Reviewer’s report

Title: Implementation of health promotion programmes in schools: An approach to understand the influence of contextual factors on the process?

Version: 1  Date: 13 Jun 2017

Reviewer: Sara Kirk

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting manuscript and research idea. It is an important topic and one which requires more emphasis in the literature. However, a few things need to be addressed by the authors to enhance the manuscript before it sufficient for publication.

General:

This is an interesting and important topic and the authors have done a good job of framing the manuscript around realist evaluation as an over-arching framework. The approach taken is timely and has potential to advance the field and the manuscript merits publication. Our main critiques are around the completeness of the literature review, which is missing some more recent publications in this field and the language and flow of the paper. For example, while this manuscript is focused on health promotion in schools, there is no reference to the WHO Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework. While there is not much research in this area, there are published studies that have sought to better understand HPS implementation, including our own work dating back to 2013 (see for example, McIsaac JL, Hernandez K, Kirk SFL, Curran J. (2016). Intervention functions to support the implementation of health promoting schools: A scoping review. International Journal of Environmental Research in Public Health, 13(2), 200. doi:http://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/13/2/200; McIsaac JL, Mumtaz Z, Veugelers PJ, Kirk SFL. (2015). Providing Context to the Implementation of Health Promoting Schools: A Case Study. Evaluation and Program Planning, 53, 65-71; McIsaac JL, Storey K, Veugelers PJ, Kirk SFL. (2015). Applying theoretical components to the implementation of health promoting schools. Health Education Journal, 74(2), 131-143). Using HPS as the over-arching framework would therefore be consistent with published literature, while also helping to increase clarity. If HPS was not used in the study, this is an important limitation that needs to be stated in the relevant section of the manuscript.

As written, the manuscript is quite difficult to follow, uses a lot of jargon and requires copy-editing to ensure appropriate grammar and syntax, as it is awkwardly worded in places. This may be a result of translation from French to English language. For example, some parts of the introduction and methods are written in future tense, whereas past tense would be more appropriate. There are three main foci to the paper as currently structure; 1) contextual factors; 2) realist evaluation; and 3) Content-Mechanism-Outcome. Each of these could form a separate
manuscript since the three sections do not transition well. Alternatively, more attention to describe each of these with more clarity, along with a clear section on how they fit together, may help with this.

Title:

The title, while descriptive is lengthy and could be shortened without losing specificity.

Abstract:

Well written but may need to be revisited if additional revisions are made, to ensure that it reflects these.

Introduction:

Clear and appropriate motivation for the study is articulated. The research focus outlined in the methods section could be more clearly highlighted in the introduction. We would suggest adding more emphasis on Pawson and Tilley’s framework for the purpose of background content. There has also been recent work on implementation of health promoting schools approaches as noted above.

Methods:

The Methods section is confusing. Although it is helpful to include working definitions, this section and the following ones do not hang together and some of the background described here could be moved to the introduction to improve readability. It may also be helpful to provide a figure that outlines the process taken, both to reduce the amount of text and to highlight where the theory and reality diverge.

The four steps from realist evaluation are not clearly described. For example, step 2 is missing detailed information and there is not enough detail provided for other investigators to replicate the study.
Results:

This section is interesting but, again, difficult to follow, as stated above. We suggest copy-editing to ensure that the flow of the manuscript is maintained. This includes being consistent with how constructs are presented. If a figure is introduced, as suggested above, this may help to guide the reader through the process more clearly so that the key results can be easily identified.

Discussion and conclusions:

Authors have answered their research question, and the conclusions drawn from the results section are justified. The significance of the study is explained and the contextual factors outlined in the discussion advance the understanding of health promoting schools implementation (especially noted in the school level combination). Limitations are stated but could be more clearly described and linked with the literature. It is also usual to include strengths of the work, e.g., the fact that this is based on a nationally implemented approach in France.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
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