

Maryland Committee for Children

Baltimore City Head Start

Maryland State Department of Education

Maryland Department of Human Resources/
Child Care Administration

Conversations on Curriculum

Conference 2002



January 15, 2002

The importance of early childhood for the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of human beings is probably...one of the most revolutionary discoveries of modern times...

Where emotional and mental growth are concerned, well begun is indeed half done.

Jerome Bruner

Carlethea Johnson

I am Ms. Carlethea Johnson, and on behalf of the Maryland Committee for Children, the Baltimore City Head Start Program, the Maryland Department of Education and the Maryland Department of Human Resources Child Care Administration, welcome to our conversations on curriculum.

We have over the years had many formal and informal conversations about curriculum. We have agreed, we have disagreed, we have agreed to disagree, we have agreed to agree. And during the past 30 years, we have noticed the increasing attention that has come to our world, early childhood education. And so we thought that it was time for a conversation on curriculum. And so I welcome you.

We found that there was a lot of interest. In our audience today, we have people from family support centers, community and four year colleges, local management boards, Head Start programs, childcare programs, family support centers, Judy Centers, state and local and federal government, and from foundations in the private sector as well. And so, this makes us believe that the work that we are doing is well worth doing, and that this event is timely.

I was thinking today about how to open this conference. I turned to Marian Wright Edelman's book, *Guide My Feet*, and there is a small prayer that I thought was appropriate.

Lord, please let our small mustard seeds of daily service grow into great shrubs of change and trees in whose branches the birds can nest and in whose shade our children can rest and feel safe. Again, welcome.

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speakers

Dr. Samuel Meisels

President of the Erikson Institute, early childhood educator, senior researcher on the national Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, expert on the use of assessments with infants and young children including the Work Sampling System, which he developed and which is now used throughout Maryland

Dr. David Weikart

Educator and psychologist, leader of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project and the High/Scope Curriculum Comparison Project, which have led to the implementation of many of the elements of successful preschool education found in today's schools, child care centers, and family child care homes

Dr. Joan Lombardi

Director of the Children's Project, which works to increase visibility of and resources for early childhood and after-school learning, educator and early childhood public policy leader, former Associate Commissioner for Child Care in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services

Diane Trister Dodge

President of Teaching Strategies, Inc., which seeks to enhance the quality of early childhood programs by offering high quality curriculum materials and training programs, creator of a curriculum used by many child care centers and Head Start programs nationwide

Linda Bevilacqua

Vice President of the Early Childhood Program, Core Knowledge Foundation, educator, authority on the Core Knowledge approach to preschool and an expert in language and learning disabilities

Dr. Rolf Grafwallner

Chief of the Early Learning Section, Maryland State Department of Education, provides leadership and direction for implementing effective learning programs in Maryland's public schools

Dr. Barbara Wasik

Principal Research Scientist, Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools, expert on effective pre-school programs for children at risk and on tutoring and coaching as means of promoting reading and school readiness

Heather Callister

Project Director of the Abell Foundation's Baltimore Preschool Collaborative Project, which works to enhance Head Start and public pre-kindergarten programs at twenty-five locations in Baltimore City and County

Dr. Sue Bredekamp

Director of Professional Development, National Association for the Education of Young Children, leader in the development of NAEYC curriculum and assessment guidelines, accreditation, and developmentally appropriate practice

Dr. Joan Lombardi, Director, The Children's Project

Good morning. It's a particular thrill for me to be back in Maryland. It was about 30 years ago this fall that I stepped into my first early childhood classroom in Maryland in the opportunity program in Montgomery County. Of course, I was only five then.

I feel that as a community, as a state, as a nation, we have really come a long way in early childhood. There has been a revolution since those days when I stepped in and was writing my own curriculum on little pieces of paper as I worked with children. There was nothing like the richness of what we have today. So we are, indeed, lucky.

I am very happy to be here for several reasons. First of all, I couldn't go anywhere on January 15th without reminding everybody about whose birthday this is. It is the birthday of Martin Luther King. And I think if Dr. King was with us today, he would know that the real way you fight for equality for children and families is to start with the earliest years. So, in his spirit, I think we begin this conversation.

Before we turn to our speakers, I want to call your attention to a report by the National Academy of Sciences called *Eager to Learn*. In this report, the scientific community verifies what all of us have been saying – that there is no difference between care and education, that there is a link between these things. So, I want to start this conversation with today by quoting the report's finding on curriculum:

“While no single curriculum or pedagogical approach can be identified as best, children who attend well planned, high quality early childhood programs in which curriculum aims are specified and integrated across domains tend to learn more and are better prepared to successfully master the complex demands of formal schooling.”

We should really think about that sentence throughout the day. Because it describes curriculum as one of the keys to quality, along with qualified teachers to implement it, of course.

Before we begin the program, can I get a sense of how many of you work directly on the floor with kids? Great. How many of you work in kindergarten programs? How many of you work with children in Head Start programs? In childcare programs? In family daycare? In school based programs? Judy Centers? Great. I'm pleased to see people from all parts of the early care and education community. We're all family, and that's what you have to remember.

Through this discussion of curriculum, I hope we can break down the barriers that divide us by the name over the door of our program and realize that whether you're a family daycare provider or whether you're a kindergarten teacher or first grade teacher, we're all in the same business. I think that's a message that Maryland is really trying to send to the rest of the country by having a dialogue where you're all in the same room. So I think Maryland Committee for Children and all the conference organizers should be thanked for that.

keynote speaker

Dr. Samuel Meisels, Director, Erikson Institute

Dr. Sam Meisels is one of the nation's leading expert in the development and use of educational assessments with infants and young children. Among his accomplishments are development and implementation of the Work Sampling System, a performance assessment that is used by teachers of children ages three to twelve. The Work Sampling System has been adopted by numerous school systems across the country and is the basis of the Maryland Model for School Readiness.

Dr. Meisels has also devised the Early Screening Inventory-Revised, a developmental screening instrument for 3 to 6 year olds. He is a senior researcher on the national Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, and has recently become the President of the Erikson Institute, an independent institution of higher education for child development professionals.

Above all, Dr. Meisels is a deep and committed friend of children and a friend of all of us in this field.

"What We Know About Children

Highlights from Dr. Meisels's remarks:

Like a lot of people these days, I am somewhat concerned about what we know about children and their ability to achieve. I think we actually know a great deal about children and their achievements. But I'm not sure that everyone else knows what we know.

I'm going to talk today about what I call myths and meaning of early childhood readiness. I'm going to try to articulate what I see as some issues and then what I see as some solutions.

As you can well imagine, concerning my use of the word myth in this context, I'm not exactly thinking about Homer or the Odyssey. What I'm really doing is looking for a polite way to tell you about a variety of positions with which I fundamentally disagree.

I'll go further and confess that my use of the word myth in this context is polite academic speak for ideas I find absolutely aggravating because of the absence of evidence to support these points of views. Several myths involve different views of teaching and learning and early childhood readiness. They involve issues of the first five years of life, not just the years from three to six. And these will be issues, as I have said, that I find particularly troubling.

Following that discussion, I'll try to bring some meaning and rationality to the topic of early childhood readiness by using assessment, and in particular the Work Sampling System, as an illustration of an integrative way of thinking about the disputes and the disparities that mark this field. I believe that the examples I'll give will offer a structure for thinking productively about children's growth, development, and learning from birth through kindergarten entry.

Myth # 1

The first myth that I'd like to present to you is that the first three years of life are no more important to a child's development than any other time in life. Now, this may seem absurd to raise at a conference like this, but it's a position that more than just a few people hold.

Most recently, we saw this book written by John Bruer entitled *The Myth of the First Three Years, A New Understanding of Early Brain Development and Lifelong Learning*. This book examined the ways in which recent findings in neuroscience have been blown out of proportion and used to imply that we know how to increase the neuroconnections in a child's brain, and ultimately the child's intelligence.

The book received a great deal of attention when it first appeared about two years ago, and it caused many people in the field to reconsider their position concerning the impact of early intervention on neurological development. It's main argument is still worth considering today for both its insights and its inaccuracies.

Bruer seeks to challenge two beliefs: first, that the brain learns best and is unusually plastic only during the early years of neuronal development; and second, that the experiences we have during those years are particularly powerful and have long-term, irreversible consequences. The thesis of his book is that these two statements are in some significant ways inaccurate – that these two statements are in some way overselling the importance of the period of life from birth to three years.

