Campbell Collaboration Establishes Disability Subgroup

Overview

The National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR) is pleased to bring you this issue of *FOCUS* highlighting recent developments within the international Campbell Collaboration (C2). A previous issue of *FOCUS* (Technical Brief No. 16, 2007) provided information about C2 and its work regarding systematic reviews.

In January 2008, NCDDR staff followed up on oral conversations and wrote a formal letter to the C2 Steering Group requesting the consideration of a Disability topic to the current C2 topics of Crime and Justice, Education, and Social Welfare. The following is an excerpt from the letter of request:

> The field of disability, as used here, is broad and encompasses research addressing issues in the areas of employment, community integration, quality of life, rehabilitation engineering, and independent living, among others. This is an area in which substantial amounts of research findings are available and research is currently being conducted. Population demographics suggest a growing expectation for evidence-based information in many areas under the disability umbrella. A need exists to promote the development of high-quality evidence-based information such as that produced through C2 that is relevant to disability.

> I believe the NCDDR's efforts to build capacity among the disability research community and to promote high-quality evidence-based submissions to C2 in the area of disability reflect a strong rationale for

THE CAMPBELL COLLABORATION

The Campbell Collaboration (C2) is an international organization that was founded on the principle that systematic reviews on the effects of interventions will inform and help improve policy and services. Through its reviews and annual colloquium (http://www.campbellcolloquium.org), C2 strives to make the best social science research available and accessible. Its reviews provide high-quality evidence of "what works" to meet the needs of service providers, policymakers, educators and their students, professional researchers, and the general public.

Established in 2000, C2 is named after an American psychologist and thinker, Donald T. Campbell, who drew attention to the need for societies to assess more rigorously the effects of their social and educational experiments, that is, the policies and practices that they introduce and promote. C2 collaborates with its sibling organization, the Cochrane Collaboration, which prepares and maintains systematic reviews of the effects of interventions in health care.

Coordinating groups within C2 are responsible for helping identify topics for systematic reviews, the individuals who contribute to systematic reviews, and the users of reviews. They also provide reviewers with advice on planning and executing reviews and making reviews accessible. There are currently four coordinating groups: Crime and Justice, Education, Social Welfare, and Methods.

Source: http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/about_us/index.php

considering establishing a coordinating group with the necessary expertise to deal with this emerging research field.

The Need for Evidence

As we all know, more and more information bombards us in our daily and work lives. Some of this information even purports to be "evidence-based." The use of bona fide evidence that emanates from high-quality disability-oriented systematic reviews can be very useful. It can give consumers and their families confidence in making decisions. It can help us resolve issues that arise when research is not showing clear results. It can help us avoid chasing after the most recent research study and its findings in lieu of what established high-quality research says in relation to a specific question.

Evidence can be used by different groups for different purposes. Researchers can use it to help establish new research plans that pick up where previous research may have left off—extending knowledge. Organizations and associations can use it to create guidelines that help direct practices. Professionals and practitioners can use it to help them keep up with the most current conclusions that can be drawn from research in their field. Policymakers can use it to help guide the development of new policies or the refinement of current policies. Consumers and their families may

find that a strong evidence-based product gives them confidence that it works.

Indeed, the goal of C2 is to help people make well-informed decisions about the effects of interventions in the social, behavioral, and educational arenas. C2's Education Coordinating Group is an international network of volunteers who prepare, update, and disseminate systematic reviews of high-quality interventions aimed at improving outcomes in the areas of education and training, including special issues related to disability, special education, and reading.

The Disability Subgroup

The C2 Steering Group met March 7–10, 2008, in Oslo, Norway, and spent a portion of the meeting discussing the establishment of the Disability Subgroup. The following is an excerpt from the minutes of the meeting:

> The disability field is of special importance to the Campbell Collaboration as evidence on interventions to improve the lives of disabled persons cuts across all our substantive areas, thus making it a possible new coordinating group. The SG (Steering Group) expressed a strong endorsement of the suggestion developed by director John D. Westbrook at the National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research to build a group within the Education Coordinating

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WHAT IS A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW?

A systematic review uses *transparent procedures* to identify, assess, and synthesize results of research on a particular topic. These procedures are explicit so that others can replicate the review, are defined in advance of the review, and include the following:

- *Clear inclusion/exclusion criteria* that specify the study designs, populations, interventions, and outcomes that will be covered in the review.

- *An explicit search strategy* developed and implemented to identify all published and unpublished studies that meet the inclusion criteria. The search strategy specifies keyword strings and sources (i.e., electronic databases, Web sites, experts, and journals) that will be included in the search.

