



On the Road to School Readiness

*Office of Head Start
Summit*

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Baltimore, MD

**Using Data from
Early Childhood
Assessments to
Strengthen
Children's School
Readiness**

*Presented by
Martha Zaslow, Director
Office for Policy and
Communications, Society for
Research in Child
Development and Child Trends*

Introduction

A Personal Story

- Three years ago, I received a gift from my loving family.



The Intent...

- was for me to have a tool that would improve quality of life; strengthen my productivity
- For example, it would give me the ability to personally make handouts for everyone at this meeting.

The Gift Went Unused

WHY???

I identified three reasons:

- *Purpose*: It didn't really fit my need.
- *Technical material*: I couldn't understand the instruction manual.
- *Integrating with existing systems*: I couldn't get the printer to work with my laptop.

Parallel

- Early childhood assessments are a tool we often do not fully use
- The same three issues that have prevented me from using my (generously offered) gift often act as impediments to the full use of early childhood assessments and limit the potential benefit from them.

Aims of This Presentation

To discuss how:

- clarity as to the *purpose* of assessment
- access to understandable *technical information* about reliability and validity
- thinking through how assessments fit within a *system* can strengthen our use of data from early childhood assessments.
- I hope the discussion can make early childhood assessments tools that we more fully own and make use of.

Purposes

Longstanding Focus on Purpose as a Key Issue

- Discussion about purposes of early childhood assessments in this presentation is based primarily on:
 - Report of the National Academies of Science Committee on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children: *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What and How* (Snow & Van Hemmel, 2008)
 - An important earlier report *Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments* (Shepard, Kagan & Wurtz, 1998)

Background on NAS Committee Report

Congressional Mandate

- In FY 2007 HHS appropriation.
- Study intended to
 - guide future congressional actions regarding assessment of Head Start programs
 - inform users of early childhood assessments
- Sponsored by DHHS Office of Head Start, with involvement of the Office for Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE).

Background on NAS Committee Report

Statement of Task

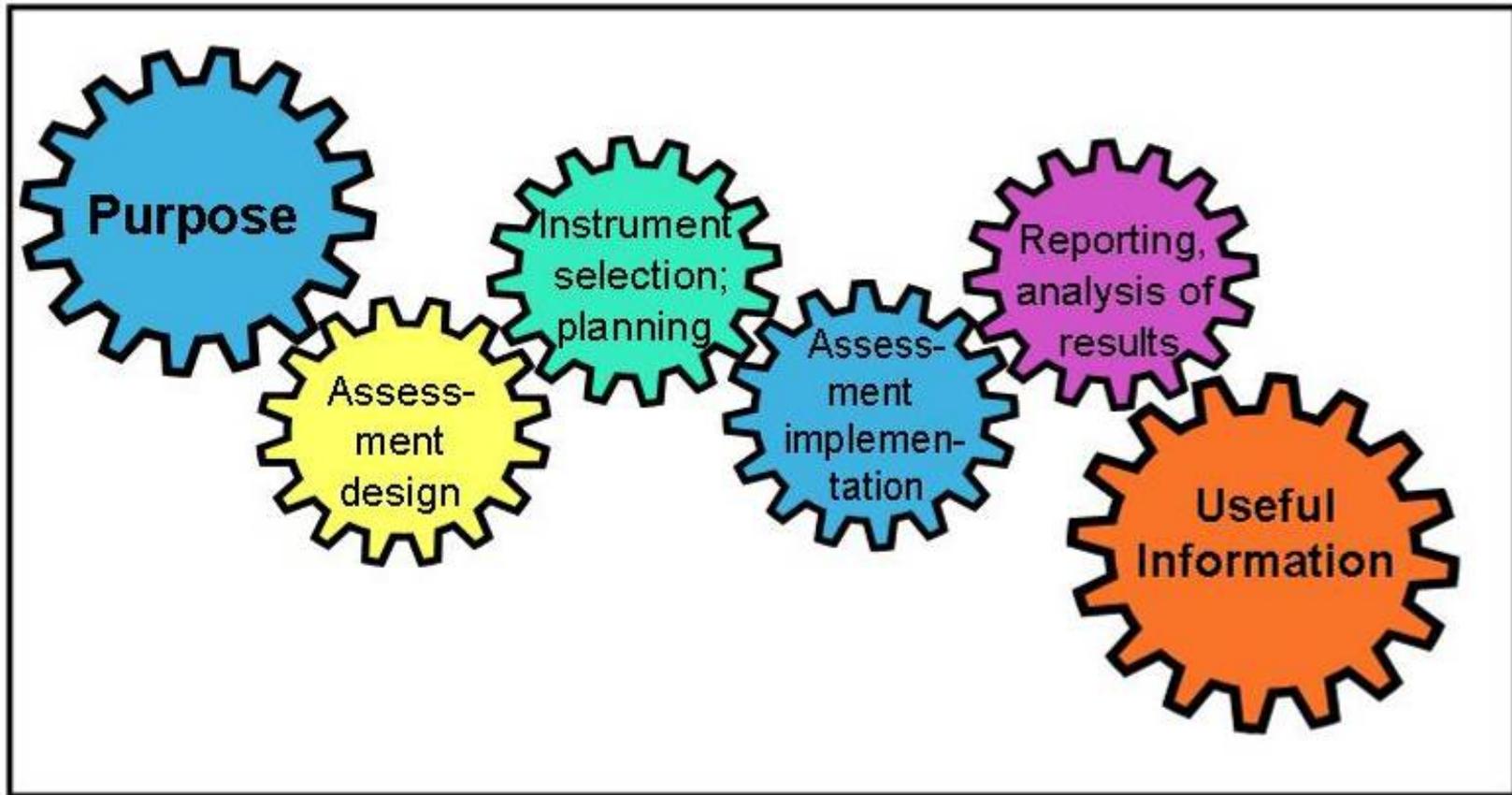
- Identify key outcomes associated with early stages of child development (ages 0-5).
- Review and evaluate quality and purpose of current techniques and instruments for developmental assessments of young children.
- Prepare report with recommendations for assessment policy and practice as well as future research priorities.

