

Feature Article**Reflections on the Genesis of the Campbell Collaboration**

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The Campbell Collaboration has over 100 systematic reviews completed or in progress, at last count in August 2013, including 35 by its Crime and Justice Group. Most of these reviews, as far as I can tell, focus exclusively on randomized or quasi-experimental studies of impact. Its influence on social science, in a relatively short time period, is evidenced by the sheer number of publications, presentations at conferences, and references to its work. Given its growing recognition as a source for evidence on the effects of social and education interventions, it is a good time to reflect on how this all got started.

My focus here is on the development of the Campbell Collaboration and not the specific events that led to the creation of the Crime and Justice Group, which has its own interesting, and connected, history (e.g., Farrington and Petrosino, 2000). In addition, I'm focused on events that led to the official launching of C2 in February 2000, and recognize there is also an interesting story of how the Collaboration was sustained during those early years, mostly on a shoestring budget. Unfortunately, this article can name but a few of the wonderful contributors who helped in some way to launch C2.

I had a rather unique perch from which to see this all unfold. The legendary statistician, Frederick Mosteller, was my boss at the time, and through him I got involved in the very early discussions. In some sense, Fred was sending me to the meetings in his stead, as he was getting on in years and finding it more difficult to travel. Also, Fred was not on the Internet (he still used a typewriter for all correspondence) and he never checked his university email. He had a secretary that did it for him, but she could not keep up with the bevy of emails the early discussions generated. But I also got the sense that Fred was pushing me into this, as was his way with junior folks, forever mentoring (Petrosino, 2004).

Beginnings

The primordial stew of C2 bubbled in the United Kingdom, not the United States, during the latter part of the 1990s. One major impetus for C2 was the rapid success of the Cochrane Collaboration in health care. A former obstetrician turned researcher named Iain Chalmers had coordinated about 100 people from around the world to prepare systematic reviews of research on care during pregnancy and childbirth, and these had been published electronically as well as in books (Chalmers et al. 1993). The largely positive reaction to this not only within health care, but also from Fred Mosteller (2003) among others, led Chalmers and his colleagues to consider the importance of preparing systematic reviews addressing questions across all of health care. The Cochrane Collaboration, named after the epidemiologist Archie Cochrane, who had questioned the wisdom of ignoring evidence from health care trials and had asked why there wasn't already an effort to take stock of them, was launched in 1993 to prepare, update and disseminate systematic reviews of research on the effects of health care interventions (Chalmers 1993). Within a short time, the Cochrane Collaboration was recognized in many parts of the world as the best source for looking at the evidence on health care effects.

Taking note of the Cochrane Collaboration's success, some in the U.K. began to ask whether an analogous movement should be initiated to cover social and educational interventions. Although the Cochrane Collaboration actually covered non-medical interventions through its Developmental, Psychosocial and Learning Disorders Group and some other groups, there was a push for something more extensive to apply to social policy and program areas. In fact, during the meeting of the Royal Statistical Society in 1996, President Adrian Smith, after commending the achievements of the Cochrane Collaboration, made such a case when he said:

But what's so special about medicine? We are, through the media, as ordinary citizens, confronted daily with controversy and debate across a whole spectrum of public policy issues. But typically, we have no access to any form of systematic "evidence base"—and therefore no means of participating in the debate in a mature and informed manner. Obvious topical examples include education—what does work in the classroom?—and penal policy—what is effective in preventing re-offending? (Smith, 1996).

Enter Iain Chalmers, again, with important assistance from Michael Peckham. While he ran the Research and Development Programme at the U.K. National Health Service, Peckham had funded the early efforts of Cochrane Collaboration (primarily, the coordinating nucleus, known as the U.K. Cochrane Centre) and had developed a strong professional relationship with Iain Chalmers. Peckham, shortly thereafter, moved from service in government to become the Director of the School of Public Policy at the University College London (UCL). Peckham provided Chalmers with some funding to investigate the possibility of initiating some type of Cochrane-like organization for the social area. The funding supported Chalmers in his exploratory work, including travel to meet and talk with leading social scientists, including Fred Mosteller, to ascertain their interest. It also permitted Chalmers to convene an exploratory meeting in December, 1998 at UCL, which brought together selected UK researchers and policymakers to discuss evidence in the social sector. After the December meeting, I remember driving with Chalmers and Sharon Cure (a researcher from the Cochrane Schizophrenia Group who was collecting randomized trials) to Cambridge to meet with David Farrington to ascertain his interest in overseeing C2 work in criminal justice.