- *Systematic coding and analysis* of included studies' methods, intervention and comparison conditions, sample characteristics, outcome measures, and results.

- *Meta-analysis (when possible)* to estimate pooled effect sizes (ES) and moderators of ES.

Source: What Is a Systematic Review? (http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/what_is_a_systematic_review/index.php)

Group (ECG) as a start (Drs. Chad Nye and Carole Torgerson, ECG co-chairs, to take forward). (p. 2)

The Steering Group's action cleared the way for the establishment of a Disability Subgroup within the ECG. The Disability Subgroup may become a new coordinating group if there is sufficient growth in interest and production of systematic reviews within the disability topic area over the next several years.

The Disability Subgroup became official and convened with the ECG in its meeting on May 12, 2008, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The Disability Subgroup has preliminarily established broad objectives to do the following:

- Undertake and maintain a series of high-quality and timely systematic reviews of interventions aimed at improving the quality of life and outcomes of individuals with disabilities. These reviews focus attention on substantive disability topics through the summary and analysis of the best available, high-quality research evidence provided through randomized and non-randomized quasi-experimental designs.

- Establish and maintain a network of individuals with disability expertise or experience who are interested in developing and/or contributing to disability-related systematic reviews.

- Encourage involvement of consumers with disabilities, their family members, and other disability-oriented stakeholders in all steps of the systematic review development process, including the development and dissemination of appropriate user-friendly interpretations of review results.

- Provide training opportunities for interested systematic review authors in the production of C2 reviews in the disability area.

The C2 Disability Subgroup has a cross-disability orientation across the lifespan of individuals with disabilities. Ralf Schlosser (r.schlosser@neu.edu) and John Westbrook (john.westbrook@sedl.org) are the co-chairs of the subgroup. Individuals interested in

conducting a C2 systematic review in the disability area are urged to contact one of the co-chairs. C2 has many helpful resources that are available to systematic review authors.

Several benefits can be expected to result from the C2 designation of the Disability Subgroup. These include the following:

- Expertise in the disability area can be organized and brought to bear to better assist individuals identifying review questions and undertaking systematic reviews.

- Information pertinent to the disability area should be easier to locate and access.

- Researchers can see more options and formats for the use of their rigorous disability-related research findings.

- Systematic reviews in the disability area developed in compliance with C2 guidelines will be shared via the C2 library and made available to an international audience.

- Disability-related topics will likely assume a higher profile in C2 training and information sharing events such as the annual colloquium.

Our Challenge

The addition of the Disability Subgroup within C2 is a wonderful opportunity to focus on developing an evidence base to support practice, facilitate future research planning, and provide a new resource for relevant, evidence-based information for both consumers with disabilities and professionals. In order for this to become a reality, however, individuals must volunteer to develop systematic reviews following the C2 guidelines.

The NCDDR recognizes that some capacity building is needed in order for this to work well within the NIDRR community. The NCDDR has conducted online training and workshops on producing systematic reviews; information about that training is available at http://www.ncddr.org/pd/courses/. The NCDDR plans to offer this free online training again in the

near future. If you are interested in being notified of upcoming trainings and workshops, please contact Joann Starks (joann.starks@sedl.org).

C2 represents a great opportunity for disability researchers to collaborate with others interested in research and the production of evidence. As researchers are being asked more frequently about "what works" and "what we know," the C2 and its gold standard for the identification of evidence is invaluable.

Chad Nye, co-chair for the Campbell Collaboration's ECG, said, "No other group I know of focuses its attention on assessing the quality and quantity of disability research for which we can draw unbiased conclusions about the intervention effects. We are trying to find out what works. In disability, we have research that hasn't been tapped—we need not reinvent the wheel."

To learn more about the Campbell Collaboration visit http://www.campbellcollaboration.org. To discuss your ideas for a C2 disability-related systematic review, contact john.westbrook@sedl.org.

HOW ARE C2 SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS?

- C2 reviews must include a systematic search for unpublished reports (to avoid publication bias).

- C2 reviews are usually international in scope.

- A protocol (proposal) for the review is developed in advance and undergoes careful peer review by international experts in the substantive area, experts in systematic review methods, and a trial search coordinator.

- Study inclusion decisions and coding decisions are accomplished by at least two reviewers who work independently and compare results.

- C2 reviews undergo peer review and editorial review.

- Completed C2 reviews are published in the Campbell Library of Systematic Reviews and may be published elsewhere.

The C2 Methods Group developed a set of policy briefs, which have been approved by the C2 Steering Group. These briefs provide useful information, guidance, and set standards concerning

- information retrieval,

- research design, and

- statistical analysis.

Source: What Is a Systematic Review? (http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/ what_is_a_systematic_review/index.php)

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