Purpose of Assessment as a Starting Point

According to this report:

- There are fundamentally different purposes for conducting early childhood assessments.
- The purpose of the assessment is the starting point for design, selection, implementation and reporting

Purpose of Assessment as a Starting Point



Four Purposes of Early Childhood Assessment

Committee identified four purposes of early childhood assessment

1. Screening and diagnostic testing (to identify special needs)
2. Guiding instruction and intervention (to support learning)
3. Evaluating the performance of a program or society (for accountability)
4. Advancing knowledge of child development (for understanding)

Primary Focus Today is on First Two of These

- In seeking to strengthen Head Start programs' use of data to improve children's school readiness, focus is on assessments conducted to:
 - Identify special needs
 - Support learning

A Closer Look at Assessments for These Two Purposes

- The NAS report summarizes the “WH” questions of early childhood assessments separately for each purpose.
- Will provide a brief summary for assessments conducted for the two we are focusing on here.

Assessment to Identify Special Needs

- *What is the goal of assessment?* To provide an initial assessment of whether child appears to be progressing as expected or may need special supports; to follow-up by determining whether a particular concern is present.
- *Who is assessed:* Screening and diagnosis can be informative for individual children, children in an early childhood program, or at community level.
- *Who is the target of assessment information?* Family, medical professional, early childhood program staff, early childhood intervention staff.
- *How is the assessment information collected?* May be medical assessment, parent report or one-on-one assessment. On screeners, thresholds indicate whether there *may* be a physical or developmental issue that should be followed up with further in-depth diagnostic work

Assessment to Support Instruction

- *What is the goal of assessment?* To get picture of what children know and can do, and to track their progress over time, to inform decisions about instruction at level of individual or group
- *Who is assessed?* All children in a class, center or program need to be assessed
- *Who is the target of assessment information:* Primarily within an early childhood setting: caregivers/educators and directors; family.
- *How is assessment information collected?:* Usually by observing children, collecting samples of their work, and talking to children. Progress is related to learning or behavioral criteria (criterion referenced) or to progress on curricular goals (curriculum referenced)

Contrast of Two of the Purposes

Key differences between assessments for supporting learning and for accountability (from Shepard et al, 1998):