I have to tell you that some of what is being said here, in fact, is true. There has been an overselling. Take, for example, the Mozart effect. That's the notion that playing classical music, especially Mozart, will boost a child's IQ. This idea was popularized in the press, but it has no clear formulation in science.

What is critical to understand is the essential place that early childhood development holds

in human growth. And this I think is something that is misunderstood in the views of those who say that the first three years of life are really not that important.

No one says this better about early life experiences and early development than the authors of another one of the National Academy of Science's reports that came out within the last year. That's *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, which lays out the scientific basis of early childhood development.

One thing that is stated in *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* is this: What happens during the first months and years of life matters a lot. It matters – not because this period of development provides an indelible blueprint for adult well being, but because it sets either a sturdy or a fragile stage for what follows.

If there is a myth of the first three years, it is that these years are not particularly important for learning or for developing the emotional core needed for later adaptive interpersonal functioning and intra-personal growth. We know this is a myth from neuropsychologists who talk about environmental factors that influence brain development. And one such neuropsychologist, Charles Nelson from the University of Minnesota, writes that *the developing brain is capable of being modified by both deleterious and beneficial experiences... Clearly, there is a sound neurophysiological basis for early childhood intervention, particularly in those circumstances in which early life experiences may be less than optimal and therefore not represent the "expected" environment.*

In other words, although it is correct to say, as does Bruer and others, that development is not over at age three, that doesn't free us from an obligation to nurture, to support, and to seek to advance the development of all children during those years. What we do during those years is extremely important, despite the fact that much more growth and development is still to come.

Curricula must have a balanced approach that emphasizes skills and meaning, social and cognition, head and heart.

Myth # 2

The fact that development occurs on many levels brings me to the second myth that I want to explore with you. That is the myth of the preeminence of cognition, specifically that cognitive development is the most important area of development and should be emphasized above all other domains.

But the evidence doesn't support the dominance of any single domain of development over another, and here I'll make reference to *Eager to Learn*, another report that came out from the National Academy of Sciences. In *Eager to Learn*, we read the following. *cognitive, social-emotional (mental health), and physical development are complementary, mutually supportive areas of growth all requiring active attention in the preschool years... All are therefore related to early learning and later academic achievement...*

We know that social skills and physical dexterity influence cognitive development, just as cognition plays a role in children's social understanding and their motor development. The task is not to emphasize one domain over another, but to be sure not to ignore one domain of development in favor of another, and that is particularly true in the first five or six years of life, if not throughout our lives.

Surely, development consists of a complex system of social, emotional, physical and intellectual functioning, and our early childhood programs must meet the challenge of responding to all of these domains rather than assuming that one or another is more dominant.

Eager to Learn is not the only research review that argues for a comprehensive approach; so does *From Neurons and Neighborhoods*. It makes the same point that no single domain of early childhood development is preeminent, by saying that *the elements of early intervention programs that enhance social and emotional development are just as important as the components that support linguistic and cognitive competence.*

Let me pause for a second and tell you why it's so important that I'm quoting from these reports. The reason is that the National Academy of Sciences is probably the most conservative scientific body in the nation. They won't allow you to put a period in a report if there isn't some evidence that supports putting it there. They are obsessive about accuracy. So, the fact that the National Academy of Sciences and the early childhood area of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement at the Department of Education supported this work is extremely important for us. It gives us terribly important ammunition.

Eager to Learn points out that some of the strongest long-term impacts of successful interventions have been documented in domains of social adjustments such as reductions in criminal behavior, lower rates of adolescent pregnancy, and enhancement of community responsibility. That kind of a statement is a direct reference to the research of David Weikart and his colleagues.

In fact, it was something of a corrective to the conventional emphasis on cognition that several members of the Zero to Three board began thinking about this issue some years ago. I was fortunate to be a member of that board, and what we did together was to create something that we called Heart Start.

Heart Start created a description of children who are ready to learn. And in that description, what we claimed was that the following characteristics are the ones that equip children best to come to school with a knowledge of how to learn: confidence, curiosity, intentionality, self-control, relatedness, capacity to communicate, and cooperativeness. These qualities suggest a way of raising and caring for children throughout their first year of life that doesn't reflect a sole preoccupation with establishing a fund of general knowledge, an ability to read and recite the alphabet, or familiarity with a long list of facts or skills.

Although it is extremely important for all children to acquire those skills as well, fundamental to the attainment of those skills is sense of self that can only be developed over time and in interaction with trustworthy and caring adults.

I believe that we must have a balanced approach, one that emphasizes skills and meaning, social and cognition, head and heart. It is only in this balance that most children will actually be able to demonstrate their cognitive abilities to the fullest.

Myth # 3

Let me go on to another myth – the myth of a magic bullet for teaching reading. It goes as follows. “Phonics is the best way to teach young children to read.”

What do the advocates of phonics have in mind? What do they have in mind for phonics instruction? The things that comprise it are matching letters to sound, alphabet and letter recognition, and conventions of print which is recognizing lower case and upper case, sentences, paragraphs, periods and so forth. It also includes learning rhyming words and word families, vocabulary instruction, and mastering the alphabetic principle, which is the concept that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken words.

This is obviously a skills-based approach to learning to read. It emphasizes “cracking the code,” the code of learning to read. Phonics is not new, but it is getting newfound emphasis and newfound importance in our current Presidential administration.

Now, what is an alternative to the phonics-based approach? The alternative is a meaning-based literacy perspective. It is sometimes called whole language, sometimes emergent literacy. It has some assumptions, as follows:

First, it assumes that young children can be engaged in language and literacy learning before they are able to read and write

conventionally. Secondly, reading, writing, listening, and speaking are part of the daily activities of the classroom where teachers read books to children, engage them in play with letters and sounds, and encourage them to participate in literacy-rich learning centers, among other activities.

This approach is what we call a top down method. It is not a matter of cracking the code from the bottom up which is what phonics does. Meaning-based literacy says we’re going to engage you, we’re going to introduce you to a literacy-rich environment, and we are going to do still more than that.

Now, significant research supports the phonics based approach, and that is a key reason for its advocacy by many policy makers these days, and that research cannot be denied, nor should anyone attempt to do so.

But the fact is there is also a great deal of research that supports the whole language approach, too. These studies consistently demonstrate that authentic reading and writing activities improve children’s attitudes towards literacy and increase their understanding about reading and writing.

In other words, whole language stimulates elements of literacy development not affected by phonics instruction alone, such as vocabulary, writing ability and attributes helpful to children as they become potentially lifelong readers.

Indeed, when we analyze the data from the nation’s newest nationally representative database – the early childhood longitudinal study, a study of more than 21,000 children in more than 1,000 schools – we learned that different approaches to reading resulted in very different outcomes. No single instructional method has identical across-the-board impact on a variety of outcomes. Moreover, some approaches that are very positive in one domain may have negative effects in another.

For me, the biggest problem is the either-or approach. Anyone who teaches whole language without thinking about phonics instruction as well is doing themselves and their children a disservice. Anyone who uses a scripted approach to phonics instruction alone without creating a literacy-rich environment is also doing a disservice. Many academics, myself among them, advocate a middle road, a balanced approach. Here is what it says:

There is significant research that indicates that phonics and whole language can coexist and can complement one another. A balanced approach combines skills instruction with literature and language-rich activities. You do not have to do one or the other. You can – I will even say, you should – do both.

And here I'll make reference to a third National Academy of Science report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties*. It says that there is no identical mix of instructional materials and strategies that will work for each and every child. All of us who have worked with kids know that we can't take one method, one curriculum, and hope that that method will meet the needs of every single child, especially not children who come from backgrounds of economic deprivation. What's more, it is clear that teachers will need to individualize reading instruction to meet the needs of a wider range of children, as our population becomes even more diverse.

Effective teachers craft a special mix of instructional ingredients for every child they work with. In short, there is no single magic bullet. There are, fortunately, many bullets or to use more positive terminology, many different instructional methodologies.

So my concern is not that there is an emphasis on phonics *per se*, or even on cognition *per se*. My concern is that the single minded emphasis is going to shortchange so many children. We need to have a balanced approach.

Myth # 4

Now I'll move onto another myth that I've spent a lot of time thinking about, and it's the myth of readiness. This myth holds that readiness can be assessed in terms of a common set of indicators of achievements that can be applied to all children. And here, I hope that you are beginning to see that these myths actually are all very highly related.

