

Randomized Field Trials in Education: Implications for Traditionally Underserved Populations

The National Research Council

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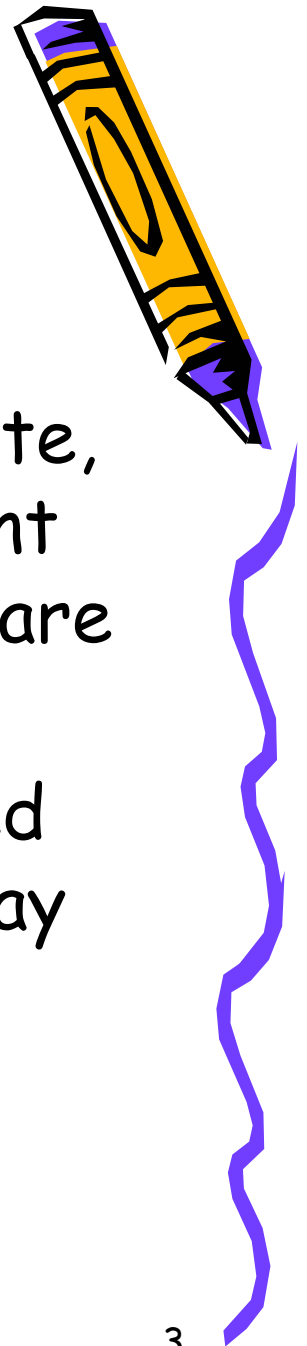
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I. How do underserved populations perceive RFT's generally and the push for them in current "scientifically based research" initiatives specifically?

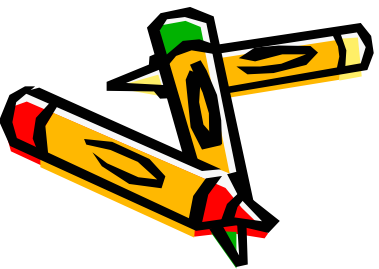
- Randomized research designs involve denying beneficial services or interventions to some students.
- Must be careful and see that the control group gets the services later
- Decisions of what variables receive randomization is subjective.

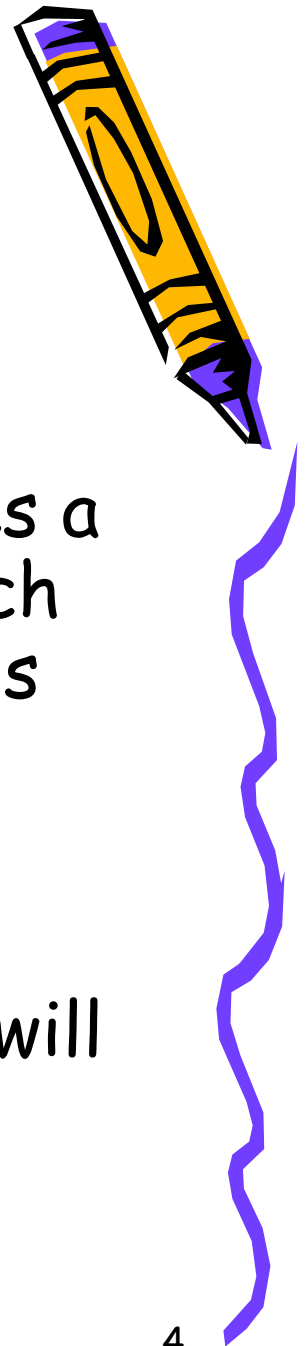




I. How do underserved populations perceive RFT's generally and the push for them in current "scientifically based research" initiatives specifically?

- There is no such thing as a truly accurate, reliable and valid randomized experiment in education in the "real world". There are always other outside influences.
- One may think that s/he has randomized groups, but political and other issues may make it impossible to insert a randomly selected control group.





I. How do underserved populations perceive RFT's generally and the push for them in current "scientifically based research" initiatives specifically?

- The complexity of issues surrounding achievement in diverse settings requires a comprehensive intervention and research approach. The present focus on RFT's is too narrow and constraining.
- RFT's are NOT the end-all and be-all
- Money for research and evaluation is always limited. Narrow focus on RFT's will decrease availability of resources for other important research.