- Context in which assessment conducted and materials used: everyday activities and materials vs. structured
- Whether approach needs to be highly standardized
- Whether it is appropriate to update information if a child shows progress (within limits of recording period data)
- Nature of training required: Important to stress that ongoing observations of children's progress require training, but training is different from that for standardized assessment
- Whether information gathered is related to criteria of learning or a curriculum, or to scores of other children in a norming sample
- Whether information is collected and communicated primarily to parents and teachers, or to policymakers and public

Key Issues Regarding Purpose Identified in NAS Report

- Assessments are developed for a particular purpose.
 - Important to start selection process with measures developed for purpose you are pursuing.
- Reliability and validity need to be established for the particular purpose and population being assessed
 - So important to be able to review the information about the population a measure was developed with and is intended for

Key Issues Regarding Purpose

- Caution is needed about using an assessment for more than one purpose
 - For example, a screener does not aim to have detailed information about child's progress on specific learning goals
 - If a measure developed to guide instruction is summarized also for a school or geographical area and used for accountability, need to use rigorous standards for training to make sure observers agree in how they are making their ratings
- Clear communication to stakeholders regarding purpose of assessment is important

Accessing Technical Information

Terminology In Technical Manuals

- How is it possible to fulfill a requirement to select measures that are reliable and valid for the particular purpose and for the particular population in a program when the technical manuals for the assessments
 - relay complex psychometric information
 - use technical jargon
 - do not present the information in a way that is comparable across measures and manuals?

Forthcoming Project

- A project funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, US DHHS, with input from the Office of Head Start, aims to address this set of issues.
- Anticipate that the report will be called:
Understanding and Choosing Assessments and Developmental Screeners for Young Children: Profiles of Selected Measures
- The draft report is currently under review.
- Project does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Administration for Children and Families of the US Department of Health and Human Services

Forthcoming Project

- Want to thank:
 - Dr. Jennifer Brooks, Project Officer
 - Colleagues at Child Trends:
 - Tamara Halle, for leading the work on this project, and Julia Wessel, Shannon Moodie and Kristin Darling-Churchill with whom I have worked on it
 - Head Start Fellows who have reviewed drafts and provided extremely helpful input: Carol Bellamy, Barbara Dowling, Rosanne Flores and Maxine Maloney
 - Will refer to the project report as *The Compendium*

Objectives of Project

- Highlight evidence on reliability and validity of measures *for key populations*, asking specifically about whether there is information on reliability and validity for populations you may be working with
- Present technical information about measures in a non-technical manner
- Identify areas where more work is needed to develop assessments and screeners for key populations

Selection of Measures for Compendium

- Include profiles of instruments that are most widely used by local Head Start programs for:
 - Individualization, classroom planning, and program improvement efforts. These are primarily observation-based measures that may or may not be curriculum-based
 - Screening children to identify those for whom further follow-up diagnostic evaluation for developmental problems is warranted.
- Measures were chosen based on data from:
 - Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR) data
 - Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) data

Selection of Measures

▪ Assessments

- Creative Curriculum Assessment Toolkit
- Galileo Preschool Assessment Scales
- High Scope Child Observation Record
- Learning Accomplishment Profile- 3rd Edition
- Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic (English and Spanish versions)
- Mullen Scales of Early Learning
- Work Sampling System for Head Start

▪ Screeners

- Ages and Stages Questionnaire 3rd Edition/Ages and Stages Social-Emotional
- Battelle Developmental Inventory Screening Test
- Brigance Preschool Screens
- Denver II
- Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Early Learning- 3rd Edition (DIAL-3)
- Early Screening Inventory
- Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic Screens
- Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status
- Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status: Developmental Milestones

Translating Technical Information

- Create a profile for each measure
- The profile is a comprehensive summary of the measure including:
 - Background information
 - Availability and cost
 - Training requirements
 - Information reporting systems
 - Approaches to family/parent input
 - Appropriateness for children of different backgrounds
 - Reliability, validity, sensitivity and specificity information for key populations

Translating Technical Information

- Document also contains background information including:
 - A definitions section with accessible definitions of psychometric terminology
 - Cross-cutting summary tables providing a brief overview of measures on content, reliability and validity, and populations the measure has been used with

Translating Technical Information

- Eliminated technical psychometric terms from profiles of measures, for example:
 - Instead of asking, “Does the measure have high inter-rater reliability?”
 - We ask, “Do different raters agree when they are assessing the same children?”
 - Instead of asking, “Does this measure have content validity?”
 - We ask: “Do experts agree that the items in the assessment do a good job of reflecting what the assessment is supposed to be assessing?”