Fortunately or not, readiness and children are much more complicated than this statement would have us believe. And indeed, as Jerome Bruner points out, *the idea of readiness is a mischievous half-truth, largely because it turns out that one teaches readiness or provides opportunities for its nurture, one does not simply wait for it.*

In other words, what Bruner is saying, is that children will come to school looking very different from one another. Just as their faces will be different, so will be their experiences and their backgrounds, and so will be what you need to do with them to help them to be "ready."

But many people believe that all we have to do is give them a simple readiness test, that's it. We'll know right away which ones are ready and which ones aren't ready and then we can do all kinds of things. But indeed, there are problems with school readiness, and here are a few of them:

- Early development is episodic and uneven. A single test given at one time will really miss the strengths of some children, while emphasizing the strengths of other children. So they necessarily disadvantage some children and advantage others. Reliability is extremely difficult to achieve in the first five or six years of life.
- Social knowledge components are typically culturally-biased. When you look at the social elements that are in most early readiness tests, to me, they look like a test of middle-class rules of etiquette – like the Emily Post of preschool, rather than social problem-solving skills.

- The validity of these tests is poor. Even if the tests results were reliable, which I have just said they are not, we still would need to question how well they tell us what we assume they are telling us.
- Many of the test items imply teaching. The fact is that you can't know your colors and even your letters or your numbers if you haven't been taught them. These are things that you have to learn. Kids are taught different things, right? Obviously. So there are different opportunities to learn and that has to be reflected in the instructional programs that they encounter.
- Content is inconsistent with teacher views of school success. Here, I am referring to approaches to learning, in particular. Many of us in early childhood know that among the many tasks we have in classrooms is to focus on strengthening, on engaging and on supporting children's curiosity, their interest, their flexibility, their problem solving, their attention to task, and their persistence. Those characteristics are the characteristics that we call approaches to learning. And those are not usually found anywhere in conventional school-readiness assessments.
- The concept of "readiness" is relative. Young children are exquisitely vulnerable to the opportunity to learn that they have been exposed to. So, what is ready in one community will not be ready in another and vice versa.

What do we know from the research literature about predicting children's competence from conventional readiness tests? We now know a lot about it. A review and analysis of more than 70 studies in this area appeared recently in *The Review of Educational Research*. And in that, the authors found that, on average, only 25 percent of the variance in early academic/cognitive performance is predicted from preschool or kindergarten cognitive status. Only ten percent or less of the variance in kindergarten to second grade social and behavioral measures is predicted by social behavioral/assessments at

preschool or kindergarten. And the authors conclude that instability or change may be the rule rather than the exception during this period. Now, if we know this, then we should act on what we know.

To summarize these thoughts about readiness, let me refer to something that a colleague of mine from Stanford, Deborah Stipek wrote not long ago: *The use of readiness tests...is implicitly based on the premise that children are not able to take advantage of school until they are "ready," and that biological maturation and experience outside of school prepares them better than experience in a school context. The evidence supports neither of these assumptions.*

What Stipek points out is that the meaningful question is not whether a child is ready to learn, but what a child is ready to learn. The appropriate policy question is not what children need to know or be able to do when they get to school, but what schools need to do to meet the social and educational needs of the children who walk through their doors.

So, our task now in trying to pull this together is to try to understand how we can make assessments of readiness meaningful. And from my perspective, meaningful assessment of young children's readiness to learn calls for a comprehensive view of learning and development. We have to get away from thinking in terms of polarities between the first three years and what follows, between cognitive and affective, between this approach to teaching reading and that approach, and between the idea that readiness is in the child and the view that readiness is in the context in which the child is being reared.

keynote speaker

Dr. Samuel Meisels, Director, Erikson Institute

The best way to evaluate a student's performance is to study performance, and not something else. It's like the story about two men watching a new boxer spar in the ring. One man says, "The new boxer looks very promising." The second man says, "Yes, but let's wait and see how he does on the written test."

Basically we have to learn to recognize that the ideal teaching and learning situation is one that fuses these polarities into a comprehensive position that is a whole. And I believe that through performance based assessments, we can find a lever into this. We can learn that assessment and instruction are best dealt with not as opposites, but as interactive elements as a multi-layered integrated process. And that the most effective assessments for young children are ones that incorporate both instructional and normative parameters into an interlocking complementary system.

The Work Sampling System is an assessment system that incorporates this approach to readiness assessment. Many of you are familiar with Work Sampling, because it is a major part of the Maryland Model for School Readiness.

You know that the Maryland Model is a continuous, progressive instructional assessment. It helps teachers to observe, to record, and to assess children's skills and their knowledge, behaviors and academic accomplishments. The characteristics of Work Sampling are that it:

- allows us to focus on individual students rather than on a group.
- directs us to attend to all aspects of curriculum, not just to one or two aspects.
- is aligned with state and national standards.
- is relevant to instruction.
- has extensive documentation.
- has standardized training and administration
- is supported by research about reliability and validity.

Fundamentally, what we have in Work Sampling is a curriculum-embedded assessment, an assessment based on the student's typical classroom performance. It clarifies what students are learning and what they have begun to master, and it provides information relevant to understanding

children's individual learning profiles. And finally, it guides instructional decision making and provides instructionally relevant information to teachers so that teaching can be enhanced and learning can be improved. It is not designed to rank and compare students or to be used for high stakes like promotion or retention. Rather it is a tool for the teacher, and its value is linked to its impact on instruction.

Alternative call out: Performance assessments, like the Work Sampling System, provide instructionally relevant information to teachers so that teaching can be enhanced and learning can be improved.

Myth # 5

Let me turn to a myth that relates to Work Sampling as a means of assessment. This is the myth that teachers aren't accurate assessors and that the only sure way to know how well a child is doing is to administer conventional, standardized tests. This myth really comes down to this question: Can we trust teachers' judgments?

My colleagues and I decided to conduct a research project on this question and designed a study to evaluate the validity of the Work Sampling System as a measure of children's learning and academic achievement. We did this in the Pittsburgh public schools which had been using Work Sampling for several years. The study involved nearly 400 children, kindergarten to third grade, over one year.

The study questions were as follows:

- Is Work Sampling a valid means of evaluating student achievement and process?
- What is the impact of Work Sampling on families?
- What is the impact of Work Sampling on children's learning?

The study found that:

- Work Sampling correlates very well with the standardized, individually administered psychoeducational battery (Woodcock Johnson-Revised).
- Work Sampling is a reliable predictor of achievement ratings in kindergarten through grade three. In fact, it was a stronger predictor of test scores than demographic variables such as the child's race, family income, neighborhood of residence, etc.
- Data that were obtained from Work Sampling accurately discriminated between children who are and who are not at risk.

So this begins to answer our question, can you trust teacher judgment? Yes, you can. But remember that this was a situation where Work Sampling was not being used for what we call high stakes purposes. Kids were not going to be failed if they did poorly. Teachers were not going to get a salary increment if their children did well. Instead, it was being used as an instructional assessment, which ironically is called low stakes, not high stakes.

Myth # 6

Another question that comes up has to do with the myth of parental rejection. It holds that parents want conventional report cards and won't accept alternative assessments.

Of course, we know this is less the case in preschool and in childcare. But what we found was that the parents of elementary students held positive attitudes toward Work Sampling. They believed that Work Sampling benefited their children, and their satisfaction increased with their increased knowledge of it. In fact, we learned that the majority of parents preferred work sampling. And finally, they wanted their children to continue participating in Work Sampling classrooms.

Myth # 7

The last myth is that observational assessments are too unreliable to have a positive effect on teaching and learning. And this brings us back to what this whole day is about – conversations on curriculum.

Work Sampling is not a curriculum. It relates to many different curricula and does imply certain things about curriculum development. The question is: will Work Sampling have a positive effect on how you teach, and therefore on how kids learn?

From the study in Pittsburgh, we found that, in fact, Work Sampling had a very positive effect on learning. We found that children in Work Sampling classrooms – children who were low-income, urban, minority third and fourth graders – had higher scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills than either a matched contrast group or the aggregate of all third and fourth graders in the entire Pittsburgh.

In reading, the kids who are in Work Sampling classrooms have a more than 25 times greater increase in their Iowa scores from third to fourth grade than their contrast group. And they are 1/3 higher than all other kids in the school district. In math, we saw the same pattern, but it is not as dramatic, not as significant.

So what we are able to show here is that instructional assessment can have an impact on teaching and on learning, and this can be shown in using assessment that are as different as day is to night, such as the Iowa and Work Sampling.

