Day 4: Introductions to Research Reports

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| Day 4 Specific Learning Outcomes |
| 1. **Distinguish the three common elements in the introductions of research reports: The research problem statement, the review of precedent literature, and the research purpose.** |
| 1. **Differentiate between a research problem statement and the purpose of a study.** |
| 1. **Evaluate the elements of a research problem statement.** |
| 1. **Appraise types of research problems for suitability to quantitative or qualitative studies.** |
| 1. **Distinguish the roles of the purpose statement, research questions and hypotheses in defining a quantitative study’s purpose.** |
| 1. **Categorize the different types of variables in quantitative research.** |
| 1. **Examine the elements of quantitative and qualitative purpose statements.** |
| 1. **Examine the elements that comprise quantitative research questions (research questions and hypotheses) and qualitative research questions (the central phenomenon).** |
| 1. **Contrast the purposes of the literature review from the perspectives of a research investigator (scholarship of discovery) and research consumer (scholarship of application/integration/teaching).** |
| 1. **Differentiate between conceptual, anecdotal, and data-based (research) literature.** |

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| Book/Article | Author | Pages |
| *Understanding Research* | Plano-Clark & Creswell (2015) | 77-188 |
| The importance of context, beliefs and values in leadership development. | Hamilton & Bean | https://ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=18893447&site=ehost-live |

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| Class Announcement: Transition & New Focus |
| **Day 4 is focused on the understanding the elements commonly found in the introductions of research reports. We will be engaging with the research problem, the review of precedent literature, and the research purpose. Although the terms “research problem” and “research purpose” sound similar, we will see that although related, are quite different.** |

Notes: Understanding Introductions to Research Reports

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| Theme, Theorists & Concepts |
| * The Research Problem |
| * Literature Review |
| * The Research Purpose |

While[[1]](#footnote-1) this course is focused on helping you to become a wise and discerning consumer of research, it is helpful to begin by understanding the processes common in most research. According to the eminent scholars Gall, Gall and Borg, research studies typically consist of the following five major stages:

Stage 1: Identifying a significant research problem.

Stage 2: Writing a research proposal.

Stage 3: Conducting a pilot study.

Stage 4. Conducting the main study.

Stage 5. Preparing a report. (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 41)

Our interests in this course lie especially in Stages 1 and 4. The result of Stage 5 is the research report such as those we worked on locating yesterday. The processes a research undergoes in identifying a good research problem is similar to the processes you underwent yesterday in identifying a good focus for your own review of precedent literature that you will conduct for Assignments 7 and 8 in this course. Stage 2 is of no concern to us in this program as our capstone is LDRS 697/698 (Learning Integration Project), not a written research report. However, you should be aware that a major component of the research proposal is a thorough review of precedent literature. Stage 3 is a normal part of conducting research, intended to serve as a field test for the provisional research methods proposed. This stage will be of only peripheral interest to you as a consumer of research reports. Stages 4 and 5 are of vital interest to you as a consumer of research.

Stage 4 is entirely focused on the collection and analysis of data. There are many kinds of data, many ways to collect data, and many ways to analyze data. As a consumer of research, you must have at least a rudimentary understanding of these nuances in order to make value judgments that will ultimately determine the usefulness of the research. Everything for the researcher ultimately comes together in Stage 5, and you, as a consumer of research, will usually have only that research report available to you.

**Research Problem**

All good research begins with a good research problem. Plano-Clark and Creswell (2010) suggest that research problems “are the issues, controversies or concerns” that demand study (p. 81). They assert that these are often real problems that must be addressed. Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) assert that “defining the research problem usually determines the ultimate value of a research study more than any other factor” (p. 41). The authors go on to suggest that in identifying the research problem, the researcher should consider personal interest, the potential benefits to the researcher’s professional growth, and potential contribution of the research study to research knowledge. They suggest that all three criteria should be considered, with emphasis on the first and third.