Hope Information in Compendium Will be Useful to You:

- In selecting measures appropriate for your purposes and populations
- In identifying steps for getting parent input and communicating with parents
- In identifying supports that are available for summarizing, communicating and using data from assessments to benefit your program and the children in it

Hope Information Will be Useful to Measure Developers:

- In identifying what your needs are that are not currently being addressed in available measures
- Moving forward with development of further measures

Integrating Child Assessments Into a System

Integrating Early Childhood Assessments Into a System

- A further impediment to using early childhood assessments in the most effective way involves using them in isolation; not integrating them with other components into a system

What is a System?

- Has multiple components. These might include, for example:
 - Assessments for individual children
 - Summaries of assessments for a class or whole program
 - Curriculum
 - Training on the assessments
 - Professional development on a particular curriculum
- These fit together intentionally
- There are feedback loops: information from one component is used to inform and shape what happens in another

Isolated Assessments

- An assessment to support instruction may be carried out for each individual child in a class at multiple times in the course of a year, and used to support instruction for individual children
- But sometimes a program has not yet summarized the data across the children in the class or for the program
- And the data may not yet be integrated with professional development for the early educators in the program or with a curriculum and how it is implemented

Moving Towards Assessments as Part of a System

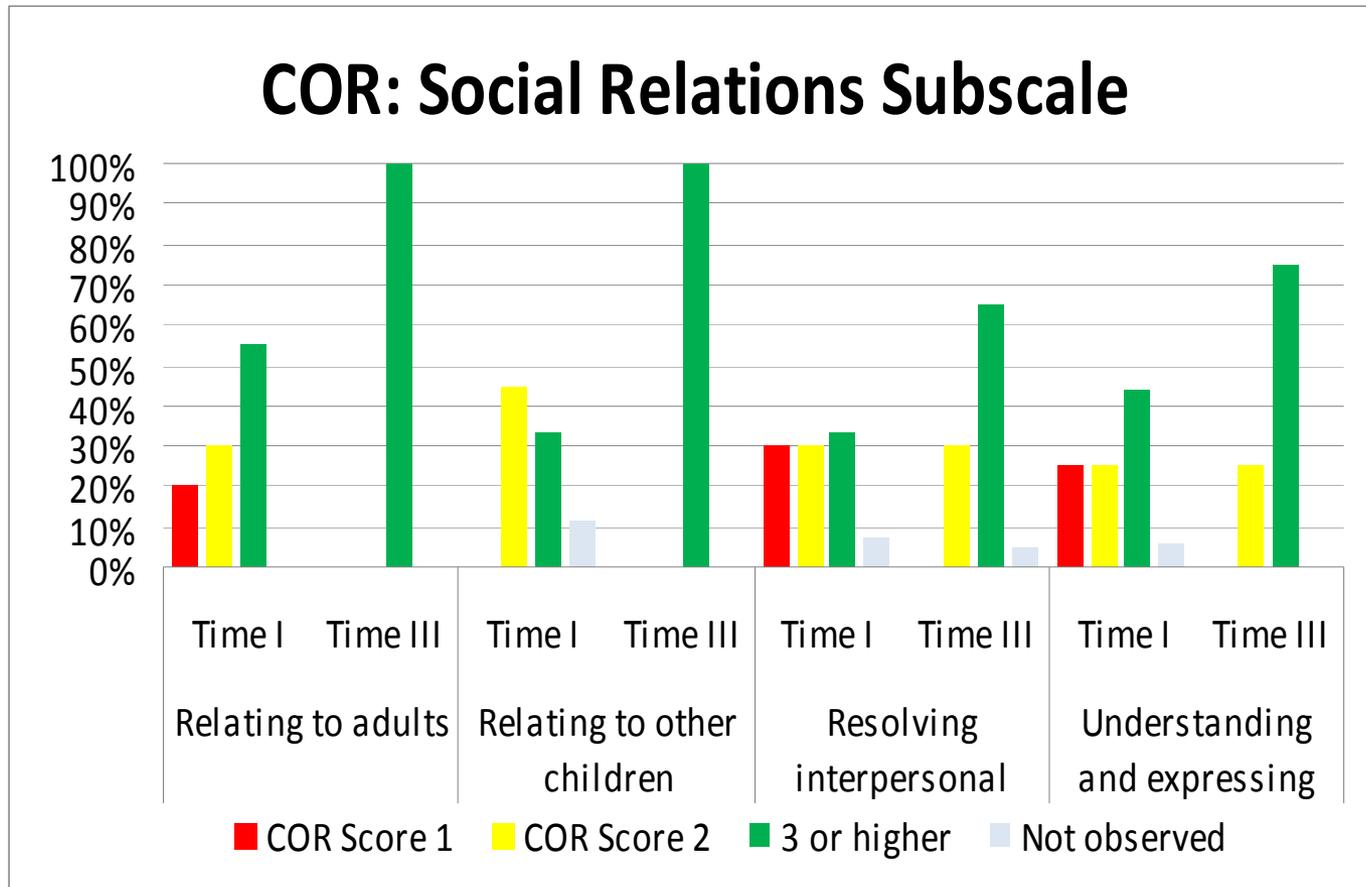
Example #1

- Here is an example from a wonderful program that colleagues and I from Child Trends are working with in Washington, DC, to help take individual child data and summarize it at a classroom level and link it with professional development
- All the work that we are doing with this program has been in close collaboration with the Director and senior staff. The approach we developed was decided upon jointly as one that would be informative and helpful.

