

4 Literature review

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Take one: Jonathon Ryan

The academic contribution and intellectual weight of a thesis are often assumed to lie in its findings and discussion chapters. An innovative methodology chapter may also attract attention. But who sings the praises of a fine literature review? To declare it the best part of a thesis might seem to damn the candidate with faint praise. Nevertheless, writing a strong literature review requires advanced scholarship, and weaknesses may seriously undermine the thesis. The candidate must demonstrate an expert command of their topic based on in-depth and critical understanding of previous studies and an appreciation of the broader concerns of the discipline. This involves mapping current knowledge in such a way that a research space is identified and a convincing case for the project is built. With close to five academic papers published *every minute* (Landhuis, 2016), this is a daunting proposition, especially with examiners being alert to omissions or misrepresentations of previous work and the inclusion of irrelevant material (Feak & Swales, 2009).

My own research focused on reference, specifically how speakers refer to people and objects and how errors and pragmatic infelicities occasionally result in miscommunication. As my examiners pointed out, I was effectively trying to tackle two PhD topics at once. I don't regret that – in fact, I'm pleased I did – but it did make for a complex review of the literature. In this first section of the chapter, I reflect on my own experience as a perhaps overly zealous reader grappling with the demands of an interdisciplinary topic.

The scope of reading

As much as I enjoyed doing my PhD, I was troubled throughout by the fear of not having read widely enough. This was reinforced by every article, talk, and supervision meeting that discussed apparently crucial works by scholars I had never heard of and about issues I had never considered. Matters were further exacerbated by reference being a highly productive topic within multi- and inter-disciplinary research (Devi et al., 2009), with relevant perspectives found in disciplines as diverse as linguistics, philosophy, psycholinguistics, cognitive

psychology, sociology, and social anthropology. While many studies of L2 reference need only look to the second language acquisition literature and the major linguistic-pragmatic theories of reference (e.g. Ariel, 1990), my focus on miscommunication required drawing heavily on key works in philosophy (e.g. Bach, 2008) and cognitive science (e.g. Kronfeld, 1990).

At the time, I happened to be writing a paper on García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Ryan, 2013), which includes a potent caution of the consequences of neglecting one's background reading: in the early 19th-century José Arcadio Buendía, patriarch of a remote village, spends months locked away in his study, working through the notes of a previous researcher and doing his own calculations by astrolabe, compass and sextant, and slowly driving himself to the brink of madness with his feverish, unrelenting work. Eventually, his findings coalesce into a frightening realisation whose gravity torments him until he mounts the courage to emerge from his room and announce:

The earth is round, like an orange.

(García Márquez, 1970, p. 5)

Stories, of course, are our oldest reservoirs of complex knowledge, and I needed little reminding that the truth of such extraordinary tales is likely to find parallels in academia. Perhaps the most notorious example is that of Tai (1994), whose paper in the premier journal *Diabetes Care* is said to have reinvented a solution fundamental to calculus for close to 400 years. The fallout likely discouraged her from further publication (it appears she has only published one subsequent paper). With the benefit of experience, I now see Tai's experience as a very unfortunate statistical anomaly; even with due diligence, it will occasionally happen to *someone*. But, like airline travel, the occasional high-profile case can create an inflated sense of the real risk.

A related source of worry is the feeling that someone, somewhere, is working on the same problem and must be slightly nearer completion. This does of course occur. A visiting scholar during my studies recounted his experience (Chris Hall, personal communication): years earlier, with his thesis in German linguistics nearly finished, he spotted in a bookshop a new monograph on *exactly* the same topic. Here was a rival scholar delivering the answer that might render his work irrelevant. Alarm bells clanging,¹ he bought and read the book with a growing sense of agitation. However, as his supervisor later pointed out, the book took an entirely different angle from that of his thesis. Of course it did. In our field, if you placed the same research question in front of ten doctoral candidates, they would produce ten very distinct theses, and there would likely be room for all of them.² In the humanities, findings can rarely be expressed in a crisp statement, calculation or a formula; they are complex, thesis-long macro-arguments with multiple interlocking sub-points. The risks, then, of such circumstances derailing your project are probably far less than they may seem.

