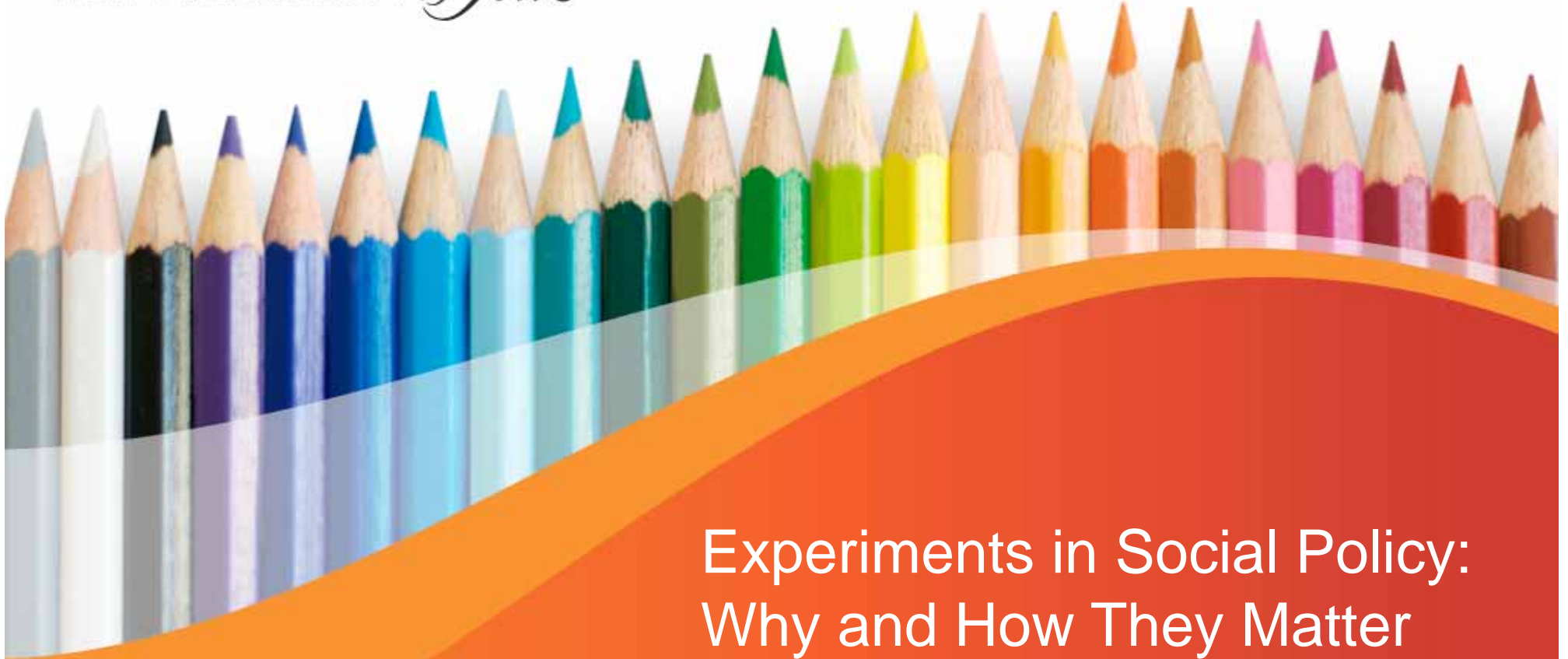


THE UNIVERSITY *of York*



Experiments in Social Policy: Why and How They Matter

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Empowering educators with evidence

Why Evidence Matters

- Helps practitioners choose effective programmes
- Provides incentives to create and evaluate effective methods
- Moves the field forward
- Decentralised systems particularly need evidence base



Evidence-Based Research in Education: US/UK

US

- Comprehensive School Reform
- No Child Left Behind
- Institute for Educational Sciences
- What Works Clearinghouse
- Best Evidence Encyclopaedia (BEE)

UK

- Best Evidence Encyclopaedia (BEE)
- Policy Exchange
- Reviews of Research



Why are experiments in education rare in the UK?

- Experiments are very rare in the UK
 - Of 189 mathematics studies, 0 from the UK
 - Of 179 reading studies, 2 from the UK
 - Of 96 studies of programmes for struggling readers, 3 from the UK
- Yet experiments are possible in the UK
- Main explanation: lack of funding



Why and When are Experiments Essential?

- When goal is suggestions for practice and policy
- Control groups represent what would have happened if the experiment had not taken place
- Experiments rule out alternative explanations
 - Selection bias
 - Pre-existing differences
 - Post hoc explanations



Types of Experiments

- Random assignment (RCT)
 - Cluster randomised trials (CRT)
 - Individual assignment
- Quasi-experiments (QED)
 - Matched
 - Regression discontinuity



Problems of Random Assignment

- Participants often hate to be randomised
- Assignment to control group can be perceived as unethical or unfair
- Interventions must be started from scratch
- Drop-outs, non-implementation may make an RCT into a quasi-experiment anyway



Methods of Random Assignment in Education

- Individuals within classes
- Classes/teachers within schools
- Schools
- Matching before assignment



Multiple Methods

- Experiments should be supplemented with observations, ethnography, other data
- Provides explanation of what happened
- Adds to theory and suggests limitations for practice and policy



Evaluation of Together 4 All

- Cluster Randomised Trial (CRT)
- Initially 13 schools, now 12
- Extensive series of measures
 - Classroom observations (COBS)
 - Playground observations (POBS)
 - Teacher ratings of behaviour, questionnaire
 - Student measures
 - Interviews – principals, teachers, parents, students
 - Mutual respect and understanding
- Multiple years



Summing Up: Random Reflections

- For recommending practice and policy, experiments are essential
- Randomise if possible, but matched designs may be almost as good under certain circumstances
- Use multi-methods. Find out what happened
- Replicate. Once is not enough!

