

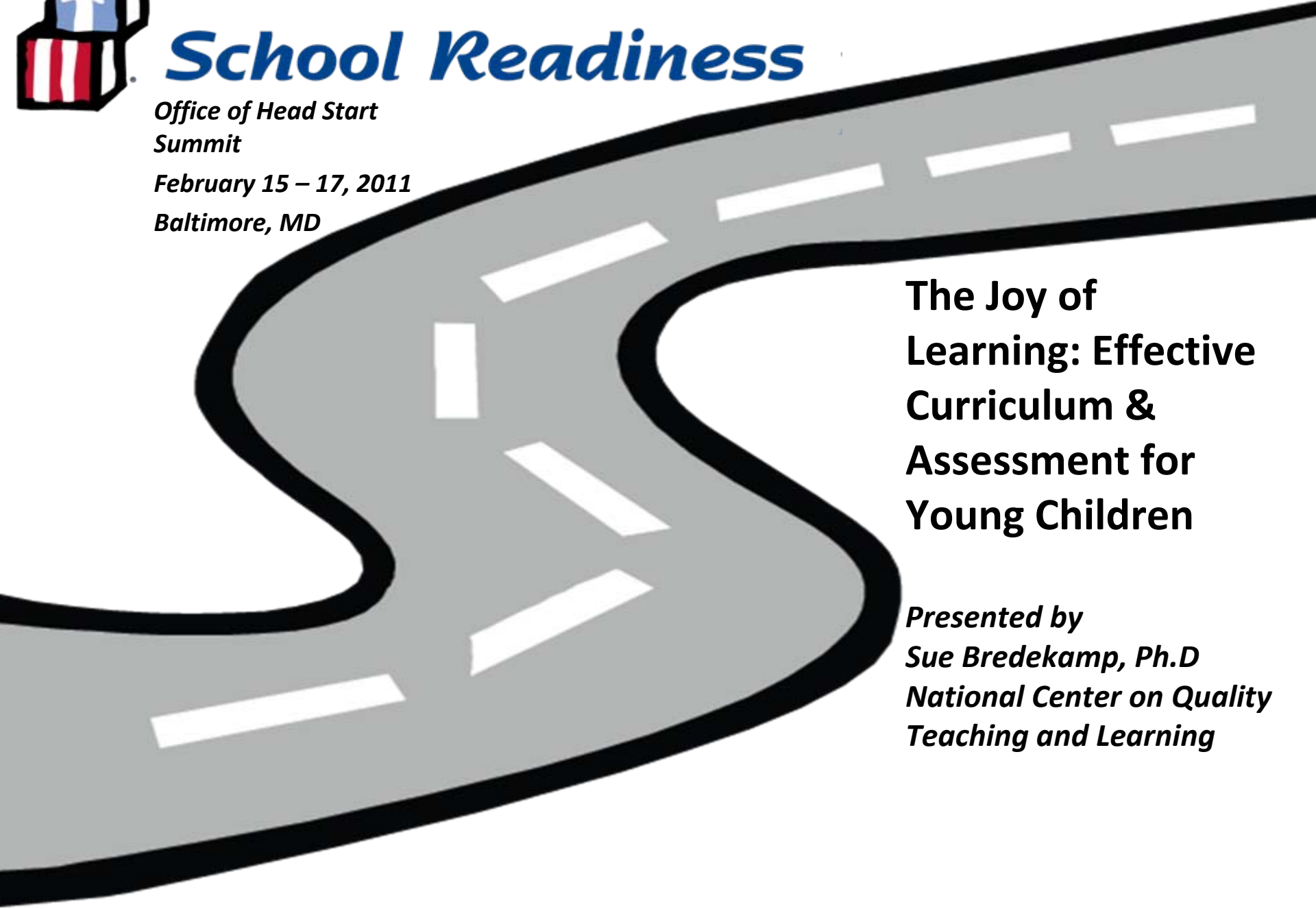


On the Road to School Readiness

*Office of Head Start
Summit*

February 15 – 17, 2011

Baltimore, MD



**The Joy of
Learning: Effective
Curriculum &
Assessment for
Young Children**

*Presented by
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Teaching and Learning*

Overview

- The early childhood context is changing rapidly, presenting new challenges and opportunities – Head Start leads the way.
- Curriculum, assessment, and teaching need to be improved to reflect new knowledge.
- Fundamental values of ECE can be retained and enhanced.
- The wonder of children + the wonder of learning require *wonderful* curriculum & teaching

Fundamental Values of ECE

- The whole child – developmentally appropriate practices
- The value of play for learning & development
- Importance of relationships and sense of community
- Valuing and teaching each child as an individual
- Respecting linguistic and cultural diversity
- Promoting relationships with families

Developmentally Appropriate, Effective Practices

- Meet each child where he or she is (on-going assessment)
- Use a wide repertoire of teaching strategies that vary for and adapt to the age, experience, interests, and abilities of individual children
- Help each child reach challenging and achievable goals (Head Start Child Development & Learning Framework)