Children in Work Sampling classrooms had higher scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills than either a matched contrast group or the aggregate of all third and fourth graders in the entire Pittsburgh school system.

keynote speaker

Dr. Samuel Meisels, Director, Erikson Institute

Conclusion

In short, what we have learned from our studies is that:

- the Work Sampling System is a valid and effective assessment of children's learning.
- teachers and families are satisfied with the system and become more so the more experience they have with it.
- ts in Work Sampling classrooms make significant achievement gains.

Now, let me try to provide you with a way to bring together a meaningful basis for early childhood readiness. First, remember that the first three years of life cannot and should not be ignored. Second, focus on all areas of development rather than on cognition alone. Third, adopt instructional approaches that are varied and balanced. Fourth, be sure that "readiness for school" applies to the child, family, school, and community – not to the child alone. And finally, adopt an instructional assessment that has the potential to enhance teaching and to improve learning.

One of our contemporary sages of early childhood development, Jerome Bruner, wrote something more than 20 years ago that I want to leave you with:

Of course, we don't know exactly how much development transpires in the early years, but we do know that it is a critical time for young children to learn how to learn. And a key aspect of this learning is a determination to attend to Bruner's admonition that both emotional and mental growth must be focused on. We mustn't think that can choose one over the other. Instead, we need to honor the way that all of us learn and grow, through passion and rationality, through head and heart.

Understanding this fundamental connectedness in learning from birth onwards is a critical responsibility that each and every one of us must meet. It is only in doing so that all children will have the opportunity to achieve their potential and thereby carry us forward into the new millennium with hope, with insight, and with enthusiasm.

The importance of early childhood for the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of human beings is probably...one of the most revolutionary discoveries of modern times...Where emotional and mental growth are concerned, well begun is indeed half done.

keynote address

Dr. David Weikart, Founder, High/Scope Perry Preschool Project

Dr. Weikart, an educator and psychologist, has had a singular influence on early childhood education in the United States. His work with the Ypsilanti, Michigan school system led to the formation of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project and the High/Scope Curriculum Comparison Project, which are the source of many elements of successful preschool education found in today's schools, child care centers, family child care homes, and Head Start centers.

Dr. Weikart has conducted studies to determine new and effective ways to improve the lives of children and families. His long-term studies have documented the extraordinary effect that high-quality early education can have on children's lives, including achieving success in school and better economic and social status in adulthood. Dr. Weikart's efforts also include research and subsequent strategies for observational and assessment tools, visitation strategies for home-based programs, infant/toddler care, and educational implementation.

Dr. Weikart has recently retired from his position as president and CEO of High/Scope, but he remains a beacon of knowledge in the field of early childhood education.

Highlights from Dr. Weikart's remarks:

We have come a long way in our understanding of early childhood development and education in the past forty years. I'd like to try to summarize for you the findings that point the way for effective early education programs and, thus, for public policy in this area.

Over the past forty years, high-quality care and education programs have struggled to find acceptance as a priority for young children. As part of gaining that acceptance, professionals in the field have recognized the need to define what is meant by a "high quality" early childhood program. Historically, efforts to define and achieve quality have focused on three areas:

The first is regulatory standards, which speak to matters of health and safety, adequate facilities, and legal requirements for adult/child ratios. Regulatory standards help improve overall settings, but they don't deliver quality.

The second is professional standards. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, for one, sets professional standards, and these are goals to strive for. And we should encourage the thoughtful application of ideals. But, by themselves, professional standards will not reliably deliver quality.

The third one is recognition of the need for comprehensive services for the children and families participating in the programs.

However, to reach the goal of providing high-quality early care, a fourth step is required. A validated, well-implemented, educational methodology must be employed, usually in the form of a model curriculum. As yet, however, this fourth step is not widely recognized as essential. In my talk today, I will present the evidence that supports the importance of such a curriculum, focusing on two studies that are foundations of our current thinking about early education.

High-quality early education is a powerful antidote to poverty.

High/Scope Perry Pre-school Project

The first is the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project done in Ypsilanti, Michigan starting in 1962. For this project, we selected 123 African-American children, ages three and four, living in poverty and at risk of school failure. They were very similar to the kids that are enrolled in Head Start today. These children were randomly divided into a program group that received a high-quality, active-learning pre-school program and a group that received no pre-school program. The two groups were not different on anything else of importance. This means that we are able to claim that any differences that we see as they go through life is a product of having had this specialized experience. And the experience they had was preschool education at ages three and four with teachers who were supervised, had systematic in-service training, and used observational assessment to judge their progress. In addition, the parents had weekly home visits.

The kids were studied over the years, at ages 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 19 and 27. The findings have always been consistent after third grade. The group who had the pre-school program has always done better. There have not been any reversals or changes. Some of the most effective differences that we have documented are:

- **Social responsibility:** By age 27, only one-fifth as many program group members as non-program group members were arrested five or more times (7% v. 35%), and only one-third as many were ever arrested for drug dealing (7% v. 25%).
- **Earnings and economic status:** At age 27, four times as many program group members as non-program group members earned \$2,000 or more per month (29% v. 7%). Almost three times as many program group members as non-program group members owned their own homes (36% v. 13%), and over twice as many owned second cars (30% v. 13%). Significantly fewer program group

members than non-program group members received welfare assistance or other social services at some time as adults (59% v. 80%).

- **Educational performance:** One third again as many program group members graduated from regular or adult high school or received General Education Development certification (71% v. 54%). Earlier in the study, the program group had significantly higher average achievement scores (at age 14) and literacy scores (at age 19) than the non-program group.
- **Commitment to marriage:** Although the same percentages of program males and non-program males were married (26%), the program males were married nearly twice as long as the non-program males (an average of 6.2 years v. 3.3 years). Five times as many program females as non-program females were married at the time of the age-27 interview (40% v. 8%). Program females had only about two-thirds as many out-of-wedlock births as did non-program females (57% of births v. 83% of births).
- **Return on investment:** A benefit-cost analysis was conducted by estimating the monetary value of the program and its effects resulted in a benefit-cost ratio of \$7.16 returned for every \$1 invested in the High/Scope Perry Pre-school program. By increasing the number of children per adult from five to eight, the program's cost per child per year could be reduced, with virtually no loss in quality or benefits.

Now, these were the same kinds of kids in these two groups. The only difference was the experiences that they had in preschool in thinking, planning, and acting. And so, I think we can say that early childhood education, when offered as a high-quality program, is a powerful antidote to poverty. It is, obviously, not the only solution. As adults, 71% of the program group earned less than \$2,000 a month. Still, program participation did

improve life chances and did significantly reduce the number of individuals needing additional help or creating social problems for the community.

The High/Scope Pre-school Curriculum Comparison Study

Now, if we know that a high-quality preschool program has these substantial benefits for both the participants and for society, then we need to ask ourselves “What does high-quality look like?” As you will recall, I started this presentation by saying that one essential element of quality, frequently overlooked, is the use of a curriculum.

So, if we need a curriculum, then this leads to the question of which sort of curriculum is the most effective at conferring social, economic, and educational benefits on its participants? The High/Scope Pre-school Curriculum Comparison Study was designed to answer that question.

Educational approaches used with children generally fall into four categories:

- **The programmed approach**, also called direct instruction. In this approach, the typical role of the teacher is to determine and then initiate the required learning activities. The role of the child is to respond to and learn from what the teacher offers, not to self-initiate individual learning or activities. These curricula include clearly defined objective; incorporate carefully designed, programmed sequences to move children toward these objectives; and provide teachers with a script for implementing the sequences. Content usually emphasizes specific pre-academic skills. It’s a strong theory. The recent Abell Foundation report on the Baltimore preschool programs and the Head Start preschool programs pushes in this direction – toward having teachers have a clear content for teaching children.
- **Child-centered**, also called the nursery school approach. In this approach, the child typically initiates learning by playing, and the teacher’s role is to respond to the child’s interests and activities. Characterized by a focus on the development of the “whole child,” such programs emphasize social and emotional growth and self-expression, rather than the acquisition of specific pre-academic skills or cognitive development. At its most extreme, like in Summerhill or similar programs, the teacher really has no agenda except to wait for the kids to flower. Most people don’t believe in the “no agenda” approach anymore. Most people feel that you have to provide certain intentional experiences.
- **Open-framework approach**, including the High/Scope Curriculum. In this approach, which is based on developmental theory, it is the role of both teacher and child to initiate learning activities. The primary educational objective for the child is the development of fundamental cognitive processes and concepts, rather than specific skills (although it is assumed that specific skills will be acquired during general development). Learning results from the child’s intended, directed experience in and action upon the environment, followed by shared reflection on the experience. In essence, it is the role of the teacher to support the child’s thinking and growing and to introducing information that is necessary for the child to have. It operates very much on the basis of the individual child because the individual child brings interest, notions and energy to the task.
- **Custodial**. This approach has the teacher/adult providing basic care while the children entertain themselves.

keynote address

Dr. David Weikart, Founder, High/Scope Perry Preschool Project

Direct instruction leaves the child without any skills of thinking and problem solving.