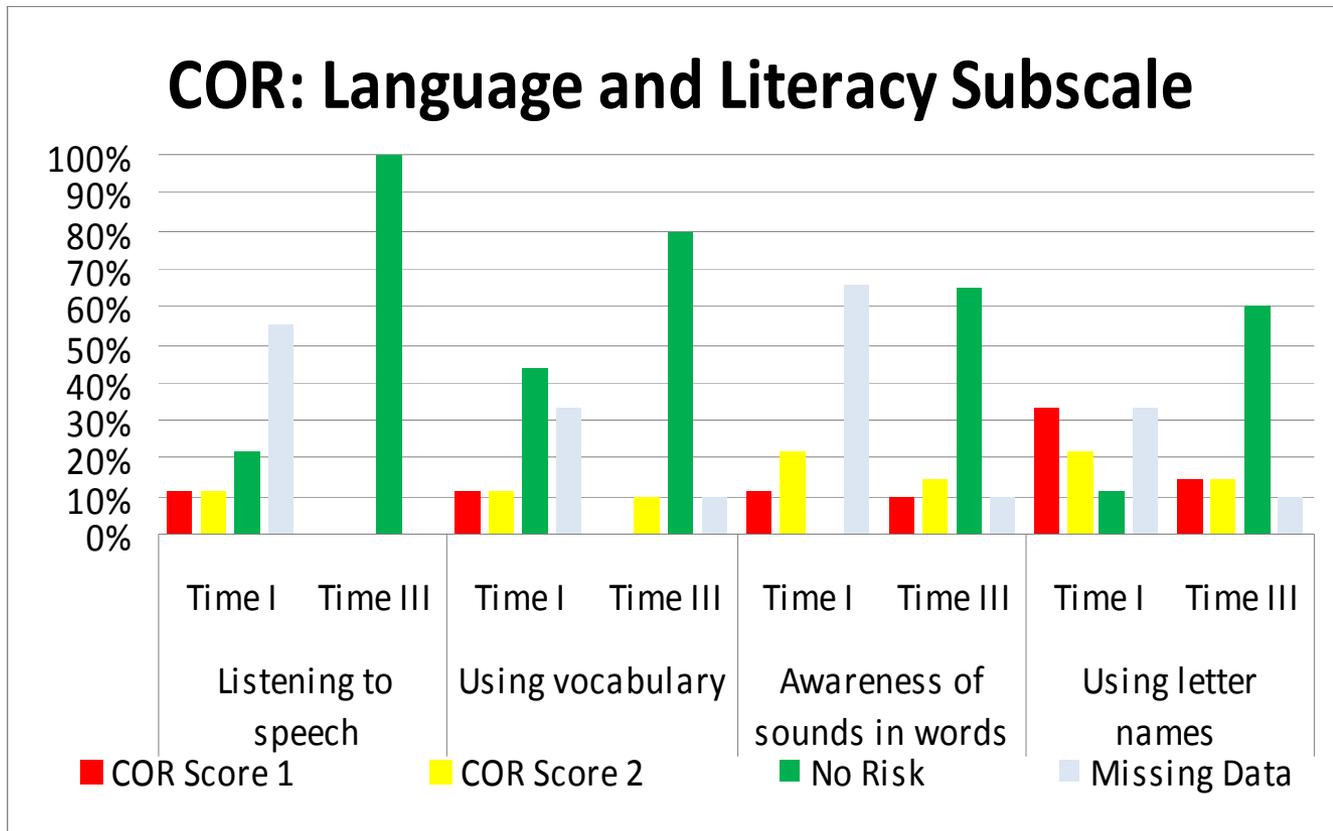
Assessments as Part of a System

- I will be using fictitious data in these figures to illustrate what happened when we took individual level child data and summarized it for the first time at the classroom level.
- The two figures that follow illustrate what can be gleaned from teacher ratings of children's progress on specific social behavior and language development learning goals summarized at the classroom level, and how the data can be integrated with professional development.

Teacher Ratings of Children's Progress on the COR



