Reviewer's report

Title: Physiotherapy interventions in scientific physiotherapy publications focusing on interventions for children with cerebral palsy: A qualitative phenomenographic approach.

Version: 2 Date: 5 August 2011

Reviewer: Margaret O’Neil

Reviewer's report:

Please see the report below based on the items reviewers were asked to consider.

Points for Major Compulsory Revision:

1) Review the conceptual model for the research and present a convincing argument that the qualitative phenomenographic methodology is appropriate for systematic review of quantitative scientific research articles on physical therapy intervention for children with cerebral palsy. What is the rationale for using a qualitative approach for scientific articles that engaged in impairment based methods primarily?

2) Rework the methodology discussing the major points in ANY qualitative research (trustworthiness of the data, triangulation and why it was not done in this case, guidelines not just the seven steps in the data analysis - open coding?, axial coding? etc)

3) Describe how the three themes (Making it Possible, Making it Work, Making it Normal) were derived and how the quotes for these themes were determined.

4) Review the references and the appendix articles chosen and defend why the scientific articles and not the family-centered articles were the focus of the manuscript.... Again, I am not clear on this point.

Minor Essential Revisions

1) Reorganize and clarify the writing to be more informative and concise.

2) Really like the figure! That is a nice feature of the manuscript

Discretionary Revisions

NA

Report on: 'Physiotherapy interventions in scientific physiotherapy publications focusing on interventions for children with cerebral palsy: A qualitative phenomenographic approach'.

Reviewer Points:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The authors pose an interesting question and use a novel approach to examine the question. However, the research question is a bit confusing and underdeveloped while the presentation of the research question or aim is not presented until page 4. This may not be so far along in the article except that the introduction is a bit disorganized making it somewhat difficult to understand the direction and ultimate aim of the study.

The authors may want to review the overall introduction and reorganize it for better flow and direct the reader to purpose and PT early on before the discussion of motor learning and control. Further, the FCS model is a service delivery model or approach and it is not causally related to PT outcomes but influences the structure, process and outcomes of the PT intervention.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The methods used are qualitative (phenomographic) which was well defined but usually focuses on the “persons” description of experiences. The phenomenon examined in this study was physiotherapy (PT) for children with cerebral palsy (CP). The study poses a unique way to conduct a systematic review of PT intervention literature for CP. However, I find that more discussion and description is needed to support the model of this research because it seems difficult to describe “PT experience for children with CP ” by reviewing scientific articles about PT interventions. I think that the articles and the information therein is too far removed from the actual experience. And if “scientific” articles are being examined, are these “usual” PT intervention sessions in which families would usually have input vs. their agreement to participate in a scientific protocol to examine intervention strategies and outcomes using various strategy tactics. So, more information is needed on the rationale and conceptual model for the study, not so much the use of the ICF Model to frame intervention or the use of motor control and motor learning principles in the delivery of PT interventions or the use of FCS as a service delivery model to engage parents and families in a child’s services.

So, the rationale for the methods and the details on the steps in the methodology need to be re-organized and described in more depth. A better research model and rationale for how and why certain articles were included in the study would strengthen the methods section. For the data analysis section, the short description on how each article was analyzed is weak in that the reader is not informed as to what and how the discussions were framed when determining how the quotes from the articles were chosen to be included in the analysis. The inclusion of the seven steps for analysis using phenomenographic methods was helpful but this information was presented as definition of terms and not applied to the actual study. For example, in Step 2, Condensation, what would constitute a “significant quotation” from the articles?

3. Are the data sound?

It is difficult to determine the soundness of the data as it is not clear how the qualitative data that are presented were included in the analysis and in the article. So, more information is needed to understand why certain quotes were
included. It is not clear if the three identified themes emerged from the quotes that were included as data or if the three thematic categories were identified by the researchers and quotes were chosen to support these themes. Again, not enough information is provided on the data analysis to determine this. For example, were there guidelines, open codes, operational definitions to help guide the final data analysis of PT processes in the chosen articles?

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The manuscript is organized in proper subsections that are standard in article preparation but each section needs more revision for details to explain the study and results and for more attention to grammar and methods of expression.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The discussion follows closely to the results and interprets the findings. However, it is difficult to understand how the results were derived and if the discussion is appropriate. The discussion does highlight some of the concepts in qualitative research (ie, trustworthiness of the data) but this section needs more work to strengthen the concept and offer a better definition of the research characteristics of qualitative research.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

No, the limitations are imbedded in the discussion with a short section on trustworthiness being associated with experience of the qualitative researchers with the explanation that these researchers are very experienced. However, this reviewer is not convinced that the “premise” of the article is flawed and that qualitative phenomenographic research may not be the right methodology to examine PT interventions in scientific research articles when one is not aware of the “experience’ of the PT in developing the intervention protocols or the “child experience” when exposed to these interventions. This reviewer understands that the authors were examining the contents of the intervention but it may not be wise to make a leap to “experiences of PT or child or family” based on the intervention description. Especially if outcome measures are not included in the qualitative analysis because outcome measures often (usually) reflect goals of therapy and if measures are impairment based, maybe the intervention articles had a tight research intervention protocol that did not include FCS approaches for a very good reason… hard to say…

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? YES!

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Not sure, the abstract is short (as usual) but a bit vague and disorganized.

9. Is the writing acceptable? The manuscript needs to be re-organized and edited for more information that is provided in a more concise fashion.
Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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