There was, however, another aspect of Tai's fate that also inflamed my tendency to over-read: the scorn and contempt with which she was treated. Similar

treatment appears much too common. Applied linguists will be familiar with the extraordinary backlash and hostility directed towards Stephen Krashen. In Wheeler's (2003, 2004) account, Krashen had become one of the field's most influential figures of the 1980s and had a guru-like following. His work, however, was repeatedly savaged for being simplistic and for making unverifiable claims cloaked in scientific terminology. Even if the ensuing backlash was inevitable, it had an extraordinary "viciousness and personal nature" (Wheeler, 2004, p. 126). To be fair, Krashen's reputation has been largely rehabilitated (see, e.g. de Bot, 2015), but it is hard to forget the ridicule to which he was subjected.

When the fallout can become this nasty, I was understandably determined to have all bases covered. This was not a matter of *imposter syndrome*, as has been reported elsewhere among doctoral students (Watson & Betts, 2010). I recall no feelings of self-doubt and I did not feel like an outsider.³ *Perfectionist self-presentation* (Cowie et al., 2018) is closer to my experience but not quite right either: although I was determined to complete the doctorate, I felt comfortable with my limitations and was relatively open about my various missteps and blunders (see, e.g. Ryan & Gass, 2012). Rather, my feelings are probably best characterised as not wanting to 'bring a pea-shooter to a gun fight'. From undergraduate level onwards, students are enculturated in what Tannen (2002) describes as a ritualised adversarial stance within academia, in which "intellectual interchange is conceptualized as a metaphorical battle" and where "vitriolic attacks and sarcastic innuendo" can be commonplace (p. 1655). In undergraduate courses, tutors – no doubt bored with marking – seemed to reserve highest praise for the most strident critiques. My critical skills were being honed writing for an audience of one – the tutor – and I was safe from the repercussions of presenting ideas publicly. But, now as a PhD candidate, facing examination and peer review, the gloves would be off.

I remember vividly my first international conference: after a young, newly minted PhD presented her work, two audience members ripped into her, overstepping any line of decency in her public humiliation.⁴ Failing to fully appreciate the misogyny at play, I imagined that submitting a thesis – and ultimately launching it into the public domain – was to invite a similarly withering attack. I came to some conclusions, starting with a decision to never be *that* kind of academic (a.k.a. 'Reviewer 2', Peterson, 2020); after all, there are numerous gracious and decent academics to emulate. I also realised that any soft spots needed serious reinforcement, and I further concluded that my main defence was a solid understanding of *all* the relevant literature.

This drove me into an immoderate and overblown review of the literature, fearful of missing the one crucial piece of the puzzle that would either pre-empt or critically undermine my arguments. I read broadly and deeply. I spent thousands of hours underlining, highlighting, and note-taking. I cited 355 sources but read many more. Though this number is not extraordinary, from a quick and informal survey of eight doctoral studies on a similar topic, it is 22% more than the next largest (291), double the median (172), and five times the shortest

(75). The point is, I could have considered fewer works and perhaps shaved a few months from my studies while also probably enhancing the quality of the thesis.⁵

It is worth reiterating that the candidate's goal should be to demonstrate a detailed, in-depth, and critical understanding of the topic and to situate it within the broader concerns of the field. This involves articulating and critiquing theory and providing a map of known and presumed knowledge, from which a promising research focus and methodology can be identified.⁶ Presumably, the longest and most complex literature reviews will be those that are more exploratory and/or more multi-disciplinary.

In my case, despite perhaps being overly ambitious, overall, I do feel that my obsessive reading has paid off in the long term. Resonating with my experience is Lantsoght's (2018, pp. 59–60) description of the stages in becoming a more skilled academic reader; having dedicated many hours to it, I can now read faster and more effectively and over a wider range of disciplines. And I enjoyed it. I recall my chief supervisor remarking that the PhD is possibly the only time in your career that you get to read so widely and in such depth over a sustained period. This certainly echoes my experience and that of others I have talked to, and we frequently lament not being able to keep up with new publications.

