

Following up on Findings from the
2009 NIDRR/OPE Sponsored State of the
Science Conference on
Postsecondary Education for Students with
Intellectual Disabilities

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One year ago, about 60 nationally renowned experts and leaders in the field of postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities attended a one-day conference to assess the state of knowledge about postsecondary education (PSE) for students with intellectual disabilities (ID)

Two comprehensive literature reviews surveying the publications in the field were distributed in advance of the conference to give all participants the latest information about how knowledge in the field of PSE has evolved and grown.

Based on comments received at the state of the science conference, a substantially revised and expanded review of the literature was prepared and submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal. This review is now undergoing revisions based on comments received by the reviewers.

The first half of the conference provided the audience with 15 in-depth presentations of the current funding, research, policy, advocacy, and hands-on practices in existing programs.

Copies of slide presentations were made available to all conference participants and placed on a dedicated website for the public to access.

The presentations were recorded audio-visually and placed on the Worldwide Web for all interested parties to view. Accessibility for persons with disabilities to these materials was of utmost concern.

The second half of the conference focused on structured discussions of research needs in five major areas of postsecondary education for students with ID by experts

These discussions were transcribed ad verbatim by a court reporter. Notes from reporters from each session were collected and presented at a full panel meeting.

Additional notes were taken by conference reporters and put into a comprehensive proceedings document.

The materials mentioned above are available online at www.sscsid.org

Today's event will place the accomplishments of the 2009 state of the science conference into a broader research framework that we hope will give us some direction for future research efforts.

To begin, let us have a look at how education, disability and rehabilitation research systematically engage in evidence-based practices of observation, description, explanation, measurement, and prediction of events – in this case, the inclusion of students with ID in PSE programs.

I have chosen the Oxford Hierarchy of Evidence model for its simple, yet powerful approach to place the scientific pursuit of knowledge into a developmental perspective.

According to this model, we are at Stage V, gathering and recording “Opinions of respected authorities, based on clinical evidence, descriptive studies or reports of expert committees.”

This we accomplished at our first state of the science conference in 2009.

Now, let us turn our attention to the next step.

Hierarchy of Evidence:

- I. Strong evidence from at least one systematic review of multiple well designed randomized controlled trials.

- II. Strong evidence from at least one properly designed randomized controlled trial of appropriate size.

- III. Evidence from well-designed trials such as non-randomized trials, cohort studies, time series or matched case-controlled studies.

- IV. Evidence from well-designed non-experimental studies from more than one centre or research group.

- V. Opinions of respected authorities, based on clinical evidence, descriptive studies or reports of expert committees.

Oxford Centre for Evidence-based Medicine (May 2001)

At present, two independent reviews of the transcripts from the expert discussions are underway:

A group of researchers led by Dr. Colleen Thoma from Virginia Commonwealth University has conducted a qualitative analysis of about 330 pages of transcripts to examine the statements and suggestions about research needs in the field.

A team of researchers headed by Dr. Charlie Lakin from the University of Minnesota is working on a classification that will guide future research and evaluation in the field of PSE for students with ID.

The two research teams will now talk to us about their work and progress to date.

