Resource Guide 2: Implementation Studies

This bibliography, designed for users of the Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse, provides several resources that may be consulted to gain a better understanding of evaluation research, and the different methodological approaches that can be taken in conducting such studies. Specifically, this bibliography includes resources that describe implementation methodologies as well as qualitative research. Researchers may find the reports, briefs, and articles provided in this bibliography useful in helping to plan and conduct studies and analysis of their own. Practitioners and policymakers can utilize these resources to better understand the approaches and data that come out of implementation studies. This annotated bibliography is a tool to support practitioners and policymakers in making decisions about funding and collaborating with such researchers to ensure that high quality implementation and outcomes studies are being conducted and account for effective internal performance management practices.

Implementation Evaluations

Bowie, L. & Bronte Tinkew, J. (2008). Process evaluations: A guide for out of-school time practitioners – Part 3 in a series on practical evaluation methods. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child Trends 2008_01 07 %20ProcessEvaluations.pdf

This brief provides a basic review of process evaluations, also known as formative or implementation evaluations. It describes what a process evaluation is, why process evaluations are important, when they should be used, and how they can be a useful tool for out-of-school time program practitioners. The brief also focuses on guidelines, strategies, and techniques for implementing process evaluations and provides some concrete examples that illustrate their utility. It concludes with a list of helpful resources for out-of-school time program practitioners.

Kisker, E. & Walker, K. (2011). Studying program implementation in impact evaluations. Presented at the OAH and ACYF TYPP Conference.
http://www.childtrends.org/Files//OAH%20Implementation%20presentation%202 7 11.pdf

This presentation examines the need for implementation studies to complement impact evaluations. Considerations for planning an implementation study are discussed, as well as which topics and questions can be answered through such an evaluation.

Qualitative Research Methods

Gardenhire, A. & Nelson, L. (2003). Intensive qualitative research: Challenges, best uses, and opportunities. New York, NY: MDRC
http://www.mdrc.org/publications/339/full.pdf

In contrast to quantitative research methods, where questions and response categories are predetermined, all the qualitative methods described above have the potential to lead researchers to new insights or ideas about how a particular policy fits in a system of interpersonal relationships, individual goals, and the frameworks of interpretation or understanding that people use when making decisions about program participation. The advantage of ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic methods is that they allow researchers to gather information, explanations, and stories directly from the people targeted by a policy and to observe behaviors (including natural conversation) that may belie self-reported statements. Even in the absence of deception, actual behaviors are sometimes at odds with recollections or perceptions. Admittedly, the less intensive qualitative methods — all essentially interview-based — provide only limited information beyond what individuals report. Seeing real behaviors, whether through simple observation or ethnography, can help fill in the gaps in researchers' understanding of why a policy works or does not work; and knowing where self-reported data diverge from actual behaviors can help reveal how and why people make specific choices among program and policy options. This paper discusses the entire range of qualitative research methods but focuses particularly on the more intensive methods to explore how researchers at MDRC and other policy research organizations can make better use of these powerful research tools.

Sewell, M. The use of qualitative interviews in evaluation. Retrieved from
http://ag.arizona.edu/sfcs/cyfernet/cyfar/Intervu5.htm

In qualitative program evaluation, open-ended responses to questions provide the evaluator with quotations, which are the main source of raw data. Patton (1987) notes that quotations "reveal the respondents' levels of emotion, the way in which they have organized the world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions. **The task for the qualitative evaluator is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their point of view about the program.**"

In practice, open-ended, qualitative interview questions are often combined with more closed-ended, structured interview formats. Qualitative interviews may be used as an exploratory step before designing more quantitative, structured questionnaires to help determine the appropriate questions and categories. Conversely, interviews may be used after results of more standardized measures are analyzed to gain insight into interesting or unexpected findings. While quantitative results are sometimes dismissed on political or methodological grounds by those who disagree with the findings, it can be harder to dismiss the actual words of participants which convey their powerful emotions. Patton (1990) gives an example of a school board which dismissed a survey showing teacher dissatisfaction as just the complaints of lazy teachers who did not want to be held accountable in their work. However, when confronted with actual quotations from teachers, reflecting both commitment to their jobs and deep concerns about problems in this particular system, the Board was more willing to hear and respond to their concerns.

Widom, R. & Collado, H. (2003). "Help, I'm getting buried in field notes!" A manual for qualitative data management and analysis. New York, NY: MDRC
http://www.mdrc.org/publications/332/full.pdf

1. This manual is intended for a very broad audience: from senior researchers managing projects that use qualitative data to assistants keeping track of field notes for a particular project; those with years of experience collecting and analyzing qualitative data and those who have never even read an ethnographic study; those whose job responsibilities include computer programming and those who have experienced a wide range of difficulties and discomfort with computers.

2. Understanding how the manual is organized will help you find the information you need:

   a. The manual starts with more conceptual, methodological, and management issues, and moves into the specifics of using N5 later. This is the overall flow of the manual, and also the particular flow within chapters.

   b. The manual roughly follows the process of qualitative data management and analysis, beginning with decisions about whether or not to use N5 and the design of the study and moving through using N5 to create output and fact-check reports.

3. If you are interested in a broad overview, you can just read the Key Recommendations and the first two chapters. If you are interested in how to do a particular task in N5, start with the N5 Cheat Sheet on the previous page, and check out the end of the chapter describing the step you're working on for more information.

Note: Unless otherwise noted all information is from the publication and/or Web site.