Education officials who promote teacher-scripted instruction with young children living in poverty are pursuing a very risky path.

So, the High/Scope Pre-school Curriculum Comparison Study, which started in 1967, randomly assigned 68 disadvantaged three- and four-year-old children (both African-American and Anglo) living in Ypsilanti, Michigan, to each of the three curriculum models: direct instruction, High/Scope, and traditional nursery school. The children attended school for one or two years and received a home visit to involve their parents every other week. We then followed these children through age 23 and came up with these findings:

- **Education:** Only one significant group difference in total education-related scores took place during the study through to the age of 23: the direct instruction group surpassed the traditional nursery school group at the end of the pre-school program, at age five, on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. The larger finding from tests is the extraordinary increase in the mean IQ of the whole sample of children, whatever curriculum model they experienced. From the baseline mean IQ of 78 at age three, the three curriculum groups together at age four, after one year of a pre-school program, evidenced an improvement of 26 points. This improvement diminished by nine points during the subsequent six years, but held steady at 17 points above the baseline at ages six, seven and ten, which is a pattern of sustained improvement that contradicted the expected IQ fade-out.

However, despite the direct instruction group's two years of intensive academic preparation, all three curriculum groups performed essentially the same on academic tests throughout their school years. The direct instruction group experienced significantly more years of special education for emotional impairment or disturbance (47%); members of the other two groups experienced almost no special education (6% each). Members of the direct instruction group failed almost twice as many classes as did members of the other

two curriculum groups, a difference that was not statistically significant but that was consistent with the direct instruction group's non-significant pattern of a lower rate of on-time high school graduation.

- **Household.** Age 23 is the very beginning of adult life and is still very much a transitional period. The striking evidence of this is that nearly half of the follow-up study's respondents (47%) were, at age 23, living with their mother and/or father, that is to say, living in their home of origin. Curriculum groups differed significantly in the percentages of members married and living with their spouses: 0 percent of the direct instruction group, as compared with 18 percent of the nursery school group and 31 percent of the High/Scope group. This finding resembles the High/Scope Perry Pre-school study finding that 40 percent of program females, but only 8 percent of non-program females, were married at age 27.
- **Life adjustments (criminal arrests).** The direct instruction group experienced over twice as many *lifetime arrests*, including twice as many adult arrests, as either of the other two curriculum groups. The direct instruction group averaged 3.2 lifetime arrests per person, as compared with 1.5 for the High/Scope group and 1.3 for the nursery school group.

Most important, the direct instruction group had significantly more felony arrests than the other curriculum groups – four times as many as the other groups combined. These differences appeared in felony arrests from ages 22 to 25, as the number of these arrests grew more substantial. Forty-three percent of direct instruction group members had felony arrest records, as compared with only 10 percent of the High/Scope group and 17 percent of the Nursery School group.

Finally, the direct instruction group reported being suspended from work significantly more often than did either of the other two curriculum groups – 0.6 times per direct instruction group member as compared with almost no work suspensions in the other groups.

So what we see here are some extraordinary differences. And I think the comparative crime rates are the most important. And they are interesting, because obviously, it isn't that the direct instruction created the crime – we don't feel that's true. And we have evidence that it's not true because the direct instruction crime rate is identical to the “no program” control group in the High/Scope Perry Pre-school study. So, direct instruction doesn't create criminality, it just didn't prevent it. And I think the reason is that direct instruction leaves the child without any skills of thinking and problem solving.

Let me go back again to the Abell Foundation report about Head Start and pre-school here in Baltimore. I was fascinated by their use of the French preschools as a way of talking about what, perhaps, Baltimore should be doing.

Now I don't know much about the French programs. But I wonder why the Abell Foundation didn't point to the Finnish model, because in Finland, all the parents – 90 plus percent of the parents and 90 plus percent of the teachers – agree that there should be no academic teaching of children until they're seven years of age. Instead, about 60 percent of the kids go to family daycare starting at age 2 or 3 and are in a family daycare system with no academics, but lots of rich warmth, reading, these kinds of things, up to age 7. Then they go into school.

And in recent tests conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, it was found that the best readers in the world were the Finns. They were the best, even though they only had two years of schooling before they were tested at age 9. The next best was United States; then Sweden, which also typically doesn't start academic instruction until age 7; and the fourth were the French.

I think that when we pick whom we want to draw from, we have to be careful, because there is a broad field out there. And, the choice of using one model or another isn't simple; it's complicated. And I agree with Sam Meisels who pointed out this morning that a range of options are involved and we must think about early education from an integrated, balanced viewpoint.

Let me return to the High/Scope Pre-school Curriculum Comparison Study. I think the obvious conclusion from the outcomes is that direct instruction leaves a gap in children's overall development. A more balanced curriculum that supports children's initiative is essential to having high quality programs that produce lasting benefits. In particular, the study suggests that education officials who promote teacher-scripted instruction with young children living in poverty are pursuing a very risky path.

So, let's take stock. We have decided to use or endorse an open-framework curriculum in which child-initiated learning is supported by adults. Is that it? Is our job done?

No, it is not – not if we are involved in efforts that involve large public expenditures and/or efforts to implement the curriculum in diverse communities while achieving promised program effectiveness. In other words, not if we hope to export the success of the model program beyond the initial setting.

International studies of early education indicate that in most countries, 60 to 80 percent of the classroom time is adult-directed, not child-initiated.

keynote address

Dr. David Weikart, Founder, High/Scope Perry Preschool Project

While the open-framework approach with an emphasis on child initiation is important, there are even broader criteria for selecting a curriculum model that will lead to the desired results. To be effective, a high-quality pre-school model needs to meet three requirements:

1. It must have a validated curriculum. This means that it must be based on developmentally valid theory. It must be documented, validated by research, and used on a wide scale and in a wide range of settings to be sure it actually works.
2. It must have a validated training system, so that it can be transferred from the model to a wide range of classrooms or care settings.
3. It must have a validated assessment system. A curriculum model needs an assessment system capable of reliably indicating the growth achieved by participating children. And, a well-developed monitoring system must be available to ensure that the curriculum model is actually in operation when it is said to be employed.

So, it takes a lot thoughtful development and implementation to deliver quality. But we, in this room, have long believed that it is worth the effort. Now, research on human brain development has confirmed our commitment to the early care and education. However, like everything else in life, the quality of the experience is key. Offering “what we believe to be important for children” is no longer acceptable or sufficient. That commitment to high quality must be realized by building upon the best model curriculum approaches now available.

Three Curriculum Models

Linda Bevilacqua

Diane Trister Dodge

Dr. David Weikart

Dr. Joan Lombardi

Discussion Topic:

Similarities and Differences in Three Curricula

- Core of Knowledge
- Creative Curriculum
- High/Scope

Linda Bevilacqua, Core Knowledge Foundation

At the preschool level, Core Knowledge is a curriculum that is content-rich and language-rich. It provides specific delineation, in all the early childhood domains, of the kinds of knowledge, skills and behaviors that we know are important as the foundation for future success and ease in learning in elementary school. To be specific, in Core Knowledge, you would find the following domains addressed: physical well-being and coordination, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, knowledge acquisition, and cognitive development. *All domains are important.*

The thing that usually catches people's attention about Core Knowledge is that it is very specific and very explicit. It is that way for a reason. I'd like you to think about Core Knowledge and its specificity, not intended so much as standards for children, but rather as guidelines for the kinds of experiences that educators need to offer to all young children in order to be sure that we are laying that foundation for future success.

However, whatever curriculum, whatever kind of program or materials you might be using, the most important thing is to plan educationally meaningful experiences. This is the notion of *teaching with intentionality*. The only way that we can provide appropriate experiences for children if we are intentional as teachers. Why are we doing a particular activity? What's the point? What do we want children to get out of this experience? This applies across all curricula.

We can provide content without it being directive. While content is tied to process, they are two different things. It's essential to provide content-rich experiences. It's the question of how to do so that is the issue. Child-initiated is often best, but sometimes, teacher-initiated activity is appropriate. We have overdone the

panel discussion

Three Curriculum Models

It's our job to make experiences count, and that's where curriculum comes in.

polarization of these two approaches. We know that the teacher/child relationship is very important, and some of us have come to believe that teachers can be nurturers only in the child-initiated environment. This is not true. We can be nurturing in both child- and teacher-initiated activities.

So, the Core Knowledge approach has three operational aspects:

- Plan educationally meaningful experiences.
- Start where each child is.
- Guide learning, step by step.

It's our job to make experiences count, and that's where curriculum comes in.

Diane Trister Dodge, *The Creative Curriculum*

I think you will find our curriculums – Core Knowledge, the Creative Curriculum, and High/Scope – are more alike than they are different. We base our practices on very similar knowledge.

Creative Curriculum is based on four fundamental beliefs:

1. the value of play
2. the importance of social competence
3. a strong link between assessment and curriculum
4. the importance of families as partners in children's learning

Two characteristics distinguish the Creative Curriculum. The first is the framework we offer for decision making, and the second is the environmental approach. These define the approach we take to achieving a quality program.

Children don't accomplish a particular skill all at once. Rather, they progress through a sequence of steps. The Creative Curriculum framework provides a developmental continuum of skills and accomplishments for children ages 3 to 5. This allows teachers to determine where each child is in relation to

curricular goals and objectives, and it indicates what activities should be offered to help each child advance in each area of development.

Our focus on the learning environment stresses the importance of the physical environment, how it is organized, how materials are displayed, and the program structure that the teacher puts in place – because there is clear structure here. It includes the daily schedule, the routines and the social environment, how the teacher builds a classroom community with the children so that they develop the social skills that are essential for success in school and in life.

I think we all agree on the value of play, but not all play is equal. With the Creative Curriculum, it is teacher's responsibility to create an inviting and challenging setting, note what children can do, whether they have the skills to learn through play, and to explicitly teach what children need to make the most of their play experiences. Teachers can't leave matters of learning to chance, which is where content comes in. Preschool teachers have always taught content, but now we want to use curriculum to help teachers be very intentional about teaching.

Assessment plays an important part here, too. If we believe that appropriate curriculum, well-implemented, is key to achieving positive outcomes for children, then assessment linked to curriculum goals and objectives is a vital tool to help teachers improve their practice. And the Creative Curriculum provides observation and assessment tools.

Finally, as an organization, we have focused on what it means to implement a curriculum. Too often, programs say they are using one curriculum or another, but all they have done is buy the book and have a couple days of training. That's not what we mean by implementing a curriculum.

I think we all agree on the value of play, but not all play is equal.

Proper implementation involves a number of phases. You need a plan. You need to know what your teachers know about your chosen curriculum, and what they know about early childhood education, and plan out your staff development. You need to figure out how you're going to introduce the curriculum so that people understand it and how to apply it. And then you need to provide ongoing support for staff – really supporting staff in understanding how to use the curriculum framework, how to use assessments, how to tie them together. It means getting out of your office and into the classroom with teachers to really work with them.

David Weikart, High/Scope

I think High/Scope approaches curriculum in a very different way than these two that have been outlined. In the first place, we come at it from a research perspective instead of an educational perspective, because the original design was a question to be researched rather than a question of service.

The focus of the High/Scope curriculum is this: that we ask children to plan to make an intention of their activity. And we ask that in all parts of the curriculum.

There is no supervision of that. A child may only have a plan for 15 seconds. But then when they get older, four and five, six and seven, eight and nine, they have plans for weeks. And that's fine.

Second, we ask the child to do something, and this means you have to set up this rich environment so there are plenty of materials. Or you have to arrange it so that the child brings stuff from home. Or you have to have parents come in who can offer alternatives and materials and things that would help the children carry out their plans.

Next, there is time to work on the plan. And during that process, children have a chance to interact, to play, to be involved in things.

During that process, the teacher rotates and works with children. The teacher, in working with the child or the plan, can extend it and expand it, sometimes entering into the dramatic play, sometimes upgrading the skills, doing a variety of things that are relevant to the kids but are not disruptive to them. She does not take over the play of the children.

The next thing that we do is called review. And review is an analysis of what happened. And you do it to the extent the child can do the analysis, not to the extent you can do it.

The important thing is that the child has attention, has a work plan, has something to work with to carry out the plan, and can talk about it in language with someone who can extend, expand, enrich that language and that process. In this, we want the teacher to be a partner and a conversationalist, not a tester. We want the child to feel they have some power. Not the power to do whatever they please, but the power to be part of the process.

So, this is, in a sense, a child's version of the scientific method. This is the fundamental way problems are solved in the world. If we want to find information out, we develop the issue. We make a plan to solve it, and then we work it through and see what happened. This kind of thinking is critical, regardless of what the child is thinking about. So on a theoretical level, this is the High/Scope approach: plan, do, and review – always at the aptitude level of the child, always adapted to their sophistication, always tailored to their interest, but always trying to pull the child along.

High/Scope is, in a sense, a child's version of the scientific method: plan, do, review.

Joan Lombardi, The Children's Project

I'm going to take my prerogative as facilitator and make a comment about public dollars, since that is where I spent most of my life, trying to get more.

Childcare programs – centers and family child care – have not traditionally gotten public education money. It has been very difficult to begin to use the word curriculum and to talk about our expectation for curriculum, because we know programs are not getting the kind of support they need to recruit and retain teachers.

That's the number one thing that we have to change. But we need to start with high expectations. That is what curriculum standards do for us; they raise our expectations.

On a different note, before we leave this panel, I have one question for all of you. This discussion has sounded very center-based. What about family child care. What do you offer by way of curriculum materials and training for family providers?

Dianne Trister Dodge: It think it was in about 1990 that we published the *Creative Curriculum for Family Childcare*. So almost everything that I said this afternoon about our beliefs about curriculum apply to family childcare. We take that same framework and apply it to a home setting. We also have curriculum for infants and toddlers, and we have a primary grade.

Linda Bevilacqua: Core Knowledge curriculum works for both centers and family providers. We have, in fact, many parents who call to talk about using the Core Knowledge preschool sequence at home. So again, those same kinds of guidelines in terms of the type of experiences would be very applicable, whether you're in a home setting, a one-on-one setting, or in a center setting. What would be different is the organizational or delivery model.

I don't think that we have specifically worked with family care providers in terms of providing training. But the basis of all of our training is very similar to the premise that I start out with when I talked to you about children. That is that we start where the person is. Every teacher comes in with prior experiences and knowledge in certain areas, and then perhaps weaknesses in others. And so the training is designed to build on those strengths, and then provide the knowledge that individuals would need in the other areas.

David Weikart: I certainly believe in the potential of family child care, especially given the Finnish system where family child care leads to such good outcomes. Our new book, *Tender Care*, is really for center-based programs, though family care programs are also using it as a way of thinking about working with children. And, we do offer High/Scope training for family child care providers. It's a series of nine two-day courses, currently offered through Lucent Technologies, which also is doing our training for private child care centers.

Three Curriculum Models

Dr. Rolf Grafwallner

Dr. Barbara Wasik

Heather Callister

Dr. Sue Bredekamp

Dr. Joan Lombardi

Rolf Grafwallner, Maryland State Department of Education:

First, I would like to say that much of what we are doing in the State is trying to find common ground for people working in all early care and education settings, so that we have a common understanding of what the desired outcomes are for our children by the time they enter kindergarten. Our hope is that, within a reasonable range, children will have similar learning opportunities in all settings. We believe that a curriculum can help us get to this outcome. Of course, along with the curriculum, you must have on-going staff development and parent involvement.

So, let me offer you a list of criteria you might want to consider in selecting a curriculum: First, the curriculum should have a framework, like the five domains, that is very encompassing and covers all areas of a child's development. I think everyone in this room is in agreement on that, and it's very important because this agreement may not exist at the national level, where there is an emphasis on early literacy or pre-reading.

Second, there must be on-going staff development, whether it's offered through the curriculum that's commercially available or in one that you develop. Ongoing staff development is very crucial and must have consistency and validity in the way it's presented to your staff.

Third, the curriculum should have goals based on child development and learning theory. The "key experiences" in the High/Scope curriculum are a good example of this. And fourth, the curriculum should include an assessment piece, which is the driving force behind the pedagogy.

The Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) provides goals for each child and can be used in every setting. It's a results-based framework for outcomes that can be aligned with various curricula, including the three that were discussed here today.

reaction panel

Three Curriculum Models

The Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) provides goals for each child and can be used in every setting.

