Reviewer's report

Title: A qualitative systematic review of the literature on Normalization Process Theory in use

Version: 2 Date: 31 July 2013

Reviewer: Stacy M Carter

Reviewer's report:

Dear Authors

Thank you for the opportunity to read your manuscript, which addresses an interesting set of questions. It is extremely gratifying to see theory taken seriously, and even more gratifying to see a study of how theory makes a difference to research practice. This set of questions—about how a theory has been used by others—is in my experience quite an original approach for a review. Overall I thought the study was well executed and manuscript extremely well written and presented. I have few comments for this reason.

Major Compulsory Revisions

I wavered on whether to put these comments under major or discretionary revisions. I decided to call them major revisions because I thought they were important enough at least to warrant a conversation with the editors about how to proceed.

Your use of a Framework approach to organise your review is completely reasonable. However I have some questions about the Framework and how you are presenting the information that you summarised into it.

First, you have provided a lot of tables, but not your Framework table, or your final index. You provide some information about what ended up in your index (e.g. the central constructs from the theory) but not a complete account. Could you provide your Framework table as a supplement, and perhaps your index as a figure?

Related to this, I have a question about your third objective: “to understand … the reported benefits, if any, of using NPT.” You note in your methodological critique that “reviews are one step removed from the primary data and therefore we rely on the authors’ reports of benefits and limitations of NPT usage, which could be limited or sanitised versions of their experience.” I agree with this critique (although note that your summary of authors’ reports is interesting nonetheless).

However I’m assuming your overall aim, guiding objective 3, was to determine whether or not it’s useful to use NPT in intervention research. Your own critical analysis and synthesis of the findings of the papers you reviewed would help to meet this aim, at least as well as an analysis of the authors’ comments about
NPT. I didn’t come away from this review with any sense of what NPT has contributed to the literature so far. It would be my preference to see some substantive material included, in addition to the more ‘meta’ account that you have provided.

Minor Essential Revisions

You use the acronym NPT in the abstract without spelling out first.

On p6, your comment on Ref 16: this seems to refer to communities of practice – worth using the formal term?

P8 You might want to mention that PICO doesn’t neatly fit your research questions and discuss how you have modified it in the table.

All the best with this interesting manuscript.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.