But who should lead them?

Chalmers and a few others were convinced that a Cochrane-like effort in the social policy and program area would have to be led by researchers from the United States to take hold. Their rationale was that most of the studies relevant to social policy, and particularly impact studies using experimental or quasi-experimental design, were generated by American scientists. And it was researchers from the United States who had created and championed various methods for synthesizing studies. Enlisting at least some of these researchers, it was perceived, would go a long way to establishing credibility.

Chalmers, despite his famous trait of dogged persistence, also recognized that the early discussions about a Cochrane analog should not be led by a medical researcher from the U.K. He continued to be very instrumental in the effort, but sought out an influential American researcher who was very well known across multiple fields, and had a reputation for supporting rigorous evidence, to lead these discussions. In 1998, Chalmers met Professor Robert Boruch at the first ever stateside meeting of the Cochrane folks (in Baltimore), and



Campbell Collaboration Meeting, February 2000. Pictured front row: Frederick Mosteller, Dorothy DeMoya, Henry Riecken. Pictured 2nd row: Hamish Chalmers, Robert Boruch, Anthony Petrosino, Iain Chalmers.

Credit: Robert Boruch/Dorothy DeMoya

suggested to him that he start the effort, with assistance from Mosteller and myself. Boruch, a distinguished professor at the University of Pennsylvania and visible scholar on experimentation and evidence (among many other things), took up the mantle of leading the effort.

At this point, Boruch began his own reconnaissance efforts with colleagues around the United States and Europe to ascertain what kind of interest there would be in the effort. As Boruch writes (2013):

After talking with Chalmers, I called up some of the owls in my tree to figure out what to do. Peter Rossi, Henry Riecken, and Fred Mosteller, were among them. Deciding to contribute on the basis of their counsel, I then indulged in meetings during a freezing winter month through Oslo, Helsinki, Copenhagen, and Stockholm so as to assay those countries' interest in systematic reviews of dependable evidence on the effectiveness of social, educational, and crime related programs.

The Stockholm meeting, in particular, was critical, as it forged a strong relationship with Haluk Soydan at Sweden's National Board of Health and Welfare. Soydan later became a co-Chair with Boruch of the C2 leadership group, referred to as the Steering Committee. Further meetings were held in July of

1999 in the U.K., first in Durham, and later in London. Michael Peckham and UCL again provided support for the London meeting, with UCL hosting researchers, representatives of funding authorities, and several practitioners (including school teachers). I remember writing the first draft of the minutes of the meeting with Philip Davies (then a Professor at Oxford University) in his university office the next day (see Davies, Petrosino & Chalmers, 1999).

Boruch also began to enlist his wife, Dr. Dorothy DeMoya, to assist in helping to organize the effort. Given the lack of funding to pay “salaries,” DeMoya, who later became C2's first Executive Director, provided critical infrastructure to support the effort. Her deft handling of personalities, events, and planning helped Boruch and Chalmers navigate toward a launch of C2.

Naming the enterprise

It had been during their Baltimore meeting in 1998 that Chalmers had suggested to Boruch that this new Cochrane-like organization needed to be named after a deceased social scientist of legendary standing. Why not Donald Campbell? Although Campbell (like Boruch) wrote about so many scientific topics, he was probably best known in the social science community for his textbooks on experimentation and quasi-experimentation (Campbell and Stanley 1963; Cook and Campbell, 1979), and his famous speech to the American Psychological Association in 1969, in which he stated:

The United States and other modern nations should be ready for an experimental approach to social reform, an approach in which we try out new programs designed to cure specific social problems, in which we learn whether or not these programs are effective, and in which we retain, imitate, modify or discard them on the basis of apparent effectiveness on the multiple imperfect criteria available.