Effective Teachers

- Create a caring community of learners
- Use emotionally supportive, instructionally effective teaching strategies
- Implement evidence-based “whole child” curriculum
- Assess (know) the whole child
- Establish reciprocal relationships with families

Intentional Teaching

- **Intentional teachers** have a purpose for the decisions they make and can explain that purpose to others

Intentional Teachers Are:

(Bredekamp, 2011)

- *Caring and committed*
- *Enthusiastic and engaged*
- *Curious and creative*
- *Respectful and responsive*
- *Passionate and patient*
- *Purposeful and playful*
- *Focused and flexible*
- *Aware and accountable*
- *Informed and effective*
- *Listening and learning*

TEACHERS MATTER

- Curriculum is a research-based plan that describes learning experiences and teaching strategies related to important learning & developmental outcomes
- To be effective, teachers must assess individual children's learning and development, and
- Adapt curriculum, including class schedules, groupings of children, and their teaching strategies and interactions with children to help them continue to make progress

Traditional EC View of Curriculum

- Emphasis on processes of teaching and learning more than content
- Curriculum is what happens . . .
- But planning is the key! (Dittman, 1977)

Curriculum Today

- Curriculum is **what** to teach – content to be learned (scope)
- And when – Important sequences based on continuum of development and learning
- Scope & sequence consists of predictions based on knowledge of what is generally achievable and challenging for children within an age range (what is developmentally appropriate) and
- Discipline-based knowledge about how abilities build on prior learning

Effective Curriculum

Comprehensive or Focused

- Standards & research-based (FRAMEWORK)
- Integrated (meaning-centered)
- Involves intentional teaching
- Uses multiple learning contexts (small & large groups, centers, play, routines, transitions, outdoors)
- Engages and **cultivates** interests
- Recognizes and capitalizes on diversity
- Differentiates and individualizes instruction based on ongoing assessment

Integrated Curriculum

- Children are meaning-makers – they need first-hand experience and context.
- Organizing learning around bigger topics (projects, science, social studies, the arts that can be explored in-depth) develops **background knowledge & vocabulary**.
- Developing & extending interests is especially important during early childhood when attention and self-regulation are developing abilities.
- **CAUTION:** Integrating may prevent necessary focused time (PCER study found 58 seconds of math in an integrated “comprehensive” curriculum)

Balanced Curriculum

- Includes child-guided and teacher-guided experiences
- In large-scale early education observational study in England (EPPE, 2003), most effective preschools provided both teacher-initiated group work (including small group pre-planned experiences), and
- Freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities, supported by teachers.

Curriculum Content & Developmental Science

- Domain-general (foundational) processes, -- apply across developmental areas and/or subject matter disciplines -- Underlying skills that **make learning possible** and predict success in school and life
- Domain-specific abilities, apply to one or a limited number of domains of knowledge such as science, mathematics, or literacy
- BOTH are important & are included in the Framework

Approaches to Learning

- BOTH positive emotions and motivation
- AND engaged actions and behaviors: focused attention, persistence, planning, flexible problem-solving
- Children need playful learning and learningful play
- Learning Content + Learning-related Behaviors or Approaches to Learning

Evidence-based Language & Early Literacy Programs

- Motivation and book appreciation
- Vocabulary and world knowledge
- Listening/reading comprehension
- Phonemic awareness & phonics
- Alphabet knowledge
- Print awareness
- Early writing

Early Mathematics

- Important Pre-K math skills – number and operations, geometry and spatial relations, and measurement – are strongest predictor of school success
- Children’s play is rich in everyday math regardless of SES (Ginsburg, et al.)
- Children’s math learning varies based on the degree to which adults use math language
- In addition to everyday math, teachers need to make a coherent curriculum plan if children are to learn important math concepts (National Research Council, 2009)

Social Emotional Accomplishments

(From Neurons to Neighborhoods, 2000)

- Negotiating the transition from external controls to self-regulation – learning to regulate one’s emotions, behaviors, and attention
- Learning to relate well to other children and forming friendships
- Acquiring the capabilities that are the foundations of communication and language

Self-Regulation

- Ability to regulate emotions, behavior, & thinking according to the demands of the situation (eg. delay of gratification, effortful control)
- To STOP doing something that is UNNECESSARY, even if you want to continue AND to START doing something that is NECESSARY, even if you don't want to (Boyd et al., 2003)
- Self-regulation measured in preschool predicts school success (literacy & math) over and above cognitive skills and family background (Blair & Razza, 2007; McClelland, Acock & Morrison, 2006)
- Problems in self-regulation are strongly related to learning difficulties and poor social relationships

Representation

- A lay-person's definition: using one thing to stand for another.
- Mental representations are crucial for higher-level thinking.
- Verbal language is a representation of physical objects, experiences, feelings, and concepts.
- Written language is an obvious example of symbolic representation
- Developing symbolic representation is essential for reading & math – the most fundamental skill for school success.

