

Highlights and reflections from the CREATE Workshop 2017: Planning Health Promotion Programs

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Sincere thanks to the European Health Psychology Society for awarding me a CREATE grant to attend the 19th CREATE workshop

“Planning Health Promotion Programmes: an Intervention Mapping (IM) Approach” facilitated by Prof Gerjo Kok, Prof Rob Ruiter and Dr Rik Crutzen (Meade, Gating, & van Beurden, 2017).

I was excited when I learned that IM was the focus of this year’s CREATE workshop. I first learned about this approach (Bartholomew, Parcel, & Kok, 1998) almost ten years ago when I was studying for my Masters in Health Promotion. While I have not used IM fully in practice, I recognise its many strengths. For example, its step-wise approach to develop theory- and evidence-based interventions, and the consideration it gives to both individual and environmental factors that influence behaviour. Coming from a public health background, this is of prime importance to me; sometimes I feel that individual factors are over-emphasised in current debates and interventions. We should instead be focusing on the multiple levels of influence on behaviours, whilst including a focus on individual behaviours (Sniehotta et al., 2017). I also value the emphasis that IM places on involving different stakeholders and information sources.

I was unsure about applying for the CREATE grant as I thought it would be a long-shot. That said, my motto is ‘apply for everything’, so I did, and thankfully I was successful. Without the funding, I would not have been able to attend

CREATE or EHPS2017. I felt that it was a critical year to attend. While I am currently pursuing my PhD in Psychology within the Health Behaviour Change Research Group at NUI Galway, my background is in nutrition and health promotion. I was entering the third year of my four-year PhD and was keen to develop my international networks in health psychology. Up to that point, I had been focusing on presenting at national and international conferences specific to my topic area. I have been familiarising myself with recent research developments and debates in health psychology (Quinton, 2017) since starting the PhD, while also refining my research proposal and starting my systematic review. It felt like the perfect time to engage with the EHPS community, and I felt ready to do so. And it didn’t disappoint.

Participating in the CREATE workshop was a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the theoretical and practical application of the IM approach, from the leaders in this area. The facilitators provided a brilliant overview of the principles and processes of IM. For me, however, the highlight was the practical examples that illustrated how they have applied the approach, what challenges they faced, and how they overcame them. I found this particularly reassuring. IM is a very detailed approach and I can see how it may be challenging to implement due to resource constraints and competing priorities. It was also useful to apply the process in our smaller groups to selected topics. It gave us an opportunity to discuss the six steps to enhance our understanding and draw on the insights and experiences of other groups members, in relation to

IM itself or the health-related topic being addressed. This was incredibly useful as I had the opportunity to think about how I could apply it to my own research, even aspects of the approach, e.g. selecting a behaviour to focus on, theory, or behaviour change methods (Kok et al., 2016). I also felt a real sense of achievement over the two days as I was able to draw on what I have learned over the past two years of my PhD regarding theories and principles of behavioural science, and my practical experience prior to this. I met lots of wonderful people, and potential future collaborators during the workshop, and benefitted enormously from the sharing of ideas and experiences. It was great to have a forum to do this in; it solidified the learning for me. I am excited about drawing on this learning to further inform my PhD work in the area of early life behavioural interventions delivered by health professionals to prevent childhood obesity.

The CREATE EC did a fantastic job in organising the workshop. It was great to have the opportunity to meet with other workshop participants during the pre-workshop networking event on the Sunday afternoon. The activities were well-structured so I had the opportunity to meet other attendees and hear more about them and their work. This made it much easier to engage in discussions during the workshop. I found that I had lots in common with others, be it in relation to my research topic or methodological interests, or my PhD experiences. It was beneficial to have the opportunity to share these with others and discuss strategies. This continued over the two days of the workshop and the conference itself.

The conference was fantastic also. Again, I met lots of wonderful people and really benefitted from the thought-provoking presentations and discussions over the four days. I came away with lots of ideas for the systematic review that I am currently completing, in terms of my methodology, such as issues surrounding the coding of behaviour change techniques in control groups (de Bruin et

al., 2016), and how I will write up the review for publication. I found the discussion with people around my poster and PhD topic especially useful. During both the workshop and conference, I had time to reflect on my PhD projects and think about how I might conduct them differently, or indeed, report them more systematically and discuss the results of them in a more critical light.

Many thanks to the workshop facilitators and the CREATE EC and to the EHPS EC and specifically the Grants Committee for funding support to participate in the workshop. I would encourage other early career researchers to attend the CREATE workshop and EHPS conference, and to apply for the CREATE and EHPS grants to enable them to do so. I left Padua feeling more informed, inspired, re-invigorated and part of a community.

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