Campbell, while at Northwestern during the 1970s, was very influential in Boruch's (2013) early career, and Chalmers' suggestion resonated with Boruch.

Show me the money

It is never easy to find financial support for developing larger innovations in social science such as the Campbell Collaboration. A strategic meeting, however, was held in fall of 1999 with Phoebe Cottingham, who was then Senior Program Officer of the Smith Richardson Foundation (SRF). The

Foundation specialized in supporting public policy research. Cottingham came to the University, and saw a presentation by Chalmers of what the Cochrane Collaboration had done through its visible product known as *The Cochrane Library*, which allowed users to search through hundreds (at that time) of reviews of evidence in the health care sector.

Out of this meeting and discussion, Cottingham provided Boruch (following a short proposal and SRF Board approval) with a small grant to support several pieces of work in support of the development efforts. The grant was modest but permitted Boruch to embark on several formative projects. Given that I was available (or better yet, Fred Mosteller *made me available*) and pretty cheap (at the time), I was able to assist on a few of them, including:

- A business plan for a proposed Campbell Collaboration
- A survey of current lead authors of Cochrane reviews to learn from their successes and challenges (Petrosino, 1999).
- A “pilot review” that could serve as an example of what C2 reviews would look like (this would eventually become the “Scared Straight” review, e.g., Petrosino, et al. 2002).

Scared Straight and the Generosity of Cochrane

Boruch (2013) acknowledges the support of Chalmers and others in the Cochrane Collaboration during the early days developing C2, before its official launching in February 2000. Besides the insights that Chalmers could provide from experience acquired during the launch of the Cochrane Collaboration, including advice on creating a “mailing list,” how to structure the first meetings, and help in developing a register of controlled experiments of social and educational interventions (Petrosino et al. 2000), there were other acts of generosity by Cochrane to support C2. One deserves special shout out here.

As mentioned above, Boruch and Chalmers had wanted a “pilot C2 review.” Petrosino mentioned to Boruch that there was a program in justice circles called “Scared Straight” and similar programs—in which youth are brought to prison in an attempt to scare them from crime—that had been tested in a number of randomized trials. Although it was universally panned by criminologists as being ineffective, there had not been a systematic review of the kind envisioned by C2 yet. Boruch and

Chalmers thought that it would be a high profile topic that could generate interest in C2.

However, there was no C2 organization yet, and certainly no editorial review processes established. The leadership of the Cochrane Developmental, Psychosocial and Learning Disorders Group—Geraldine MacDonald and Jane Dennis—agreed that the pilot C2 review could go through the editorial processes of their Cochrane Group, and could be published by both Cochrane and C2 after the latter had been officially launched. Thanks to this early generosity of people in the Cochrane Collaboration, the Scared Straight review was conducted (with early support of SRF), and confirming what most criminologists touted, indicated that youth exposed to this program *did worse* on crime outcomes than youth who were assigned to nothing (Petrosino, et al. 2002). Although the final review was not officially published until 2002, the protocol (or plan for the review) and early publications were generated as early as 1999, and were well circulated during these early days.

Conclusion

All of these efforts built momentum as we moved toward the new decade, and C2 was officially launched in February 2000 in Philadelphia. The halls around the Inn at the University of Pennsylvania that first day could have served as the foundation for “Who’s Who?” in the social sciences. There was a feeling during the meeting that those who had gathered there were beginning something special. Now I am mindful of the quote in the Atwood (1985) book, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, that “When we think of the past it’s the beautiful things we pick out. We want to believe it was all like that.” The beautiful things I pick out about C2 to dwell on now are not just the scientific ones, as important as they have become. What I remember best are the relationships that were built during the effort. The camaraderie of working hard on something we all believed in. And having an opportunity to listen and learn from passionate, smart and generous colleagues committed to providing reliable evidence to inform the development of social and educational policies.

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