

National Academies
National Research Council
Center for Education
Committee in Education

Randomized Field Trials in Education Workshop:
Implementation and Implications Session, 9/24/03

Post Prandial: Boruch on Implications for Education
Research and Researchers

Some History

- 1974 Social Experimentation SSRC
- 1975 Experimental Testing of Public Policy
- Evaluating Youth Employment and Training Programs NAS
- Implication: Better late than never for education

Implications of What?

- USDE Federal policy: YES indeed
- USDE Law: NCLB
- USDE Program Announcements:
Research proposals that include
randomized trials
- USDE What Works Clearinghouse
- Other: Other countries, other substantive
areas

International: Randomized Experiments/Trials

- World Bank: IPDET Workshops, Ottawa, July, 2003
- World Bank: 5th Biennial OED Conference, DC, July 2003
- UK Cabinet Office/Durham: Evidence Based Policy Biennial Conference, July 2003
- Campbell Collaboration/Rockefeller Conferences on Place Randomized Trials, November 2002, December 2003
- C2 SPECTR

Implication: Conditions

- Federal Judicial Center
- Is the problem severe?
- Are purported solutions debatable?
- Do RCTS yield appreciably less equivocal estimates?
- Will results be used?
- Will human rights be recognized?

Implication: Entities as the Units

- Change is hard.
- Changing entire places and people in them is hard.
- Entities/places are the targets, with common problems and challenges, about which we must learn...
- Hospitals, ICUs, ECUs, units
- Schools, classrooms
- Crime hot spots
- Housing developments
- Stores
- Bank units
- Weather sites
- SPR, C2 SPECTR

Implication. Learn How to...

- Determine eligibility and readiness to participate
- Assess probable stability of the eligible entities
- Understand incentives, including randomized roll out, delayed intervention, resources
- Develop the relationships/partnerships needed in collaborative trials
- These issues cut cross substantive areas and we can learn from them,

Implication. Learn about RCTs versus QEDs

- Studies that compare estimates based on trials against those based on nonrandomized trials
- Glazerman et al, Shadish, et al, BMJ, others
- Domain specific biases
- When randomized trials become QEDs
- Crater equation etc.

Implication. Learning about “No Difference” Etc.: Why?

- The null hypothesis is not called that for nothing.
- Why didn't we find a difference?
- Disciplined post mortems: RCT design, power, and execution, implementation or the interventions, control activity, measures, substantive theory
- Empirical failure/success rates and research policy
- Further, negative effects, small effects, etc.

Implication. Accumulate, screen, synthesize

- Cochrane Collaboration in health care:
<http://cochrane.org>
- Campbell Collaboration in the social sectors: <http://campbellcollaboration.org>
- What Works Clearinghouse in education:
<http://w-w-c.org>
- RCTs as privileged, explicit standards for production, including search

Implication. Build Capacity

- Statistical: Design and analysis
- Political/policy: Waiver statutes, evidence based policy, incentives
- Institutional: People, processes, multiple organizations and types, collaborative agreements (ownership of the trial), trial as disruption
- Managerial: Operations, local coordinators, etc.
- Aim: Intelligent suppliers and intelligent consumers
- But how?

- Unless we are honestly experimental, we will leave the great questions of society to the ignorant advocates of change on the one hand and the ignorant opponents of change on the other. Lippmann (1937)