

ECDE7016: Writing a Critical Literature Review in Education

Moving from description to criticality

13.10.26

Outcomes for today

- Distinguish between descriptive and critical writing.
- Identify analysis, critique and synthesis within academic literature.
- Evaluate examples of literature review writing.
- Apply critical questioning techniques when reading research.
- Use literature to develop an evidence-informed argument.



Pre-session activity

- Drawing on your reflective memo and annotated article:
 - What was the author's central argument?
 - What assumptions did you identify?
 - What alternative perspectives might challenge the author's position?
 - Did you find more examples of description or criticality?

Moving from description to synthesis

- Smith (2024) found that professional development improved teacher confidence.
- Smith's findings suggest a relationship between professional development and teacher confidence, although the reasons for this remain unclear.
- While Smith provides useful insights, the study's limited sample restricts the transferability of the findings.
- Although several studies report positive impacts of professional development (Smith, 2024; Jones, 2025), evidence regarding long-term changes in classroom practice remains mixed.

Activity: which extract is most critical?

- Smith (2023) examined teacher wellbeing. Brown (2024) also explored teacher wellbeing. Jones (2025) found similar results. These studies demonstrate the importance of teacher wellbeing.
- Research suggests teacher wellbeing influences retention and performance. Whilst findings are broadly consistent, the relationship appears influenced by organisational factors and school context.
- Although studies consistently associate teacher wellbeing with retention (Smith, 2023; Brown, 2024), much of the evidence relies on self-reported perceptions from single institutions. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how organisational culture shapes wellbeing across different educational contexts.

Article discussion

- What is the author's central argument?
- What assumptions underpin that argument?
- What evidence is used to support claims?
- What strengths and limitations can you identify?
- What perspectives, voices or issues appear to be absent?
- How does this source connect to wider debates in the field?
- What themes, tensions or gaps does this source reveal when considered alongside the literature you have identified so far?
- How might this source contribute to a literature review?

Turning reflection into critical writing

- Using your reflective memo:
 - Write:
 - One descriptive sentence
 - One analytical sentence
 - One critical sentence
 - One synthesising sentence

Questions for Reading Critically

- What claim is being made?
- What evidence supports it?
- What assumptions underpin it?
- What alternative interpretations exist?
- What is missing?
- How does this connect with other studies?
- Why does this matter?

Final question

- What's one thing you'll do differently when writing your literature review?

