Reviewer's report

Title: Clarifying differences between review designs and methods

Version: 1 Date: 27 January 2012

Reviewer: Judy Sebba

Reviewer's report:

1. The paper is a commentary on the need to clarify terminology in systematic reviewing. It addresses an important and timely issue. Systematic reviewing has been developing rapidly and strongly held views about it are slower to change. So for example in the social sciences there are still many people who believe that SR is only about quantitative experimental studies and are unaware of the developments in narrative review etc.

2. The arguments are clearly stated, logically ordered and well made. It is stimulating, interesting and challenging though certainly too technical to engage those unfamiliar with SR. I assume they would be less likely to be reading this journal and therefore this may be less of an issue?

3. The balance question is where I am struggling. Given the focus of this journal on biomedical research, I think the balance in the paper might be acceptable. However, the real need is not just to preach to the converted in biomedical research and I feel the paper is rather self referencing and self generating - many of the references are to these authors' own work and while they are undoubtedly leading authors in the field, a wider berth on the literature might have provided a broader appeal and challenged researchers from other disciplines.

Discretionary revisions

If the authors wish to attract a wider readership, the paper needs to reference a broader set of literature on systematic reviewing since the arguments are essentially conceptual and methodological. These authors know the field and I doubt they need the references from me but they know where to find me if they do!

e.g.


Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests