Reviewer's report

Title: Lessons learned from the AFLY5 RCT process evaluation: Implications for the design of physical activity and nutrition interventions in schools

Version: 1

Date: 24 July 2015

Reviewer: Ben Smith

Reviewer's report:

The kinds of process evaluation presented in this manuscript are an important and often underdeveloped aspect of intervention research. Potentially they can offer valuable insights for research and practice. This is a nicely written report of a process evaluation of a school-based diet and physical activity intervention, that gives a clear and systematic presentation of its findings. That said, there are several areas in which it could be strengthened or further developed, as set out below.

Major revisions

1. The study needs to be better contextualised in relation to what is already known about effective health promotion within school settings, with clarification in the Introduction of how it addresses research needs, and consideration in the Discussion of what it adds to existing knowledge. A body of relevant research that the authors need to better engage with, particularly as it seems to present very similar findings and recommendations to those given in this manuscript, concerns health promoting schools. The authors will be able to select relevant publications from this literature, and some to consider are:


2. There are details about the process evaluation that are not provided in the methods section, with reference made to another manuscript that is undergoing review [ref 18]. Given that it is not clear when and in what form the other process evaluation manuscript will be published, it would be helpful to readers for important details about the methods to be provided here. These include the sampling and recruitment of teachers and students, the procedures for data...
collection (locations, timing and duration, research personnel), and an outline of the questions asked of respondents.

3. In the Results section there are two sections (lines 267-270, and lines 329-335) where it is not clear whether we are reading the author’s interpretation and recommendations, or comments from study respondents. If it is the former then the authors should adopt the style of integrated results and discussion more consistently, whereas if it is the latter then it should be clearer that the points were made by respondents.

Minor essential revisions

4. In addition to the above, there are several quotes given that seem to add little value to what is provided by other quotes and accompanying summaries. Those which could be removed are on lines: 163-165; 177-178; 204-205; 379-381; 404-406.

5. Add “a” before “project champion” on line 436

6. Ref 24 is referred to as a systematic review on line 452, whereas it is not.

Discretionary revisions

7. In the Introduction the authors state that the AFLY5 intervention was not found to be efficacious, and go on to say that the process evaluation from this study would offers insights that could lead to more effective diet and physical activity interventions (lines 102-105). The lingering question that this reader had as the Results were presented was to what extent the findings were directly relevant to the AFLY5 intervention. The Discussion includes some comments about possible improvements to the AFLY5 intervention, but these could be elaborated upon further, with consideration of whether these issues may explain the lack of efficacy found in the RCT.

8. Some phrases and terms may be unfamiliar to an international readership, as they were to this reviewer. For instance “lower down the school” (lines 273-274) presumably means in earlier grades at school, and “homeworks” (lines 356,358) means homework.

9. On lines 463-464 the authors refer to the need for “greater recognition at the policy level of the importance of diet and physical activity”, which is somewhat vague and could be improved by a more concrete recommendation.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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