Teacher Ratings of Children's Progress on the COR



Moving Towards Assessments as Part of a System

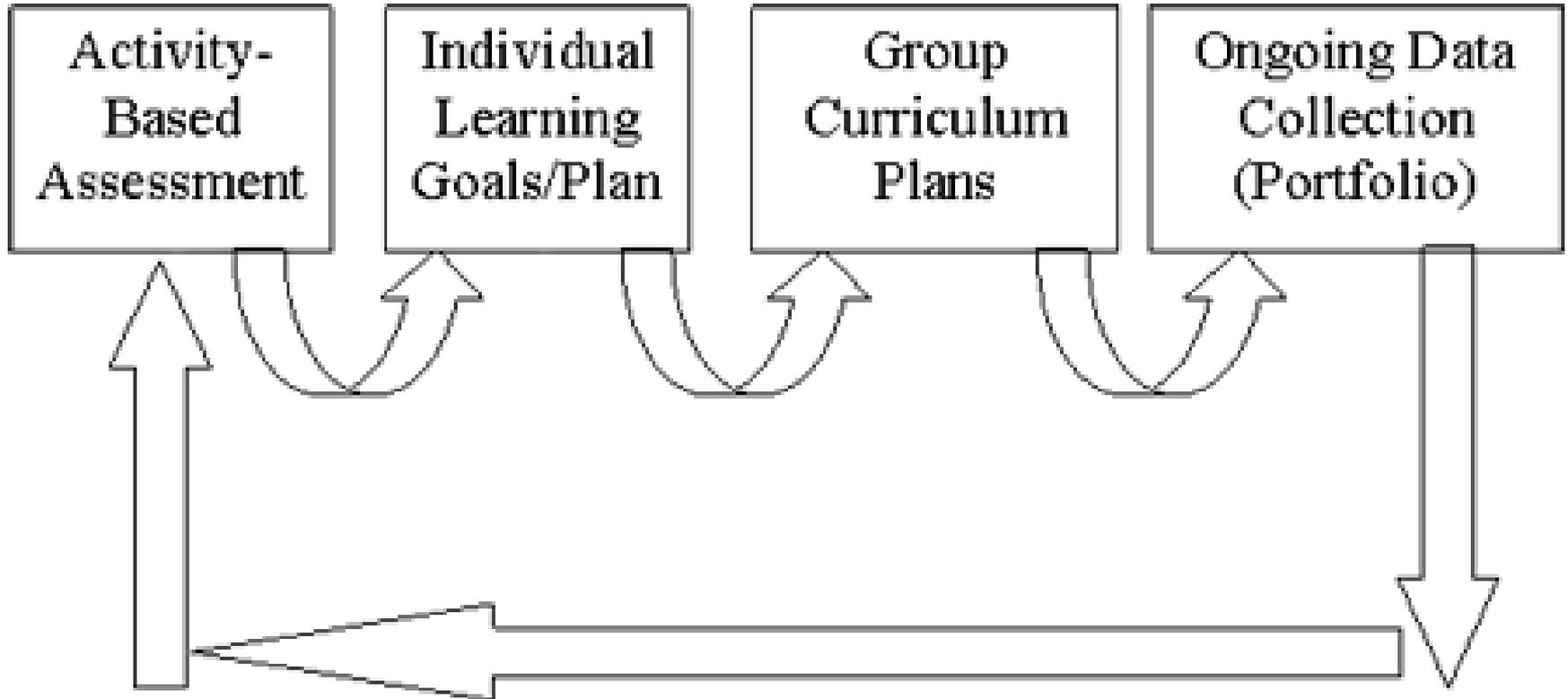
- These kinds of figures were very heartening to the program staff, illustrating the overall progress the children in this program were making.
- At the same time, these kinds of figures helped the staff identify priorities for their own professional development. For example, wanted to focus more on
 - Helping children resolve interpersonal conflict
 - Helping children hear sounds in words