Role of Play

- Vygotsky & play = the leading behavior in children's development, "the preeminent educational activity of early childhood"
- During play, children behave beyond their current level of independent mastery.
- Children develop representational abilities through pretend play using objects and actions as symbols & become more able to take another's perspective.
- Socio-dramatic play with its system of roles and rules is unique in its support of self-regulation.

What teaching strategies are most effective in Pre-K?

- “.... Good teachers acknowledge and encourage children’s efforts, model and demonstrate, create challenges, and support children in extending their capabilities, and provide specific directions and instruction.
- All of these strategies can be used in the context of play and structured activities.”
(*Eager to Learn, 2000*)

Effective Teachers:

- Provide more experiences to promote self-regulation and other cognitive processes such as:
 - ✓ Choices so children can self-regulate
 - ✓ Planning and “revisiting” opportunities
 - ✓ Ways of representing thinking and feelings
 - ✓ Small group work for children to discover their own & others’ ideas, and negotiate different perspectives (difficult for them to do with adults)
 - ✓ Teacher-supported socio-dramatic play AND
- Fewer experiences that interfere with or diminish children’s capacity to self-regulate such as *extended* periods of whole group instruction or waiting during routines and transitions.

“Every small child is always
an exception.”

Loris Malaguzzi, 1993

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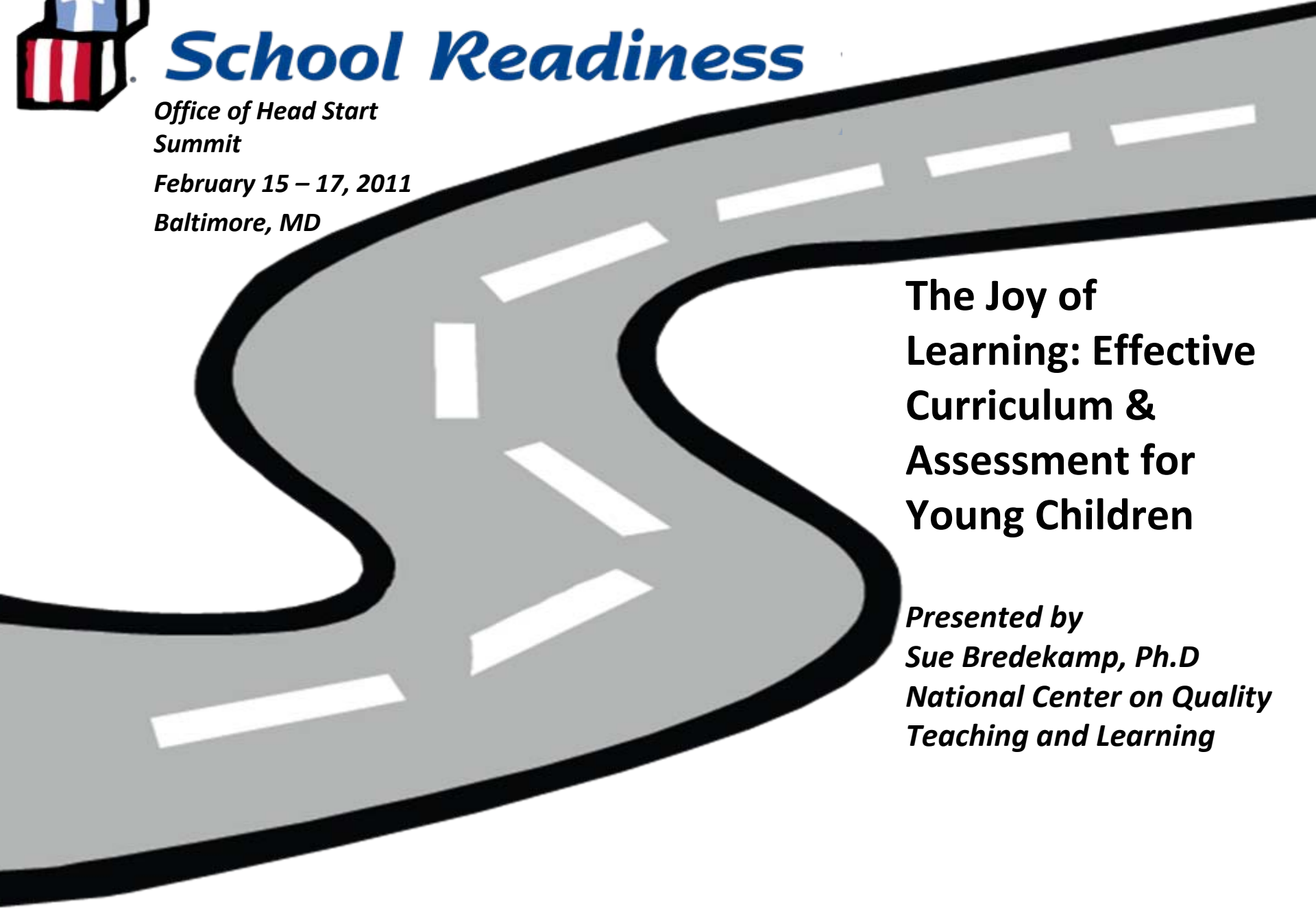


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