The art of reading and the art of writing about it

My initial academic interest in language was sparked not by language learning or teaching but by doing undergraduate philosophy, so I leapt at the opportunity to join a graduate course on Grice's (1989) theory of implicature. I was impressed not only by *what* we read but also by the *way* we read. In applied linguistics, I had become accustomed to reading widely, with a twin focus on extracting the main details from an article and articulating a response. There was an emphasis on coverage, ensuring a broad sweep over a wide range of key topics. The graduate philosophy course was very different. I recall us reading only a handful of articles over the whole semester, but the approach was painstaking. After closely reading an article at home, our small class would convene once a week for a couple of hours of meticulous line by line analysis of the argument, always on a high state of alert for anything fuzzy, any flaw in the argument, any hint of sophistry.

I am not meaning to imply that applied linguists don't read critically; they do. But the emphasis and process are different, stressing synthesis of the literature, analysis of the research design, analysis of data, interpretation of findings, and the development of subsequent arguments (Porte, 2002). Since philosophy relies not on empirical data but on rational argument, it focuses much more intently than other disciplines on establishing precise definitions and premises, and from these, inferring logical conclusions (Baggini & Fosl, 2010). Since philosophy's step-by-step construction and validation of arguments depend entirely on reason, the elements of each argument need to be scrutinised to an extraordinary degree.

In my doctoral research, I mainly took the applied linguists' approach, but on one occasion in particular, faced with a sense of crisis, I switched mode. I was nearly a year into my project when I became hopelessly confused about how

different papers and their claims related to each other. The closer I looked, the more confusing this became. I felt a rising sense of panic over the realisation that I had no idea what *reference* meant. Reference, remember, was the central concept in my thesis. The trouble was partly one of interdisciplinarity: few writers outside philosophy precisely defined what they counted as reference, and there was often a misalignment in what they considered to be referential phenomena. This was done without comment and with very little of the underlying criteria made explicit. What made sense from the perspective of (mis)communication was a much narrower range of phenomena than what most linguists were considering. I was baffled.

I managed to free myself from this morass through the reading approach instilled during those philosophy classes. I found writers casually borrowing concepts from other disciplines without recognising that they were logically incompatible with their own perspective. I proceeded by identifying a core definition of reference (based on Bach, 2008) that made sense in terms of (mis)communication and then set about carefully examining key works, scrutinising arguments and claims, footnotes and reference lists, and, in particular, dissecting the examples. My literature review ultimately proposed a way of reconciling these different views through a new conceptual framework, which felt to me a particularly satisfying outcome and a solid contribution of the thesis.

Writing all this up was tricky. My supervisors encouraged me to write extensively right from the beginning, on the grounds that the process of writing helps develop one's thinking. It was write-to-think as well as write-as-you-think. Both fine writers themselves, they provided very detailed feedback on academic writing style and this prepared me well for subsequent publishing. Looking back, however, I do have a hesitation about the approach to these early drafts. I would be submitting draft literature reviews long before I had read enough and so ended up writing hundreds of thousands of words that bore little resemblance to the final document. While this does provide useful practice, it is often harder to adequately re-shape a long and flawed chapter than it is to tear it up and start again. Several years later, I talked to a PhD student who had the complete opposite approach: she planned exactly what to say before doing any writing.⁷

It is also worth keeping in mind that literature reviews typically require substantial revision once the findings and discussion take shape. In my case, having read so much and spent so much time writing about it, I was overly attached to an unnecessarily lengthy review: while Lantsoght (2018) mentions an ideal of "condensing it into an overview of 10–20 pages" (p. 71), mine was a bloated 106 pages with a further 51 pages relegated to the appendices. My feeling now is that not only did too much time go into researching and writing it, but that it became such an unwieldy document that it took an inordinate amount of time to work into shape. If I were to do it again, I would be advocating for the early drafts to include more note-like or bullet-pointed sections, with fewer fully written passages. Only towards the end of the project would I try to produce a fully written draft.

