Well Begun is Half Done: Helping Children Succeed in School

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What Does Quality Look Like in Early Care and Education?
Parameters of quality include the following:

- Low child/staff ratios
- Training in early childhood development
- Continuing professional development
- Developmentally appropriate practices
- Continuity in caregivers
- Safe, caring environment and strong parent involvement
Impact of Quality on Development

- **Structural Attributes:**
  Turnover, wages, education, prof. development, group size, ratios

- **Dynamic Attributes:**
  Staff continuity, verbal environment, emotional support and cognitive enrichment, staff responsiveness, developmentally appropriate practice
Cognitive, social-emotional, 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.

Eager to Learn, p. 307
Heart Start

Characteristics of Children Who Are Ready To Learn

- Confidence
- Curiosity
- Intentionality
- Self-control
- Relatedness
- Capacity to communicate
- Cooperativeness

ZERO TO THREE
National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families
Does High-Stakes Testing in Early Childhood Improve Quality?
Tests are not perfect . . .
A test score is not an exact measure of a student’s knowledge or skills.

*High Stakes* (National Research Council, 1999, p. 3)
Purpose of the National Reporting System

• To enhance local aggregation of child outcome data and local program self-assessment efforts;
• To enable the Head Start Bureau and ACF Regional Offices to plan training and technical assistance efforts;
• To incorporate child outcome information into future Head Start program monitoring reviews.

Head Start Info Memo, 6/03
“The National Reporting System is a key process in establishing a practical quality assurance system for Head Start.”

-- Craig Ramey, Chair, NRS Technical Work Group
“What we are trying to bring to Head Start is not different from what you encounter when you buy a car....”

-- Craig Ramey, Chair, NRS Technical Work Group
“If schools were factories, America would have solved the education problem a century ago.”

-- Malcolm Gladwell, *The New Yorker*
In general, large-scale assessments should not be used to make high-stakes decisions about students who are less than 8 years old or enrolled below grade 3.
High-Stakes Testing In Early Childhood

(Eager To Learn, 2001)

• Assessments used for purposes external to the classroom, rather than to improve practice, place a heavy burden on the assessments and the adults responsible for them.

• Tests used for high-stakes purposes must not be mistaken for statements about the learning trajectory of individual children.
"If parents do not want their 4 or 5 year old child to participate [in the NRS] then the child will not participate. However, parents should be well informed and understand that the individual names of children will NOT be used and that individual results of children will not be reported."

ACF, June 23, 2003
High stakes testing does not promote learning in early childhood.
Problems with School Readiness Tests

• Early development is episodic and uneven
• Social knowledge components are typically culturally-biased
• The concept of “readiness” is relative
• Test items often imply teaching
• Content is inconsistent with teachers’ views of school success
• Validity of the tests is poor
The best way to evaluate a child’s performance is to study performance, not something else.
Assessment Defined

The process of obtaining information for the purpose of making evaluative decisions
Our Challenge

To transform assessment information into meaningful intervention and instruction
Observational Assessment

Assessments based on systematic observations of children performing tasks that are part of their daily experience.
Curriculum-Embedded Assessments based on children’s typical classroom performance.
How Can We Help Children Succeed in School?
How the Outcomes Framework Can Help Children Succeed

- Focuses on all areas of development including socio-emotional, in addition to cognition;
- Suggests instructional approaches that are varied, balanced, and meet the needs of individual children;
How the Outcomes Framework Can Help Children Succeed - 2

- Based on assumption that “Readiness for School” applies to the child, family, school, and community—not only to the child;
- Represents an approach to assessment that has the potential to enhance teaching and improve learning.
The best way to improve a child’s performance is to _teach_ the child, not to _test_ the child.
Understanding the child within context is key to understanding the child.
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, 1980