Somewhat reflexively, a thorough review of precedent literature informs the identification of a good research problem. Gall, Gall and Borg suggest that through the process of the literature review the researcher ask themselves the following kinds of questions. (a) Has research on this problem been done before? (b) What has been learned? (c) What more can I contribute? (d) How do my methods compare to those employed by other researchers? (e) Are there more compelling research problems to be addressed (2007, p. 43)? All of these contribute to answering the ultimate question for any research: “So what?” As a consumer of research, these sorts of questions can help you identify a good research problem to focus your personal research interest. This narrowing of research interest, or research problem, is a process that is refined as you read over a variety of literature, including research reports, and is the foundation of Assignments #2 and #3 in this course.

**Precedent Literature Review**

The research problem establishes why a particular research study is worth doing, and the review of precedent literature supports this by establishing what is already known about the problem, and summarizes what scholarship has already established regarding the research problem. This has many facets that go beyond merely establishing the research purpose. As we will see, review of precedent literature affects in one way or another virtually every aspect of a research study and its final report. For that reason, one of the most important preliminary steps in the process of scholarly inquiry is doing a thorough review of the precedent academic literature on a given topic. A precedent literature review is the process of locating, obtaining, reading, and evaluating the research and theoretical literature in your area of interest. Bordens and Abbott (2005) outline several important reasons for a researcher to conduct a precedent literature review:

1. **To avoid needless duplication of effort**. By becoming familiar with an area of study through a review of the literature, the researcher can avoid “re-inventing the wheel”. The researcher’s specific question or topic may already have been thoroughly addressed and answered. In the case of research designed for application, a review of literature provides a rich resource of information upon which to draw and apply to the chosen context.
2. **To clarify the design of research.** Designing a study involves decisions regarding which concepts or variables are most germane and how to define, measure, or describe them. The published literature provides the researcher with a rich resource of information about each of these dimensions. The researcher may also find established procedures or existing materials (e.g., a survey tool) that would inform their research.
3. **To update the researcher on the current state of knowledge in a particular field.** Researchers must be up to date on current empirical or theoretical advances and controversies in a particular area.

Gall, Gall & Borg (2007, pp. 96-97) provide a similar but expanded list of reasons for the researcher to conduct a thorough review of precedent literature:

1. **Delimiting the research problem.** Generally, it is advantageous to the researcher to investigate a limited problem in depth as opposed to doing a superficial study over a broad area. Review of precedent research will give you insight into how other researchers have focused their inquiry within a broad field.
2. **Seeking new lines of inquiry.** A thorough review of precedent literature will not only reveal what has been done in a given area of interest, but will also, perhaps more importantly, reveal what has been overlooked. This is valuable information for a potential researcher, and is a major driver of new research.
3. **Avoiding fruitless approaches.** The cause of scholarship is not advanced by the multiplication of research studies based on the same methodological paradigm that continues to report no significant effect, and the researcher who adds to such a litany clearly demonstrates that he or she has not done an adequate review of precedent literature. As a wise and discerning consumer of research, you want to avoid wasting your time with fruitless approaches.
4. **Gaining methodological insights.** Researchers can find important ideas as to how they can design their research to be more fruitful. As a wise consumer of research, you may consider looking for reports using a variety of research methods.
5. **Identifying recommendations for further research.** For both the researcher and the discerning consumer of research, the section of research reports that makes recommendations for further research can be a gold mine.

A precedent literature review that is useful and instructive exhibits the following features: (a) the writer’s ***clarity*** of purpose and ***focus*** of the research question; (b) the ***thoroughness*** of the writer's search; (c) the ***quality and reliability*** of the writer's sources; (d) the degree to which the writer provides ***synthesis*** (i.e., relates research studies to one another and to the paper's thesis and purpose in meaningful ways); and (e) the ***objectivity*** of the writer in selecting, interpreting, organizing, and summarizing the research he or she has reviewed.