Reflection

As I began my PhD, a small informal coffee group formed among postgraduate linguistics and applied linguistics students. There, a comment was made which has stuck with me: *every PhD is different*. Reflecting on this now, I recognise that our PhD journeys differed not only along dimensions, such as topic, methodology, and data, but also our previous studies, our academic and non-academic strengths and limitations, our supervision, our identities and cultural capital, and our other life circumstances. Although I see this in broader terms now, what struck me at the time was the implication that what worked for others might not work for me. I would need to negotiate my own path. Now, as a supervisor, I know that my students may engage with each stage of their PhD or master's journey in very different ways, and my own preferences may not suit them. However, if I could offer one piece of advice to all, I would emphasise the intellectual luxuriousness of being a PhD student, able to read in extraordinary depth and breadth, and I would urge you to revel in it.

Take two: Yi Wang

The literature review is “typically the first research activity” in a PhD project (Lantsoght, 2018, p. 55). Hart (1998) defines it as selecting available documents on the nature of the topic and way of investigation and effectively evaluating the documents for the research being proposed. Ridley (2012) illustrates the role of literature review as “describing the bigger picture” of “a complicated jigsaw puzzle” in which “your research is a small piece” (p. 6). He further highlights the “continuous” nature of the literature review process from the start of developing the research idea to the completion of the thesis' final draft (p. 175). Among the number of key aspects discussed in relation to how to conduct a literature review (e.g. Hart, 1998; Lantsoght, 2018; Ridley, 2012), three were crucial to my own PhD experience: broad and deep reading, logical and critical thinking, and accurate and concise writing.

The earlier paragraph is a mini literature review on the ‘literature review’ – the topic of this chapter. I began my section this way with a dual purpose: providing basic information on the concept of the literature review and illustrating a few relevant skills which worked well for me in my own PhD project (see Chapter 6). The highlights here are: first, selecting salient source readings; second, extracting pertinent points and presenting them in a logical manner (my favourite structure being the powerful *what-why-how*); and, last but not least, mapping out thematic connections (between the whole project, the chapter under discussion, and the focus of this section).

Starting to read

At the earlier stages of the PhD road, I was far from able to read, think, or write as described earlier; by this, I refer to the time prior to data collection when,

as many advised (e.g. Dunne, 2011; Ridley, 2012), a comprehensive literature review should be largely established. In fact, during the first five months after conditional enrolment, there was only a moderate further development of the literature writing. Several reasons contributed to this. First, right from the beginning of the PhD study, I was working part-time (teaching ten hours per week), which occupied a lot of time. Also time- and energy-consuming were studying and writing up an application for human research ethics, approval of which was a premise for confirmed enrolment. In terms of the reading of literature itself, I was by no means ‘a zealous reader’ (as Jonathon has described himself), without mentioning that the literature was academic and mostly in English. Prior to the PhD study, my reading of English was mainly for ESOL teaching purposes, text length rarely exceeding 1,000 words, and the nature of reading more intensive than extensive.

The last reason (which sometimes I think is a devastating one) relates to a misunderstanding of the place of extant literature in grounded theory, which was the guiding principle for my data analysis. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explicitly advised against conducting a literature review at an early stage of the research process, calling upon researchers “literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study” (p. 37). Although a number of scholars (e.g. Denzin, 2002; McGhee et al., 2007) showed strong disagreement with this stance and argued for the need to undertake an early literature review, in my case, due to limited time, I took the delaying stance for self-reassurance. As a consequence, much of my reading was more reactive than proactive – that is, getting onto reading on a certain point as and when the need arose. This was different from the way Jonathon dealt with his reading – he ‘revelled’ in it ‘over a sustained period’ and swept a wide range of topics. The way I responded to reading caused much stress – I panicked at the time, feeling like a soldier on the frontline already, with the necessary weapon not yet prepared.

