

Realist Reviews in 5 Steps:



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01. Scoping of Literature

- Familiarize yourself with realist review guidelines and reporting standards
- Assemble a team with content and method expertise
- Consider input from a librarian or information specialist



02. Formal Literature Search

- Scope the literature before determining area of focus and undertaking formal search
- Literature selection is determined by usefulness and contributions to theory
- Guided by context, mechanism, and outcome (CMO) configurations
- Flow diagram is useful to illustrate included/excluded articles



03. Appraising the Literature

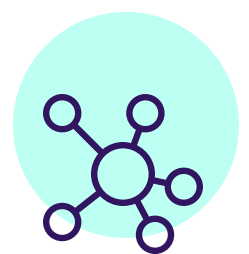
Inclusion is based on:

- **Relevance:** ability to contribute to theory building/testing; and
- **Rigor:** methods to generate data are credible and trustworthy
- Studies deemed low quality based on traditional hierarchy of evidence may be included for theory development and testing



04. Extracting the Data

- Included papers are coded for CMO configurations
- Both quantitative and qualitative data may be relevant
- Deductive and inductive coding are methods used
- Coding includes positive and negative outcomes
- CMO configurations can be articulated as "if, then" statements



05. Data Synthesis + Narrative Development

Purpose of data synthesis is to refine program theory:

- Testing an initial theory
- Adjudicating between different theories
- Reviewing how theory holds within different settings
- Expert stakeholders may be useful when building/confirming program theory

Realist reviews extend understanding about how a program works:

- Explicit statements about the context and mechanism that will contribute to educational outcomes
- Data from primary studies are used to support the theoretical explanation
- New explanations can inform future education interventions
- Reviews highlight contexts where a program may be unsuccessful or mechanisms that are key for success

