Reviewer's report

Title: Teasing apart 'the tangled web' of influence of policy dialogues: Lessons from a case study of dialogues about healthcare reform options for Canada

Version: 0 Date: 23 Dec 2016

Reviewer: Bev Holmes

Reviewer's report:

Thanks for the opportunity to review this paper, which is on the important topic of policy dialogues and their potential to support development of evidence-based policy. While I think there is a solid contribution in here, I feel that the paper as structured reads too much like an evaluation of the policy dialogues by attendees, and that the promise to "contribute to the literature about the capacities that can be gained by participating in a policy dialogue, and elaborate mechanisms by which the capacities developed may influence policy processes" is not fully realized. There are some very good points here, but they seem to be somewhat buried in ideas or suppositions that are already well-recognized or seem self-evident.

To elaborate, the first sentence of your discussion doesn't do your good work justice, in my opinion. You say your findings "support the important role that policy dialogues play in …" and also that they "suggest a 'tangled web' of mechanisms…” but these by your own admission are not new. I think your addition to the literature would be how what you have learned (or confirmed) would be used going forward. It would be great if you made more of your claim that the findings "further our understanding of how [capacity development] may influence the content and process of policy making…"

I would suggest reframing the paper to focus on what is really new and can be acted on in policy dialogues, and how. A few other comments, going in order through the paper, that it might be helpful to take into account in such a reframe:
ooIt would be helpful to define policy and explain the stages of the policy cycle that you refer to.

* On page seven, similarly there is a reference to the effectiveness criteria. Although they are mentioned elsewhere, it would be helpful to mention them here.

* Who are the "other stakeholders" who are referenced several times?

* Could you say a bit more about the thematic analysis? I think it's good to realize that themes don't reveal themselves but rather are revealed by researchers, so explicitness about how this happens is appreciated.

* On page 23, you say that when designing policy dialogues it may be helpful to think beyond capacity development to the intended influences on policy. I would have thought policy dialogues were aimed at influencing policy in the first place, not at developing capacity. Perhaps explain that a bit more?

* On a more minor note, there are quite a few typos and grammatical errors to be corrected.

In summary, this is a well-written and promising article; I hope it can be reconceptualised to maximize its potential.

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