Combining Normalisation Process Theory and Participatory Learning and Action research: rationale and example from international research

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Presentation outline

• Implementation science benefits from the use of theory and participatory research approaches
• How do we do theoretically informed, participatory research?
• Example of combining Normalisation Process Theory (NPT) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Research
  • Describe NPT and PLA
  • Present rationale for combining them
  • Provide overview of how they were combined prospectively in an EU project – RESTORE 2011-2015
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## Normalisation Process Theory (May and Finch, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Implementation work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense making</td>
<td>Can stakeholders make sense of the intervention?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Can stakeholders get others involved in implementing the intervention?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enactment</td>
<td>What needs to be done to make the intervention work in practice?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>Can the intervention be evaluated and re-configured to make it more workable in practice?</td>
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PLA Research

• PLA originated in the Global South – rural development projects (Chambers, 1984), applied to heath (O’Reilly-de Brún and de Brún, 2010).

• PLA is a practical, adaptive research strategy that enables diverse groups and individuals to participate, learn, work and act together in a co-operative manner
  • focus on issues of joint concern, identify challenges, and generate positive responses in a collaborative and democratic manner

• The great strength of PLA, lies in the democratic inclusion of locals as ‘experts in their own right’ – the reconfiguring of locals as stakeholders capable of providing unique insights to the issue

• PLA involves a participatory mode of engagement and an extensive tool kit of techniques to create a meaningful partnerships (O’Reilly-de Brún et al., 2018; de Brún et al., 2017).
PLA Focus Groups using techniques for interactive and visual data generation and analysis

(O’Reilly de Brún et al., 2018; de Brún et al., 2017)
Rationale for combining NPT and PLA (de Brún et al., 2017)

- Both been developed in response to multiple failures to implement innovations

- Both are located within the broad frame of social constructionism, which acknowledges that reality is defined and conveyed through a range of socio-cultural means

  - NPT has focused in the main on the perspectives of ‘professionals’ (service-providers, planners, policy-makers) and doesn’t explicitly address power dynamics

  - PLA does pay attention to power may ‘miss’ implementation processes that NPT has identified through systematic theory building processes

Does NPT and PLA offer a potentially stronger ‘heuristic’ to think through implementation issues than either on their own might otherwise provide?
How to combine NPT and PLA

- EU RESTORE project (2011-2015)
- Designed to improve healthcare for migrants by implementing guidelines / training initiatives to support communication in primary care consultations (MacFarlane et al., 2012)

De Brún et al., 2015; Lionis et al., 2016; Tuensissen et al., 2017
Key findings

- PLA provided tools and techniques to create a meaningful partnership
- PLA addressed power dynamics within stakeholder groups where there were asymmetries of power
- PLA enabled implementation work
  - strengthening *engagement* (buy in) and supporting *enactment* (problem solving)
- NPT alerted stakeholders to *appraisal* work
- The use of PLA and attention to issues of power revealed structural influences that limited stakeholders’ ability to solve certain problems in their contexts
- PLA takes time and requires significant commitment by researchers and stakeholders (as does an RCT)

de Brún et al., 2017; O’Reilly-de Brún et al., 2018; Tuenissen et al., 2017; MacFarlane et al., forthcoming
Conclusion

• NPT and PLA were compatible to investigate and support implementation of guidelines and training initiatives and, combined, **did** provide a stronger heuristic device than either one on their own may have provided.

• Further research could explore:
  
  • Ways to integrate PLA into health research routines (i.e. how to normalise it)
  • How the participatory element could be strengthened even more
  • Combining PLA with Extended NPT.
Thank you
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