Reviewer's report

Title: Bridging, brokering, and buffering: A theoretical exploration of school leaders' engagement with local school wellness policy implementation

Version: 0 Date: 01 Nov 2019

Reviewer: Tim Rapley

Reviewer's report:

It is really nice to see not only how you used education theory (and so encourage others to think and work with, ideas outside the usual suspects) but also show how you combine and consolidate different theories. Also, the focus on specific strategies, over individualized constructs, is a good way to enable discussions around change for others.

Note - At a few points, you need to make this a tad more accessible to a global audience - so, in the abstract you talk about 'federal requirements', then in introduction, for example, 'USDA', then 'Superintendents' (e.g. in the UK, that label is used in relation to the police!) - and roughly what range is a 'school district'.

Page 3: You note that: 'Studies examining school leaders' perceptions of wellness policies have reported discrepancies between school board members' confidence in school districts' capacity to implement, compared to state public health nutrition directors and wellness advocates [3]' - so tell the reader what these were (only needs a sentence)

Page 4: 'individual identification with organization (implementation leaders). - you are missing the closing scare quote

Page 6: Why are the reference numbered as 17-20 all the same - why not use a single number? I realize you are following a specific version of citation - but not sure that this is house style.

Methods (or if you prefer, Results): Can you tell the reader how many people took part in focus groups (ideally, range of number of people per group) and how many involved in follow-up interviews (and whether or not these were where the same people).
Results: I find it interesting that, given that some of this data was from FG (and we are not given an indication about whether a quote is from a FG or Int) we only get quotes from one speaker. So, are these focus groups - where you are interested in group interaction, as in you are generating and analyzing interaction between participants, seeing how consensus (or not) is generated etc - or are these actually group interviews? We get no sense of the group interaction in the emergence, building up, consolidation, disagreement etc of these ideas.

Results: In one sense, the results work - in that they enable the reader to begin to make sense of the phenomena. However, I'm never sure about the presentation style of describing the issue, then at the end add data excerpt - as can we loose actual engagement with the data itself, and the beauty and intricacy of that.

So, for example, what we see, say, in the first extract is clearly a story of motivation (or really, maybe values - note the 'have to' here) 'philosophically, I personally have to do what's right for children' (and I note, if they did not say 'to do what's right for children', especially in a FG with others, it would be problematic - but that does deny that work). But this is tied to a broader sense of the issue, the tension they routinely face, around finances and how that can constrain 'doing the right thing'. But what this quote shows is how they work to manage that tension - they show us how they draw on a strategy you later discuss, that of brokering, turning it from 'red to black' (in a narrative sense, over actual finances) as they outline they 'spin it' to reframe within common message, around 'responsible citizens'. Now, this is important, in part as it shows the reader what is going on, and shows that these 'characteristics' to be effective have to aligned with specific strategies.

Also, you note that CFIR outline specific traits as key, however, you note that 'several demonstrated a high degree of personal interest … '. Analytically, I'm interested in to what degree are any of these, or all of these relevant, here. And what is lovely is that the quote you offer seems to align with a range of these, not one, - so, we see hints of tolerance to ambiguity, values (over motivations per se), innovativeness.
And in the second quote, again, we see more. Note here the 'we', the institutional we - so, we see get a sense of collective effort, maybe adaptiveness - and again we see how they do the work of brokering (and this is potentially a nice, clearer example of the issue, than what follows about the process), where they have 'tried' to enable a new message. So, analytically, what is clear is that, the new policy focus, is part of longer history, one that is tied to 'logic' of health and cognitive performance. So, is part of the strategy work here, as much about using new policy announcements to enable and reframe longer term aims and ideas, to enroll new actors/partnerships through this?

So, rather than let quotes speak from themselves, ideally, at times, you need to show the reader the work that they do. This will really strengthen your argument.

**Level of interest**
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests**
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?
If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests'

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal.