Today's Agenda

- Introductions
- Child Assessment History
- Lessons Learned
- Current Research
- Implications for Practice
- Open Q&A

Child Assessment History:
How did we get here?
Early Assessment: The Beginnings

- Child Study Movement
  - Role of developmental psychologists
  - Understanding how children develop
- Early assessment tools & findings
  - Video-taping
  - Note-taking
  - Observations
  - Early scales

Early Research on Child Development

- Increased data on how children grow and learn
- Brain development from birth through age 5
- Studies showing long-term benefits from high-quality ECE
  - HighScope Perry Preschool Study
  - Abecedarian Project
  - Provide rationale for investment in ECE

The Origins of Head Start

- Response to emerging research
- Designed to “promote school readiness”
  - Originally conceptualized as literacy and math
- Significant investment of federal funding
- Government desire to measure an “ROI”
  - Measuring spending, families served (inputs)
Assessing for Identification

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Goals:
  - guarantees right to an “appropriate education” for all children with disabilities
- Implications for testing, identification, and placement
  - valid and reliable tests
  - standardized measures
  - by trained professionals
  - development of IEPs

The Era of Standards and Accountability

- Government Performance and Results Act of 1993
  - Head Start requirement: conduct assessment to guide instruction
- New requirements in 1998 Reauthorization of Head Start
- No Child Left Behind (2001)
  - Goal: hold states accountable to improve education for children
  - “adequate yearly progress” based on child learning outcomes (outputs)
- Results
  - Development of standards
  - Alignment of instruction and assessment to standards
  - Quality Rating Systems

Good Start, Grow Smart

- Head Start National Reporting System (NRS)
  - Goal: build a national database to track progress
- Criticism
  - Rushed development
  - Limited evidence of validity & reliability
  - Turned into a high-stakes measure
  - Narrow focus on literacy and math
  - Teaching to the test
- Terminated in 2007
Example of Testing Situation

Example IEA PPP Language Assessment

Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge

- Federal funds provided to states during the recession
- State-funded Pre-K programs
  - Increase “school readiness”
  - Serve 1.3 million children
  - By 2013, 100% of states have early learning standards
  - Require child assessment
Children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children’s learning, and schools are ready for children.

(Office of Head Start, 2011)

Implications of Policy

Lessons Learned about Policy

- The "stickiness" of assessment
- Unintended consequences of well-meaning policies
- Policy should be informed by:
  - Early Childhood Research
  - The voice of EC professionals
Controversies Unearthed About Child Assessment

- Formal v. informal assessments
- Children’s cultural and linguistic backgrounds
- Accuracy of testing young children
- Reflecting all aspects of children’s development

Current Research: What do we know about child assessment?

“A one-time snapshot of a child’s ability using a single instrument for all children has a risk of producing inaccurate or incomplete conclusions...”

(Beal & Wakabayashi, 2011)
Holistic v. "Academic-based" Assessment

- Teaching to the test
- Research
  - Brain research
  - Executive functioning
  - ACEs & trauma
- Implications for instruction and assessment
- Implications for state guidelines

Observation-based Assessments

- Authentic environments
- Longer window of time
- Familiar adults
- Most valid assessment type for young children

Implications for Practice Today
1. Understand your purpose

- 4 Purposes of Assessment (National Research Council)
  - To support learning
  - For identification of special needs
  - For program evaluation
  - For accountability
- What are your requirements?
- Be explicit with staff and stakeholders

2. Choose the “right” tool

- Aligned with your purpose
- Valid and reliable
  - Valid = measures what it intends to
  - Reliable = produces consistent results
- Is valid and reliable for the population of children you serve
  - Changing demographics

3. Set your staff up for success

- Communicate your purpose
- Communicate the value
- Training on the assessment instrument
  - How and when to assess
  - How to score
  - Refresher trainings
  - Reliability assessments
- Training on interpreting data accurately
- Training on communicating about assessments with families
4. Use data in the right way

- Inform child development
- Inform instruction
  - What to teach
  - How to teach
- Inform training and PD
  - How to best support staff

Child Assessment is a Powerful Tool

Sources