Reading broadly

Nevertheless, with extra effort, I did manage to read fairly broadly and deeply. In terms of the breadth of reading, an effective starting point is to identify the leading authorities on the key concepts involved in the project. Here, direct recommendations from supervisors are of great help (Lantsoght, 2018). In this sense, I was very fortunate. Both concepts under investigation, learner autonomy and teacher cognition, were mature research fields with well-established scholars (Phil Benson and Simon Borg, respectively) and widely recognised works, including books and state-of-the-art review articles. By engaging with this literature, a number of other scholars were identified together with their publications, and the reading became horizontally broad. For others such as Henri Holec and David Little on learner autonomy, I traced their earlier works, where necessary and possible, back to the very first one. Also, following Benson’s (2001) book, I traced the origins of the concept of learner autonomy. These steps expanded

my reading in a vertical direction. Furthermore, I went over all these processes with relevant literature written in the Chinese language, including the conceptual origin of autonomy (Lao Tzu, 6th Century BC). As the reading proceeded, its overall organisation took shape: a network of vertical and horizontal lines, from current to earlier works, from one scholar to another, and from the West to China. This organisation subsequently guided and facilitated my thinking and, later on, the writing.

Reading intensively and critically

Reading in depth bears some resemblance with intensive reading. By intensive, I mean a detailed discourse analysis from the overall structure of the text (and background information when necessary) to paragraphs and syntactic structures then to vocabulary. Nation (1993) has long been an advocate for using intensive reading for vocabulary development, and I did need to enlarge my bank of academic vocabulary. I visualised a text as a tree – the whole as well as each branch and leaf. A further benefit of intensive reading, drawing on the tree image, is that it has been greatly helpful in many other aspects of PhD work, especially in the final construction of the whole thesis. With the literature review then, I analysed in great detail some key articles (e.g. the empirical studies on teachers' beliefs and practices about learner autonomy). I also used NVivo 10 for literature review and found considerable similarities between synthesising literature and analysing qualitative data – both processes of disassembling, labelling, comparing and contrasting, and finally reassembling (see also Chapter 6).

Critical thinking is a critical part of conducting the literature review, a skill that Chinese students reportedly struggle with (Tian & Low, 2011; Zhang, 2017). At the early stage of the PhD, it was indeed a big challenge for me. I remember the feeling of total loss at the very first meeting with my supervisor when he gave me an article to read and make critical comments. It was not published in a highly ranked journal – in which case the article could be too highly developed to allow easy 'criticism' (my confusion at the time with the term 'critique') – and the author's background, as a Chinese university lecturer, was close to mine. However, I had no clue as to where to start and how to critique. I had never been trained for this. On this issue, my supervisors' support with scaffolded activities worked. First, they provided sample annotated readings, containing full references, key points, and critical questions. Then, they suggested articles for me to read followed by face-to-face meetings during which they asked me questions. After that, the control was handed over to me to select articles to read, annotate, summarise, and ask questions, followed by discussions at supervisory meetings when, very often, they asked more critical (and more challenging) questions. This became the norm of dealing with new readings, and it continued for five months or so, during which my understanding and practice with critical analysis strengthened. My own habitual intensive text analysis also contributed positively.

Writing the literature review

The final stage was writing up the literature review chapter, a further and bigger challenge I had to face. While Jonathon somewhat regretted having written too much and considered that early-stage writing may be better in bullet points than in full, my problem was totally the opposite: a great deal of my early literature review writing was in bullet points, which I struggled to put together into coherent sections or paragraphs. I now know why: I am ‘a map person’ – similar to the tree image I portrayed earlier – and I have a strong inclination to take control and not get lost. I need to be clear at all times as to where I am and where I am going. For this tendency, bullet points do present a much clearer picture than pages of full prose. However, what I needed, but did not do well at the time, was to write up at least some of the points in a timely manner and on a regular basis. In further comparison with Jonathon’s experience, I also have a tendency towards perfectionistic self-presentation (Cowie et al., 2018), but unlike him, unfortunately I did also suffer from imposter syndrome (Watson & Betts, 2010). I endeavoured to write as best I could; before putting a sentence on paper, I carefully thought about its structure, coherence and cohesion, and even more so about phrasing – I had at least three dictionaries open all the time to check meaning, collocation, and synonyms. However, very often I denied my judgements, deleted the efforts, and ended up with little or no production.

