes reviews that are aimed at understanding conditions, interventions, or methodologies in the social, health, and environmental sciences. Attention is paid to the goodness of fit between different research questions (e.g., questions about constructs or categories, rates or trends, correlations, predictions, causes or effects, and applications) and review methods. I identify the logic and evidentiary requirements needed to answer different kinds of questions and support different types of inferences. This framework might be used to aid in the design and critically appraisal of primary studies, as well as reviews.

Littell, J. H. (2018). Conceptual and practical classification of research reviews and other evidence synthesis products. *Campbell Methods Discussion Paper Series*.
<https://campbellcollaboration.org/library/conceptual-and-practical-classification-of-research-reviews-and-other-evidence-synthesis-products.html>. doi:
10.4073/cmdp.2018.1