I. How do underserved populations perceive RFT's generally and the push for them in current "scientifically based research" initiatives specifically?

- Overall feeling that poor and minority groups are the most evaluated and researched population while they have no input into the process.
- While such national groups as AEA are reviewing their standards, practices and guiding principles to incorporate issues surrounding contextual validity and relevance in order to enable evaluators to plan and conduct contextually responsive evaluations, some fear that RFT efforts are moving in the opposite direction --- decontextualizing.



I. How do underserved populations perceive RFT's generally and the push for them in current "scientifically based research" initiatives specifically?

- Perception that more effective tools and strategies for data collection are needed in diverse settings.
- Perception that the RFT focus is in opposition to the view that culture-free evaluations are not the most accurate or helpful in the diverse society of the 21st century in the U.S.



II. What are the benefits and drawbacks of the trend towards more RFT's for traditionally underserved groups?

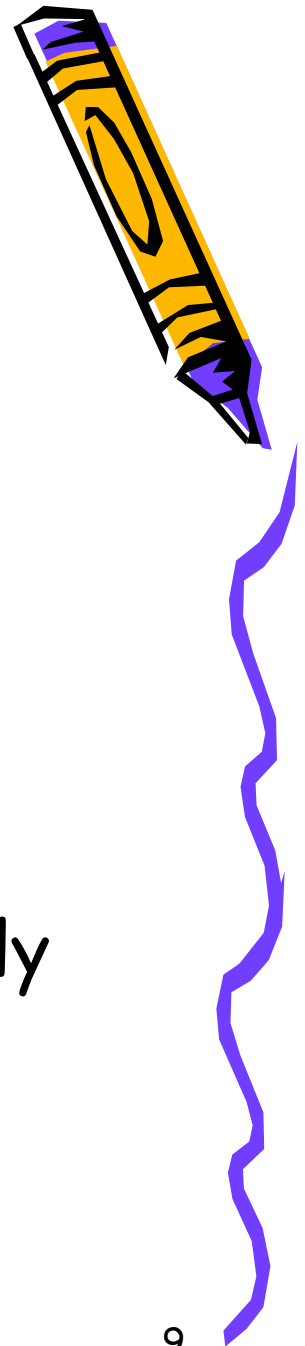
- Focus on RFT's to the exclusion of other methods and designs decreases the likelihood of understanding not only that there are differences in outcomes, but why, how and for what subsets of students.
- Qualitative methods contribute richness and context to interpret outcomes when presented along with, not in place of, quantitative methods.

II. What are the benefits and drawbacks of the trend towards more RFT's for traditionally underserved groups (TUG's)?

- Because of high mobility rates of students and teachers in schools and districts heavily populated with TUG's, the sample size needed will be extremely large because of attrition rates.
- The time needed to implement full treatments can be extensive, especially when students have been without resources for so long. Thus, there may not be time to give the full treatment. Randomization does not address these issues.

II. What are the benefits and drawbacks of the trend towards more RFT's for traditionally underserved groups (TUG's)?

- Causal relationships can be drawn if significant differences in outcomes are found.
- Confounding variables could include differences in teacher competence/ quality, expectations.
- Research using RFT's is extremely costly and time consuming.



III. What kinds of capacity are required for traditionally underserved populations to participate in and use the findings of RFT's?

