Reviewer’s report

Title: What are the applications of social constructivist learning theories in knowledge translation for healthcare professionals: a scoping review

Version: 2 Date: 8 September 2013

Reviewer: Tim Rapley

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Major

Page 5: I think the discussion around ‘theory’ is clearly key and its role, especially a theory that emerged outwith the domain of social psychology. However, are we always talking in the same language in relation to what we actually mean by ‘theory’? For example, within health psychology, theory such as ‘theory of planned behavior’ is not equivalent to how sociologists (and others) always think about and actually use theory. Something like TPB was created in and around the norm that a theory that is something is testable, with discrete constructs, which can offer predictions etc. However, the routes of social constructivism (and many others, be it one of the range of social constructionist theories, or symbolic interactionism, or actor-network theory etc …) is radically different. Alongside this, the enactment of the theory is also radically different. TPB has a set of routinized courses of action, a set of limits on its use and as such you can spot, at a glance, whether they are doing (something like) TPB. Whereas with social constructivism, your review demonstrates the wide range of ways aspects of the theory is enacted. So, a long sentence to say something simple (sorry).

Page 5: Relatedly, you need to make very clear the difference between social constructivism and social constructionist – especially as I suspect that some readers would assume they are the same thing. And also, in relation to this, that neither is ‘one’ thing, that social constructivism is not a united uniform, rule-bound approach, but rather an epistemology that has been used, adapted and built on, in a range of ways. Clearly social constructivism (and in its fellow-travelling ‘ist’ form) has a core narrative but the enactment is plural, ad hoc and varied.

Page 5 (and beyond): You also need to highlight what is unique to social constructivism. With many of the articles you review, the claims and outcomes they make echo work in a range of areas that does purport to draw on social constructivism. So for example, the role of evidence/knowledge-in-action as something beyond ‘research’ (to include tacit, experiential etc), is something that has been discussed at length in a range of work, and has been central to the critique of EBM for a range of approaches – from the early work of Tanenbaum, to Gabbay and Le May’s ethnography to things like Mykhalovskyi and Weir overview, to the SSM section in 2006 (Volume 62, Issue 11 which overall, the
quality of argument varies) and many beyond.

Page 17-18: I’m not sure why you are criticizing the papers for not highlighting the specific components of the KTA framework. Why should they? Why should they be aware of it, especially as some are prior to its growth? Also you highlight that KTA ‘falls within the social constructionist paradigm’ – but following the quote you offer, so do a wide range of theories – including ANT, ethnomethodology, third generation symbolic interactionism, and a range of approaches to social constructionism. Overall, I’m unsure what this whole paragraph is trying to do here, especially in this section of the paper.

Minor

Page 3: I think you also need to mention here, or somewhere, the MRC framework on complex interventions – where they also promote theory as a central part of designing and evaluating interventions.

References


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