Reflection

Wrapping up this section, I endorse Jonathon’s compliment to PhD reading as ‘intellectual luxuriousness’. In addition to reading widely and deeply, I’d also like to emphasise the significance of being proactive and staying focused at the early stage. This will lay a firm foundation and provide confidence for the candidate throughout the project. When it comes to writing, I admire Jonathon’s practice of ‘write-to-think as well as write-as-you-think’, and I hope that, as time goes, this is a game I can play with increasing ease.

Take three: Angel M. Y. Lin

I read with great interest the contrastive accounts written by Jonathon and Yi. I cannot remember how I approached the literature review writing task when I was a graduate student 30 years ago. However, I can see Jonathon and Yi’s approaches as possibly occupying different counterpoints on a spectrum of different approaches to doing the literature review. Cultural background and capital, as Jonathon puts it in his endnote, do seem to shape the approaches that different doctoral students take. Later, I outline several themes that have emerged in my over 20 years of experience supervising PhD students. I then discuss some implications and suggestions for PhD candidature.

The interdisciplinary literature review and the 'meta-theoretical stance'

Jonathon's strategy is an example of an interdisciplinary approach, especially when he discusses how he sorts out the different meanings that different authors may give to a term, without explicitly defining it, in different disciplines. His job is then that of sorting out, comparing and contrasting, and in the end developing his own theoretical framework to negotiate terms used by different researchers located in different theoretical traditions. Jonathon's training in philosophy helped him in this work, as he went 'meta' – that is, going beyond any single discipline and developing a meta-theoretical framework to map out different ways of understanding the same term.

However, doing the interdisciplinary literature review requires not only time and energy but also what I would call a 'meta-theoretical stance'. What is a meta-theoretical stance? I would define it as an orientation to seeing any specific theory from a discipline as located on a broader philosophical map of different ontological and epistemological commitments, for instance, seeing reality as socio-historically and discursively constructed by social actors (a social constructivist theoretical commitment), or seeing reality as objectively existing out there to be discovered (a positivist theoretical commitment). In order for a doctoral candidate to locate any specific theory from any discipline on this broader ontological and epistemological map, which I would call a 'meta-theoretical' map, they need to have a philosophical understanding of this broader map in the first place. However, in much of the doctoral preparation work in Applied Linguistics, this basic philosophical preparation is often missing at worst or piecemeal at best. I often ask my PhD students this question: "Why is your degree called a Doctor of Philosophy, and not just a Doctor of Education, or a Doctor of Applied Linguistics?" It is this deep engagement with philosophical ideas that is required in doing a PhD.

'Criticality' and finding one's own voice

As Yi commented, Chinese students are often stereotyped as 'not being critical enough'. However, rather than saying that we need to give Chinese students more training in critical thinking, I'd like to pose some more fundamental questions: What counts as criticality, and what enables criticality? Rather than saying that doctoral students need more cognitive training in critical thinking skills, I would instead say that we need to engage our doctoral students in understanding how one's own subjectivity and identity (or sense of who we are and how we should relate to self and others) have been shaped by our sociohistorical and sociocultural experiences, or what is commonly termed 'socialisation'. Sharing some cultural background with my students, I can understand how unsettling it can feel for a doctoral candidate to 'critique' an established authority in a theory or discipline. The issue is not really 'lack of criticality' *per se* but is perhaps, more profoundly, that of finding one's own voice among the authoritative 'theoretical figures' and feeling comfortable in joining in a discussion with these figures.

In a sense, writing the literature review involves not only writing about theories and joining in a discussion, but rather, it also entails dialoguing with the already established participants of these discussions as a ‘newcomer’, and feeling confident, comfortable, and emotionally secure enough to offer one’s opinion as worthy of being listened to – in short, to have a voice in these ongoing discussions.