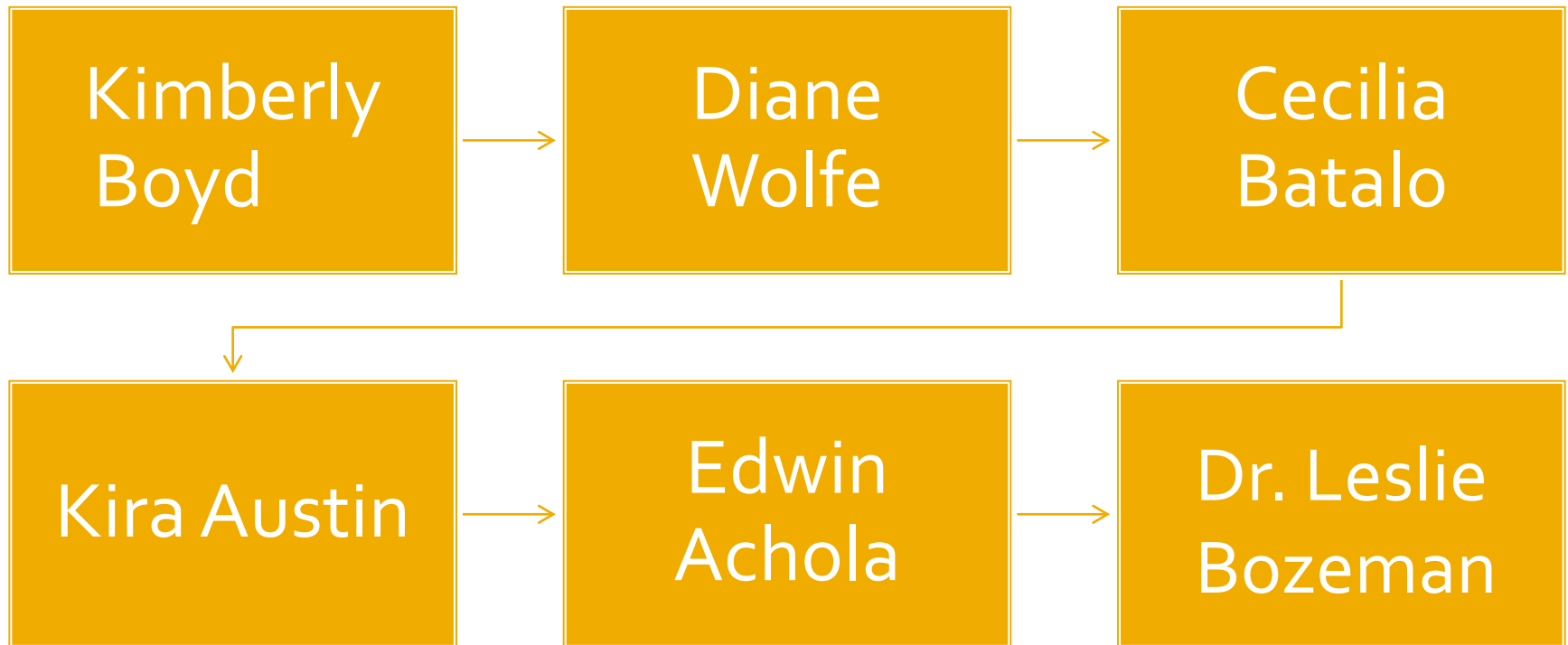
State of the Science Conference: Recommendations for the future of postsecondary education for individuals with intellectual disability