It is my hope that this conversation will continue on the regional level. One way this will happen is through the MMSR training that we are doing in collaboration with Maryland Committee for Children. We are currently doing training-of-trainers sessions and will have some have several hundred child care providers trained in MMSR. Of course, we hope this will continue through the child care community.

Barbara Wasik:

I'm just going to review for you five important items that I learned today. The first is that training is really important. It is really important if our teachers are to be able to implement a chosen curriculum. It takes skill and training for a teacher to extend learning experiences, and it requires that the teacher, herself, have strong language development.

Assessments are training tools for teachers.

Second, I learned that curriculum means many things to many people. Curricula can be anywhere along a continuum from extremely structured to less structured. But all of the curricula discussed here today had an important characteristic. They had conceptual and procedural knowledge connected to them that allowed them to be implemented with a high degree of fidelity. Teachers must understand why they are doing something and they need to be told how to do it. This knowledge must be part of the curriculum.

Third, I was reminded of the importance of focusing on the whole child. I'm a literacy person, so I tend to get focused on pre-literacy skills, getting kids to learn the alphabet and to develop phonemic awareness. But I heard everyone here today saying how important it is to focus on both the cognitive and the affective – and the family piece, all of this that makes the child.

Fourth, I heard affirmations about the importance of assessment. It is wonderful that all the curricula we heard about had individual assessments. We saw that classrooms using the Work Sampling System showed growth over

time when others, without assessment, did not. I honestly believe that the assessment was a training tool for those teachers. It taught those teachers how to look differently at those children, how to talk differently to those children, how to observe behaviors that normally would have been passed over as kids doing cute things, when kids were actually doing things that were purposeful. And then, assessment gave teachers ways to be able to qualify that and then make themselves better teachers as they went through the process.

So assessment needs to be tied to curriculum, and teachers need to be trained in the utility of it and how it can guide and help them in understanding what their children know, what their children need to know, and how they then can change the procedures they're going to do the next day in the classroom that will effect the education of their children.

Finally, and everyone seemed to cheer for this, is that the early childhood field needs to be professionalized. This means people need to be paid more money, but it's not just money. It's also training and professional development.

Heather Callister, Abell Foundation's Baltimore Preschool Collaborative Project:

I'm going to put a little spin on what has been talked about here today. First, you should know that I have been working with disadvantaged children and families forever. But this April, a light bulb went on for me. I have been going around the state visiting Head Start classrooms and preschool classrooms. And what really clicked for me is the incredible importance of language development and vocabulary development. What I am seeing is dedicated, committed teachers just like those who are represented here, who would also be listening to the importance of language development and vocabulary development and be nodding their heads. And yet when I go into these classrooms, I am not seeing the level of language enhancement that will help disadvantaged children get where they need to be.

Think about this for a minute. Children from upper income families go into kindergarten knowing 90 to 95 percent of the words that will be used in kindergarten. Disadvantaged children go into kindergarten knowing 40 to 45 percent of those words.

Now you tell me which of those two groups will be able to function on the most abstract level? We're asking our most deprived children to manage a level of contextual abstractness that is the most difficult for any child in a kindergarten group to attain.

We estimate that disadvantaged kids need around 40 hours a week of intensive language development to get them to the level of middle- and upper-income kids. When you only have children in a Head Start half-day program for two and a half, maybe three hours a day, we don't have a minute to waste.

I think part of the problem here is that a lot of people don't understand the value of conversation because as a culture, we don't do conversation very well. And we don't ask questions. We give statements. So let's look at the way we converse and think about how our way of dealing with one another impacts the children that we're working with, or the children who are worked with by those whom we supervise.

The other thing I notice when I go into classrooms is language being used to control children. Language is used because a lot of staff don't yet have classroom management techniques they need. The concern of a lot of teachers in disadvantaged programs, and here I'm thinking Head Start, is that they must maintain control. And how do you maintain control? You give directives, closed ended directives. "Sit down; put your book away; be quiet." And I hear that from the most committed, impassioned teachers.

So, we need to get back to the training. And we need to acknowledge that the work to be done is incredibly complex. We are fooling ourselves if we think it's a matter of holding a

book up in front of children and every so often showing them the A,B,Cs. It's much more complex in terms of the development of the brain and development of the early reading and writing and language experiences that children must have. And yet we place this incredibly complex task into the hands of people who are often not particularly well trained, especially in this particular area, and not very well supported in terms of their change in the classroom.

A lot of training has taken place, but let's look and see if the training methods that we are using are really good. Do you know how many of us sitting in this room have been trained until we want to gag? And do you know how many Head Start people have been trained until they want to gag? And yet, you know what? Sometimes you go into classrooms and you don't see good stuff happening.

Now, does that mean that we don't know what it is to be teaching, how we need to be teaching, and initiating child-directed learning? No. I think it means that we need a new supervisory structure which understands how to supports staff and also understands the ramifications of what we are trying to do in the classroom.

Sometimes teachers get left alone to do it on their own. Instead, we need to be able to model good behavior; we need to be able to supervise to excellent standards; and we need to use more peer coaching, so that we are honest with one another about exactly the level that we are attaining in terms of this language development.

Classrooms need a new supervisory structure which understands how to supports staff and also understands the ramifications of what we are trying to do with our various curricula.

Three Curriculum Models

I think that we all agree with what was said earlier about readiness to learn, that all children are ready to learn. But there is a difference between being ready to learn and ready for school.

Sue Bredekamp, National Association for the Education of Young Children:

I want to start by echoing what Linda said earlier about Maryland being high among the states in what we have accomplished in early childhood. You live here, you don't have the national perspective that people like Joan and I have. I really do want to stress that I have lived my entire life in the state of Maryland and I am very proud of that. I'm proud to live in this state and proud of how we've always stood up for children.

I really want to say that I think a considerable amount of that is due to the relentless advocacy and leadership of Sandy Skolnik, and to the collaboration that we've established with Carlethea and Rolf, and others here. It is wonderful to see this happening in my backyard.

I was at NAEYC for 18 years from 1981 to 1998, when we developed the standards for accreditation. One of the standards was that there would be a curriculum in the program.

Before we ever had a system, we circulated the standards and we got phone calls. The most frequently asked question we had was what is a curriculum? That was beginning in 1984 and 1985. We're talking, you know, 15 years ago. People in our field were clueless about the notion of curriculum.

So, we have come a very long way. We still have a ways to go, but we have come an enormously long way, and we have had three examples of models of curriculum that people have been working at very hard, and that do draw on what we now know about how young children learn and what they need to know. What are the forerunners if you will, of the next level of education that children will encounter? So I think it's really a wonderful time.

We are getting a lot of attention to early childhood; there is a lot of talk. Money is possibly going to come in some different ways in larger amounts to early childhood education, but we have to be very careful out there that we get it right and that we pay attention to people who have been working very hard and that we not be easily misled.

For instance, on the matter of outcomes, the child outcomes framework coming out of the state, coming out of Head Start, have been deeply thought about by these curriculum developers. This is the kind of work that they do. They have thought about what it is we want children to be learning, what kinds of experiences will contribute to that.

But at the same time, you're going to be getting over your doorstep lots of people saying: Here is the quick and dirty way to get you to the outcomes. You, as a director, now don't even have to think about it. All you have to do is this. Be wary of those kinds of things. And also be wary of the pressure that may develop around assessment and meeting child outcomes. So that we make sure that the pressure, if any, is on the adults, not on the children. And that we focus on supporting young children toward achieving these outcomes.

I think that we all agree with what was said earlier about readiness to learn, that all children are ready to learn. But there is a difference between being ready to learn and ready for school.

There is a body of school knowledge, including school language, for instance, that Heather reminded us of. And certainly when you go to school and you understand what the teacher says, you can build on prior learning much easier than if you don't.

And for children who don't understand, the gap just gets wider – because more and more of what the teacher says is not understood. And so the children can't build on their prior knowledge, and they can't catch up.

In fact, some people say that in this country we don't have an achievement gap, we have a verbal language gap, and that that is really a significant cause of what is happening and why poor children in this country persist in this achievement gap.

Now, I feel we are really responsible as early childhood educators, because when is language development happening? It's happening on our watch, so it's our responsibility to really pay attention to what Heather has been saying and to put language development right up there. Because it absolutely effects every other dimension of learning, and certainly it effects literacy. You can't be literate without language.

What is the curriculum with infants and toddlers? It is language development, but it starts with relationships. It is relationships, language development, and learning experiences. The whole world is a learning experience for infants and toddlers. So that's the curriculum, and it has to be thought about very intentionally at that age just as well.