Moving Towards Assessment as Part of a System

Example #2

- Another example comes from Hallam, Grisham-Brown, Gao and Brookshire (2007). Highly recommend publications by this group on this set of issues.
 - Project LINK (*A Partnership to Promote LINKages among Assessment, Curriculum, and Outcomes in Order to Enhance School Success for Children in Head Start Programs*)
 - Assessments conducted in structured activity settings within the normal routine, using the Assessment, Evaluation and Planning System (AEPS)
 - Results of this study (in the series of publications) indicate that implementation of the system resulted in higher scores on classroom language and literacy stimulation using the ELLCO

Conceptualization in LINK



Moving Towards Assessment as Part of a System

This conceptualization illustrates:

- Multiple components intended to work together
- Integration of child assessments with curriculum
- Feedback loops

Also important in LINKS: Ongoing technical assistance for staff

Moving Towards an Assessment System

- Important message from this conference:
 - In developing a system that incorporates child assessments for your program, take into account
 - Child outcomes in new Framework
 - Local school district expectations
 - Early learning standards

Conclusions

Conclusions

- I have tried to note how:
 - clarity as to purpose,
 - using new resources to fully access technical information, and
 - integrating data collection about children's progress into a larger system

Can help make data from child assessments useful in strengthening child outcomes

Conclusions

- I hope you will have less delay than I did in addressing impediments to using an important set of tools effectively and making them fully your own.
- You will be relieved to know I will not be concluding this presentation with a personal story about another family gift: a Mother's Day trip to see the movie "Gladiator."

References

- Hallam, R., Grisham-Brown, J., Gao, X., & Brookshire, R. (2007). The effects of outcomes-driven authentic assessment on classroom quality. *Early Childhood Research and Practice, 9* (2).
- Shepard, L., Kagan, S., & Wurtz, E. (1998). Principles and recommendations for early childhood assessments. Washington, DC. National Education Goals Panel.
- Snow, C. & Van Hemel, S. (2008). Early childhood assessment: Why, what and how? Report of the Committee on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children. Washington DC: National Academies Press.

Additional Information for Those Interested

- Overview of information for assessments conducted for two further purposes from NAS report

Evaluating the Performance of Program or Society

- *What is the goal of the assessment:* To determine if a program is effective; to determine if a public investment has had desired results; to document and track well-being of children in a community, region or state to identify strengths/weaknesses to better target interventions and to monitor children's wellbeing
- *Who is assessed:* It is *not* necessary to assess every child. An appropriate sample is sufficient. Goal is not to provide input on individual children's instruction but to assess program as a whole.
- *Who is target of information:* Funders, policymakers
- *How is assessment information collected:* Often through standardized assessments to hold constant timing, content and procedures of data collection

Advancing Knowledge of Child Development

- *What is the goal of the assessment:* Deepen knowledge of particular domains of development with eventual aim of strengthening related aspects of professional development, curricula, and environmental quality
- *Who is assessed:* Sample appropriate for research question. Informed consent required because data are used for “generalizable knowledge”
- *Who is target of assessment information?* Researchers and those in practice community
- *How is assessment information collected?* Standardized assessments of development or new measures under development. Usually in coordination with measures of early childhood professional development and/or quality of the environment.



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