

DOL CONFERENCE

APPLYING RESEARCH AND EVALUATION TO EVERYDAY PRACTICE

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Research Informing Policy and Practice: Key Principles

- Engage key stakeholders throughout the study from formulating research questions at front end to sharing findings throughout.
- Consensus building with the programs being evaluated – site staff can become effective champions for good research and effective programs.
- Cumulative knowledge from related studies has a more powerful impact than any individual study (e.g. welfare-to-work, community college persistence, etc.)
- Importance of sustaining programs until research findings become available.
- Consider a range of dissemination tools to get the word out: policy briefs, how-to-guides, and blogs.
- Changing practice involves more than dissemination: strong evidence, transfer agent, receptive audience, management will and capacity.

Case Study I Career Academies: A Successful High School Reform Model

What Are They:

- ❑ Small learning communities
- ❑ Curriculum integration around a career theme: health, business, information technology
- ❑ Employer partnerships for internships and work-based learning

Other Key Characteristics:

- ❑ Popular: 2,500 throughout the country
- ❑ Durable: 40 year history
- ❑ Multiple Goals: dropout prevention and college and career prep
- ❑ Target – broad cross section of students
- ❑ Support networks – multiple networks provide information sharing and technical assistance: National Academy Foundation, Career Academy Support Network, National Career Academy Coalition

Case Study I – Career Academies

Research History

- ❑ Earlier quasi-experimental evaluations found effects on dropout prevention
- ❑ MDRC random assignment evaluation involving 9 typical sites, 1,700 students, and 12 years of follow-up (U.S. Department of Labor, U. S. Department of Education, and group of foundations supported the study).

Key Findings:

- ❑ Large and sustained post high school employment and earnings gains, particularly for males, without reducing college going or completion.
- ❑ High outcomes on high school graduation, college going, and completion but no impacts.
- ❑ Positive impacts on family stability and marriage.
- ❑ No impact on dropout prevention or high school graduation, although some educational impacts for the most at-risk students.

How the Career Academy Community Has Used These Results

- Various Career Academy networks adopted “standards of practice” based on evaluation findings.
- Networks embraced what worked (employer partnerships and work-based learning) and committed itself to improving what didn't (bolster academic rigor and targeting).
- Ongoing dialogue at Career Academy conferences and through Career Academy conversations.
- “Education Week” commentary on the positive relationship between research and practice over 20 years.
- Input on a new IES funded sequel study to further strengthen Career Academies as they scale-up.

Case Study II: The Search for Effective Interventions for At-Risk Youth

Youth Programs that Did Not Produce Impacts:

- JTPA Youth Evaluation
- JOBSTART
- New Chance
- CET Replication
- STEP

Youth Programs that Produced Some Positive Effects:

- Job Corps
- Original CET Program
- Youth Incentive Entitlement Program
- National Guard Youth Challenge

Taking Stock of Mixed Results: Don't Disinvest But Use Past Evidence to Create and Test Potentially Stronger Programs

For Programs That Do Not Work - Learn Why:

- ❑ Poorly conceived interventions?
- ❑ Limited contrast with the status quo?
- ❑ Poor implementation?
- ❑ Highly motivated self-selected participants?

For Programs That Have Some Positive Effects – Plausible Explanations:

- ❑ Structure and discipline
- ❑ Opportunities for work experience or stipends
- ❑ Contextualized learning
- ❑ Caring adults
- ❑ Rewarding forward progress
- ❑ Wrap around services
- ❑ More extensive outreach to youth who are more at-risk

Promising Programs that Exhibit These Features But Have Not Been Rigorously Evaluated

- YouthBuild
- Gateway to College
- Year Up
- GED Bridge to Certificate Programs
- Summer Bridge for rising high school seniors: college prep classes with summer jobs