I have a couple of reflections on the curricula that we heard about. And I think that people who are here talking about the curriculum may not agree with me. What I think is so interesting about these curricula is where they start.

Core Knowledge starts with the content. What do you want the kids to know? Creative Curriculum starts with where the children are, the learning environment. It focuses on how children learn within their environment and from their experiences. And High/Scope starts from these cognitive processes of plan, do, and review.

I think where we have messed up on curriculum is that, in our analyses, we tend to stop where the curricula start. We don't go on to a full conceptualization of what they are about and what they are capable of accomplishing for children if we embrace the full conceptual, philosophical frame work and

also pay attention to the capabilities of children. What we know now about what children are capable of learning and what they need to know and be able to do in order to succeed in kindergarten.

For example, if we know that knowing the alphabet and being able to write your name when you enter kindergarten is so incredibly predictive of your later success in reading, why would we not do activities and experiences and provide all kinds of support for learning the alphabet and writing your name? In any one of these three approaches, it's possible. And it's necessary. That doesn't mean that's all you do, and the way that you do it is very important.

Finally, let me say that what is the same about these curricula is that they are absolutely, fundamentally not teacher-proof. Every single one of these curricula requires an excellent teacher, and that is true of every single curriculum in the world that is of any value.

It is the teacher who implements the curriculum. So, we absolutely have to have people who are capable of establishing positive relationships with children, of conversing intellectually with children, people who do not engage in what Carlethea Johnson has called the language of oppression – or words to that effect, who provide a curriculum that is so intellectually interesting to children that group management, as Dave mentioned, becomes less of a problem because children are so interested and engaged in what they are learning and what they are doing.

This, of course, relates to funding, which clearly is not adequate. And we have to fix that because what we all know is that the teacher is critical, and the teacher has to be a professional to implement the kinds of curricula we have been talking about today.

"The essence of this conference can be summed up with this:

In early childhood, there is no difference between *care* and *education*. And curriculum is one of the keys to quality in care and education." Joan Lombardi, The Children's Project, conference facilitator

The Curriculum Conference featured presentations by Dr. Samuel Meisels, President of the Erikson Institute, and Dr. David Weikart, leader of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project and the High/Scope Curriculum Comparison Project. Specific "lessons learned" about early care and education programs, for children ages zero to five, include:

- 1** Care and education programs should address *the whole child*. Social, emotional, and physical development are just as important as linguistic and cognitive competence.
- 2** One of the elements of quality in childcare and early education is the *use of a curriculum*. A well-planned curriculum, implemented by people trained in its use, works to ensure that children have the experiences, acquire the knowledge and language, and are exposed to the thought processes, classroom structures, and discourse patterns that make them better prepared for the complex demands of school.
- 3** Not all curricula are created equal. Curricula that are based primarily on direct instruction (teacher-directed activity) do not engender thinking and problem solving skills. A more *balanced curriculum that supports young children's initiative* is essential to having high quality programs that produce lasting benefits. In particular, the High/Scope Curriculum Comparison Project suggests that education officials who promote teacher-scripted instruction with young children living in poverty are pursuing a very risky path.
- 4** Each curriculum should be *validated*. This means that it must be based on developmentally valid theory. It must be documented, validated by research, and used on a wide scale and in a wide range of settings to be sure it actually works.
- 5** *Staff training* and professional development are critical. It requires skill and training for a teacher to implement a curriculum and to nurture individual growth by building on children's initiative and extending their learning opportunities. Each curriculum should include a validated training system, so that it can be implemented in a wide range of classrooms or care settings. On-going professional development should include opportunities for teachers to apply the latest methods, to compare their experiences with others, and to record which strategies really work with which groups of children.

- 6** In Maryland, child care and Head Start programs should *align their curricula with the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR)*. This means that curricula should include activities that lead to mastery of the school-readiness skills/knowledge set forth by MMSR as those children need in order to enter school ready to succeed.
- 7** A curriculum should include an *instructional assessment* that has the potential to enhance teaching and to improve learning. A curriculum-embedded assessment, based on the student's typical classroom performance, clarifies what students have mastered and guides instructional decision making so that teaching can be enhanced and learning can be improved. It is not designed to rank and compare students or to be used for high stakes like promotion or retention. Rather it is a tool for the teacher, and its value is linked to its impact on instruction.
- 8** Young children who are living in circumstances that place them at risk for school failure – poverty, low level of maternal education, maternal depression, etc. – are much more likely to succeed in school if they attend high quality early care and education programs. Nonetheless, outcomes are enhanced when parents and early care professionals work in concert, and early care programs should strive to *communicate school-readiness strategies to parents*.
- 9** The early care community and local school systems should implement *transition practices between preschool-level programs and kindergarten*. These should include communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers, between parents and teachers, and among the children themselves as they prepare to move into the school environment. Assessments and/or portfolios should pass from preschool to kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten teachers should find opportunities to explain school-readiness expectations to parents and child care providers.
- 10** All appropriate curricula require considerable skill and training on the part of teachers and caregivers. The low-levels of *compensation* that characterize the early care profession hinder the recruitment and retention of skilled individuals. Significant improvements in compensation must accompany training and professional development.
- 11** The advantages associated with use of a well-planned curriculum and the considerations about curriculum selection apply equally to *all settings* – family child care, child-care centers, Head Start, etc. Curriculum use will help ensure that children have similar learning opportunities in all settings.
- 12** In Maryland, *resources, training, and technical assistance* are available to early care and education programs that want to implement a curriculum, to align it with the school-readiness indicators defined by MMSR, or to use past-year school-readiness data to determine the skill areas (domains) and/or special student populations that need to be especially supported. See the Training and Resource list in the full conference report.

Training for Child Care Providers and Trainers

Maryland Committee for Children (MCC) is in its second year of providing Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) training and technical assistance for **child care providers** and **trainers** through a grant from the Child Care Administration – Maryland Department of Human Resources. As of September 2002, 45 trainers will be completing requirements in order to provide MMSR training in various sites across Maryland. Additionally, child care providers who have completed modules 1 – 5 of MMSR Training will begin modules 6 – 9 in the fall of 2002.

For those who have not completed Modules 1 – 5, MCC is offering specific training on each of the seven developmental domains within the Work Sampling System and how to incorporate them into the classroom. These sessions, which will begin in October 2002, are open to both **center-based providers** and **family child care providers**. For more information, please check the Training Clearinghouse Calendar, available from Maryland Committee for Children or check MCC's website, www.mdchildcare.org. Copies of the Training Clearinghouse Calendar are available by contacting MCC at 410-752-7588.

Websites

The websites listed below provide information useful to **parents, child care providers, and others** involved in the early care and education of young children.

Maryland Committee for Children (MCC) website: www.mdchildcare.org

MCC's web site contains information about the Maryland Model for School Readiness, features a sample overview of the domains and indicators from the Work Sampling System, contains dates on current training sessions being offered on each of the seven domains of the Work Sampling System, and dates for MMSR training that will be offered in the state during the coming year. Find the information under "**For Parents**" or "**For Child Care Providers**" on the MCC web site.

Maryland Department of Education (MSDE) website: www.msde.state.md.us

The MSDE website offers the first annual report on the school-readiness assessment of all Maryland kindergarteners, by state and county. This report (found at http://www.msde.state.md.us/Special%20Reports%20and%20Data/Kindergarten_Report_2002/School_Readiness_Report.pdf) includes two sections of particular interest to **parents and other caregivers**:

- an article entitled, *What Children Should Know and be Able to do When They Enter Kindergarten – An example of skills, behaviors, and knowledge of school readiness*. This article provides a brief explanation of each developmental domain along with examples of skills/competencies that would signal full readiness in the respective domain, and
- a chart that explains the thirty WSS indicators that describe the skills, behaviors, and knowledge being assessed as children enter kindergarten.

A second useful MSDE site is the Improving School Readiness website:

<http://www.mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/readiness/index.html> This site covers a number of early childhood initiatives which promote best practices in early pedagogy and support the school reform efforts in Maryland.

Among many other features, the site provides a detailed chart of *MMSR "Readiness" Outcome & Indicators* which can be found at:

http://www.mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/MMSR/MMSRDE1_toc.html

Parents and early educators should bear in mind that MMSR not a curriculum. MMSR is a readiness framework with a set of indicators.

Any preschool or early childhood curriculum can be aligned to the framework, and MSDE has a document, *MMSR Planning Guide*, that facilitates this alignment (see:

www.mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/mmsr and look for *MMSR Planning Guide*).

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