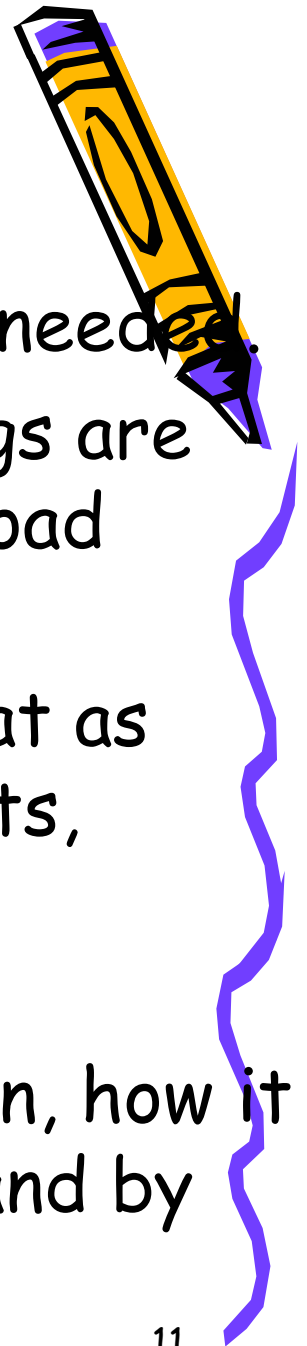


- Institutes and other non-traditional learning opportunities must be funded with stipends for students and faculty. These institutes must be offered in settings where those involved feel supported and encouraged. HBCUs and HSIs are likely places to offer these institutes.
- Graduate courses in experimental and quasi-experimental research methodology with stipends targeted at members of underserved groups.



III. What kinds of capacity are required for traditionally underserved populations to participate in and use the findings of RFT's?

- Greatly improved dissemination system is needed.
- Reports of research and evaluation findings are generally technical and not written for broad audiences.
- There is a need to vary the delivery format as required for such diverse groups as parents, school personnel, the private sector, the government and program participants.
- There is a need to consider what is written, how it is written, to whom it is being presented and by whom.



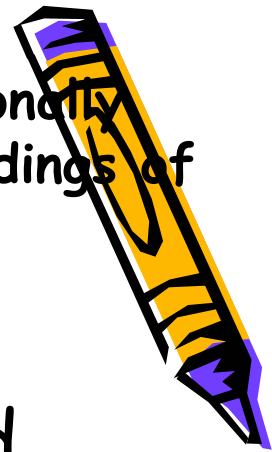
III. What kinds of capacity are required for traditionally underserved populations to participate in and use the findings of RFT's?



- Dissemination of findings is not getting to Universities.
- Research findings are not getting to or impacting teacher training programs.
- The fact of inadequate dissemination has become increasingly important in the diverse society of the 21st century (with its longstanding and widening achievement



III. What kinds of capacity are required for traditionally underserved populations to participate in and use the findings of RFT's?



- Networks organized and supported.
- Funding of faculty exchanges.
- Workshops on developing research skills and effective uses of research findings.



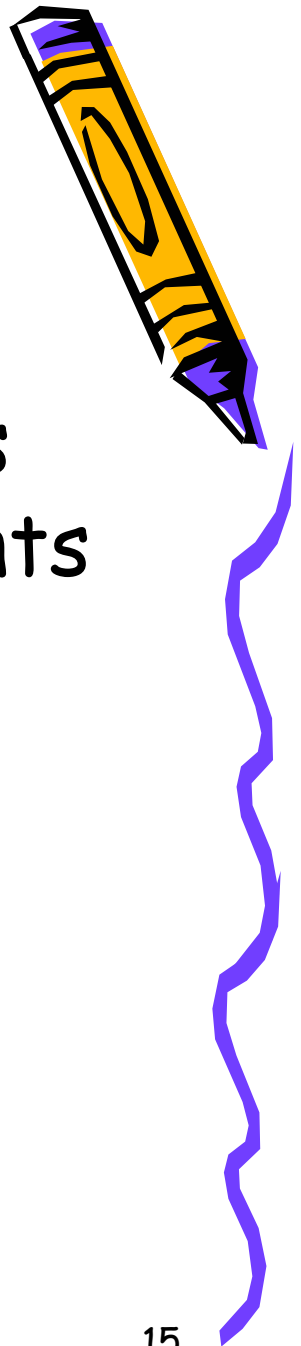
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- An interesting approach to building capacity is seen in the action research work of Stafford Hood of the University of Illinois.
- Hood is teaching evaluation practice to teachers to empower them in the evaluation participation process as well as in looking at careers in evaluation. Thus, teachers can use this knowledge at formal and informal levels



IV. What are the incentives and disincentives for traditionally underserved populations with respect to providing access and/or altering service provision for RFT's?

- Time consuming when many schools are struggling with the requirements of NCLB. Some are facing being reconstituted



What can traditionally underserved populations expect to gain or lose from more RFT's in education?

- Systematic use of research to inform education policy.

