

Researching local government improvement

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The improvement experience?

- Needs Analysis
- Capacity building
- Lesson drawing and sharing
- It will change the provider body
- Stretching: finding new solutions to intractable problems
- It is also an activist, creative agenda of intervention and research

What sort of research could support it?

- The limits of best practice case studies
- The limits to after the event evaluation, even if well funded and sophisticated
- The case for a deliberately experimental approach
- A formative phase: design experiments
- Establishing what works: randomised controlled trials

Features of a design experiment

- A specified intervention underwritten by an explanation of the mechanism(s) of change
- A close observation of progress by researchers and practitioners
- A reformulation of the intervention in the light of that observation; adjusting for better performance
- A cycle of repeated assessment until effectiveness of intervention reaches desired standard

Randomised controlled trials

- Comparing treatment and non-treatment groups
- Gold standard of evaluation
- Challenges in research design
- A strategy that has been unwisely neglected in UK but not elsewhere