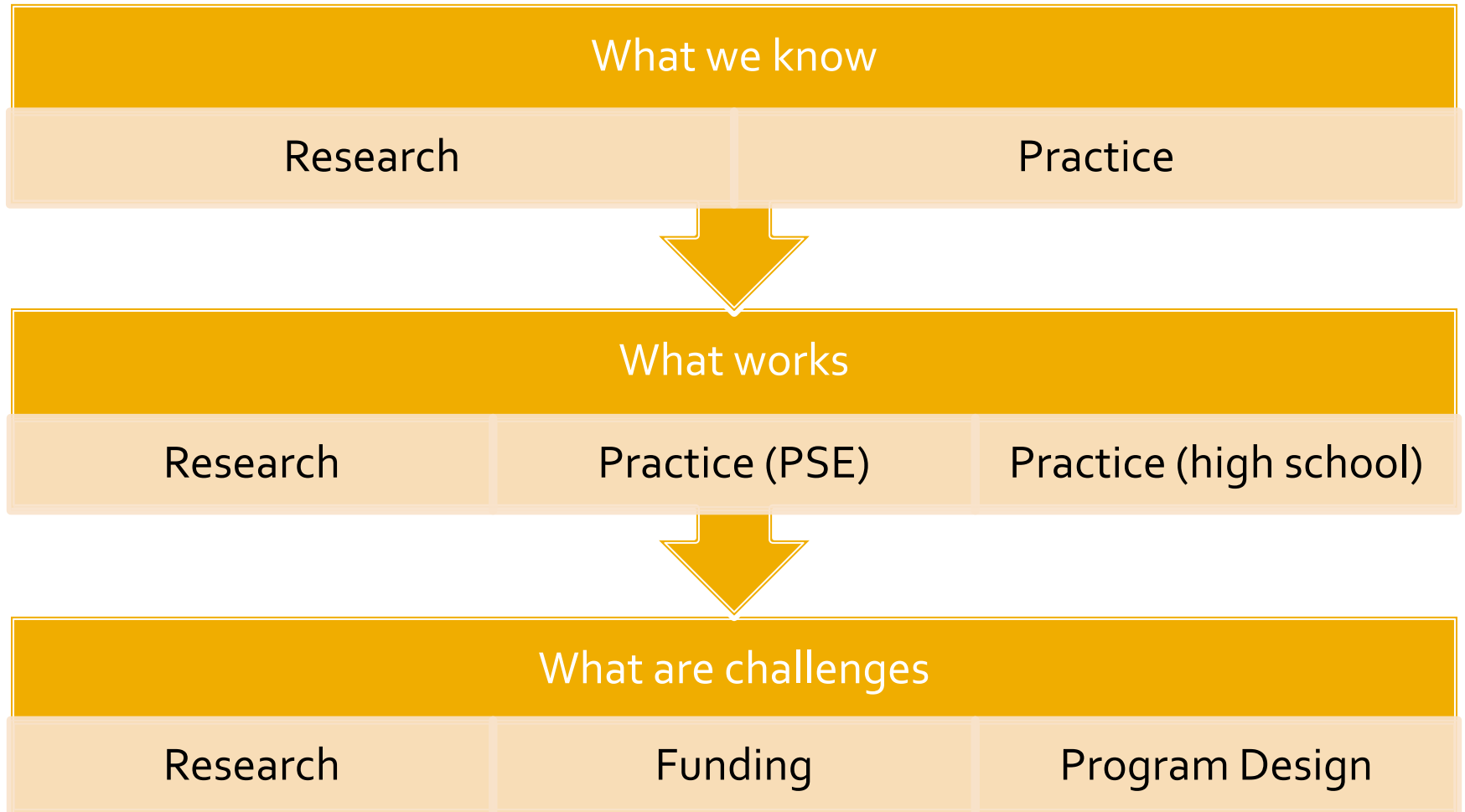
VCU School of Education

BRIDGING OPPORTUNITIES

Qualitative Researchers



Charge of Focus Groups



Qualitative Research Design

First Steps

Identification of Researcher Biases

Grouping of Researchers by bias

Identification of outside reviewers



Identification of emerging themes

By focus group

By research team

By whole group

By entire team



Description of themes

Identification of quotes that capture themes

Identification and analysis of outliers

Themes: Research

We really have to say that there is a real responsibility for us to establish some foundation of evidence for this embryonic practice that we hope will grow, but who knows.

Themes: Student Self-determination

- *How would the student define their – how would they define themselves in relation to others? So in other words, who are they? Do they include their diversity in learning? Do they include their learning in the way that they frame the explanation of themselves to others?*
- *Is their quality of life in the end after all of this is done any better than the students who did not have this experience? Are they then becoming meaningful citizens in a community setting? Have they taken their skill sets and worked to change their local and state situation, political situation, earning situation? Are they becoming change agents?*

Themes: Funding

- *What are the different funding streams? What are the different ways we maybe could reconceptualize the funding?*
- *The third major category is, what are the economics? I talked about that a little bit above, the funding. But how much does it cost? Who is paying? What are the ways that colleges and universities are providing in kind or other support? And the return on investment.*

Themes: Program Design

- *It seems to me that successful programs, successful students are the ones that have huge amounts of supports. And the supports are very different from just someone who goes in to get an extended time on tests, and additional tutoring, these kinds of things in that you need social development, et cetera.*

Themes: Outcomes

- *Perhaps, employment is the most important outcome, but it's not enough. We also need to be looking at least at academics, and you know, socialization, I think is the term that's often used. I really mean social engagement and independent living. So there are four: academics, employment, independent living, and social engagement.*

Themes: Right to Access

- *It bothers me that when women were brought in no one had to study if it was good for women in order for there to be legislation. When minorities were brought in, same thing. We didn't have to do studies to prove that it was the right thing to do. And I don't think we're going to change that, but it bothers me that we have to prove with studies that this is good.*

Recommendations

- Identify common philosophical approach to guide research & program development
- Research across programs/models
- Longitudinal research
- Program development needs to reflect outcomes, student needs, student preferences
- Need to build on research from other areas rather than re-invent wheel/repeat mistakes
- Awareness
- Need to develop common language