**Research Purpose**

The research problem establishes why a particular research study is worth doing, the review of precedent literature establishes what is already known about the problem, and the research purpose establishes what the research specifically intends to do. The research problem establishes why the research matters. The review of precedent literature summarizes what scholarship has established regarding the research problem. The research purpose succinctly states what the researcher actually intends to do. Typically, the normally few sentences of research purpose are further refined into a limited number of research questions or predictions (hypotheses) that the researcher hopes to address.

Taken together, these three common elements in introductions to research reports combine in such a way as to “pose significant questions that can be answered empirically” (Gall, Gall & Borg 2007, p. 35). As a consumer of research, you are vitally interested in the answers research reports offer to your significant questions.

Plano-Clark and Creswell contend that specifying a study purpose may be the most important step the entire research process (2015, p. 162). Identification of the research problem and review of precedent literature leads directly to specifying the purpose of the study. The purpose will then provide direction for selection of the research design, data collection, analysis of data in determining findings or results, and finally in the interpretation and evaluation of the research.

**References:**

Bordens, K., & Abbott, B. (2005). *Research design and methods: A process approach* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gall, M., Gall, J. & Borg, W. (2007). *Educational research.* Boston: Pearson.

Leedy, P., & Ormrod, J. (2010). *Practical research: Planning and design* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Plano-Clark, V. & Creswell, J. (2010). *Understanding research: A consumer’s guide.* Boston, MA: Merrill.

Plano-Clark, V., Creswell, J. (2015). *Understanding research: A consumer’s guide* (2nd ed.)*.* Boston, MA: Pearson

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| Assignment Instructions |
| **Immediately after class today, review the assigned readings, the instructor notes, and the PowerPoint(s) for today. Based on your reflections, prepare the following Reflection Brief.**  **Reflection Brief #1: Introductions to Research Reports (5% of course mark)**  (NB: This assignment is due today within an hour of the end of class.)  **Prepare a brief (250-300 word) response to the following:**  **The most important thing for me in the introduction section of a high-quality research report is . . .**  **Please post this reflective brief in the drop box under Day 4.**  **N.B. Group #1 will lead us in a discussion of Reflection Brief #1 first thing tomorrow morning (part of 10% of Individual Daily Engagement course final mark). See MyCourses for grouping details.**    **Assignment # 3 – Literature Review Search (15% of course mark)**  (NB: This assignment is due at midnight of Day 5.)  The purpose of this assignment is to develop the skills of literature search, retrieval and review. This assignment and Assignment #4 will be closely linked. This assignment will be your initial efforts at locating scholarly literature relevant to your professional concern, and Assignment #3 will be the final document that summarizes the findings of your review of precedent literature in scholarly prose, fully APA 6 format compliant.  **Literature Review Search Component Steps**   1. Write your problem statement in at most a few concise sentences (or question format). 2. Identify the searchable keywords and domains of social science that arise from your problem statement. 3. Locate 15 scholarly sources that are potentially relevant to your Literature Review in Assignment 3. Include at least two each of the following: books or e-books, journal articles, web-based documents. Build an exhaustive reference list of the sources you have used, formatted to APA 6 format requirements. Also, be sure this entire document is APA6 format compliant. 4. In several appropriately cited paragraphs each, do the following: (a) present a working knowledge summary of your topic (the basic facts required to make someone familiar with the topic to a limited extent) based on what you have discovered about the topic from your initial investigations of literature and (b) what the major issues and questions are that are being asked in the field. Finally, (c) present a brief statement outlining your personal professional interest in this topic. In essence, you are presenting a *working knowledge summary* of your topic (the basic facts required to make someone familiar with the topic to a limited extent) *based on what you have discovered about the topic from your own experiences and from the reference sources*. You will want to *superficially* describe the relevant issues subsumed in your problem statement, including the urgency, the controversies, and anything else that will convince your reader that your problem statement is worthwhile pursuing. Again, be sure to cite appropriately. |

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| Assignment Grading |
| **Assignments will be graded using the general rubric posted in the course outline for LDRS 591 in MyCourses and the specific reflection brief rubric provided on MyCourses.** |

1. © David Williaume 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)