While this is not secret knowledge, and many introductory literature review textbooks (e.g. Swales & Feak, 2000) have talked about writing the literature review as joining in an ongoing discussion in the field about a specific topic, not all doctoral students would feel the same kind of confidence about their status as a ‘legitimate speaker’ in this ‘conversation’. This brings us back to the notion that Jonathon refers to in one of his endnotes: the family capital or cultural capital that a doctoral student brings to the task of writing the literature review.

Cultural capital and supervisor–supervisee reflexivity

Jonathon has family members who have been academics, and he also had philosophical training – I would see both as forms of cultural capital that enable him to adopt a meta-theoretical stance in doing an interdisciplinary literature review, finding his own voice, and developing a theoretical framework to critically discuss different interdisciplinary theories as his original contribution to the field. To this discussion, I would like to add my observation that a woman scholar/doctoral student of colour coming from a non-Western cultural background could easily find herself in a situation like that of trying to join in a cocktail party crowded with white Western scholars who are old timers of some established scholarly communities, whose theoretical jargon she might be working hard to understand and use, in order to gain the status of a legitimate peripheral participant (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). If her supervisor can share with her some cultural capital (such as introducing her to some people at the party, or featuring her work through co-authoring or co-presenting), this would ease her entry into these communities of practice. As she gains more capital and confidence, she can become less of an LPP and more of a legitimate or even core member of these research communities. However, for her to develop her own voice and to make her original contribution, both the supervisor’s and the doctoral candidate’s critical reflexivity is needed – that is, negotiating the identity and positionality of new researchers in established communities and working towards increasing participatory opportunities for these new members. The supervisor and the supervisee need to work as an egalitarian team critically reflecting on and sharing each other’s blind spots so that the supervisor–supervisee relationship is one of mutual enrichment rather than that of a one-way transmission of knowledge. As Laura has put it so aptly in the introduction: “Identities encompass both how individuals see (and strive to position) themselves, and the reflexive, mutually-constitutive relationship that this has with how individuals are seen and positioned by others”. The supervisor and the supervisee are in a mutually constitutive relationship. This reminds me of my own PhD supervisor, Dr. James Heap, at OISE, University of Toronto, and what he said at the end of my oral defence in June 1996 – “Angel

has enriched me”. It is in deep gratitude to my own supervisor that I am dedicating this piece of writing to him. I hope I am as good a supervisor to my students as my supervisor has been to me.

Reflective questions

- What are the aims of a literature review in a PhD thesis?
- Which of the three approaches to writing a literature review, as discussed in this chapter, is closest to your own experience?
- What is meant by ‘cultural capital’?
- How may scholars gain or share cultural capital related to the academic demands of doctoral study? How do these questions apply to your local context?

Notes

- 1 I confess to some artistic license: Chris’s phrasing was “quite concerned” (personal communication, June 26, 2020).
- 2 It is, however, only fair to mention a counterexample also from Chris: his friend was at an advanced stage of a PhD thesis on an obscure Early Modern German author when he too found a newly published book on the same topic. He felt he had no choice but to abandon the topic and switch to a new one. The moral of *this* anecdote is that there is risk in focusing too narrowly on a single minor figure or artefact.
- 3 Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of *habitus*, I recognise a degree of cultural capital here: through my extended family, such as an uncle who had been a senior lecturer at the same university, I was reasonably familiar with and comfortable in the company of academics (or, at least, those hippy ones).
- 4 I vowed to intervene next time. In the years since, I have occasionally searched the three parties involved online and there seems to be some cosmic justice: the presenter’s career has blossomed, easily the most successful of the three, while that of the main aggressor sank without trace.
- 5 Still, experienced scholars often do much more extensive reviews. Kelly (1969) helpfully numbered his list of 1,171 primary sources and 226 secondary sources. Life is too short to attempt manually counting those in Ellis (2008).
- 6 There are many more detailed descriptions available, but see Bitchener (2010) for a helpfully detailed yet concise account.
- 7 The downside, she noted, was that she tended to procrastinate.

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