

# Journal of Early Intervention

<http://jei.sagepub.com>

---

## General Growth Outcomes or Developmental and Readiness Domains? Naming Is Not Knowing!

William H. Brown

*Journal of Early Intervention* 2001; 24; 181

DOI: 10.1177/10538151010240030201

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://jei.sagepub.com>

---

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children

**Additional services and information for *Journal of Early Intervention* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://jei.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://jei.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations** (this article cites 3 articles hosted on the SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):  
<http://jei.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/24/3/181>

Department of Education, Office of  
Programs and the Universities  
of Kansas, and Oregon. The opinions  
expressed in this paper are those of the authors  
and do not represent the official endorsement  
of the authorship for the final four au-  
thors by random draw.

of the Early Childhood Research  
Institute on Measuring Growth and Development  
to help us test these ideas. We thank  
the Minnesota Center for Survey Re-  
search, particularly Pam Jones, for their assist-  
ance in the mail survey described in  
this paper. We appreciate the assistance of  
the National Center on Education Out-  
comes to access ORBIT, their da-  
ta availability-related literature.

Correspondence to Jeff Priest, Institute on  
Measuring Growth and Development, University of  
New Hampshire, 7 Leavitt  
Durham, New Hampshire 03824.  
E-mail: jcp@cisunix.unh.edu

# ED

## G MATERIAL



**Information contact:**  
Department of Education,  
Early Childhood Education  
Dissemination  
43214-3292

**Make checks/purchase  
order payable to:**  
Early Childhood Education  
Dissemination Service Center

**Mail to:**  
Department of Education,  
Early Childhood Education  
Dissemination  
1000 North Avenue  
Columbus, Ohio 43214-3292



*JEI, 2001, 24:3*

## REACTIONS FROM THE FIELD

# General Growth Outcomes or Developmental and Readiness Domains? Naming Is Not Knowing!

**WILLIAM H. BROWN**

*University of South Carolina at Columbia*

The tendency has always been strong to believe that whatever received a name must be an entity or being, having an independent existence of its own. And if no real entity answering to the name could be found, men did not for that reason suppose that none existed, but imagined that it was something peculiarly abstruse and mysterious.

John Stuart Mill (as cited in Gould, 1996)

As an early childhood special educator who was asked recently to develop an evaluation to follow young children in state-funded pre-schools in South Carolina through the third grade, I read Priest and colleagues' article with keen interest. I must be candid however; I have methodological concerns about their general growth outcomes (GGOs) survey. Specifically, I have questions about the representativeness of the sampling frame, which limits any generalizations to both early childhood special educators and parents of children with disabilities, and the low response rate with accompanying problems of nonresponse biases, which restricts generalization to even the two populations sampled (cf. Fowler, 2002). Nevertheless, with some familiarity of the efforts of investigators from the Early Childhood Research Institute on Measuring Growth and Development and with an understanding of the clear need for "... reliable and valid empirical data to guide the differ-

ential allocation of programmatic resources to promote the development of vulnerable children and the adaptation of their families" (Hauser-Cram, Warfield, Shonkoff, & Wyn- daarden Krauss, 2001, p. 5), I believe that the manuscript serves as a useful springboard for discussion. Indeed, the authors' paper has achieved that purpose with the editor's requests for commentaries!

A pragmatic question emerges from my review of the Priest et al. article: How might GGOs assist me, or for that matter others, in both systematically following young children's developmental and educational progress and determining which children might benefit from well-targeted interventions to improve their progress? My question might serve as a framework for a commentary on Priest et al. Perhaps, my comments might also apply more broadly to the recent and future efforts of investigators from the Early Childhood Research Institute on Measuring Growth and Development.

A contemporary definition of assessment for early childhood special educators is "... a generic term that refers to the process of gathering information for the purpose of making decisions" (McLean, 1996, p. 12). Moreover, assessment has four basic functions: screening, determining eligibility, planning programs, and evaluating child progress. It appears logical then to consider the explicit purpose of Priest and colleagues' survey and how

*Brown*

181

the information gleaned from it is related to determining the nature and usefulness of GGOs.

As many readers of *JEI* know, assessment has had a relatively long albeit controversial history (e.g., Gould, 1996; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). In their introduction, after noting the nomothetic nature of Goal 1 of the National Education Goals Panel (1999), the investigators argue for the need for idiographic assessment procedures. I doubt that the authors will receive appreciable argument from many early childhood special educators on that point. Nevertheless, I am compelled to remind them that Binet's early assessment efforts were driven by a very similar, benevolent charge from the French Minister of Public Instruction to develop measures for identifying young children in need of educational assistance (Binet & Simon, 1916). Again, I must be forthright; the authors' argument implying the effectiveness of the contemporary procedural safeguards of IDEA (1997) appears relatively naive. Legislative intent and regulations notwithstanding, I simply do not know of any compelling evidence that we have been doing a better job of safeguarding children and their families from inappropriate assessment and labeling practices than in previous years. Although anecdotal, my own experience in two states has suggested that children and their families continue to face many formal and informal barriers in obtaining meaningful assessments for their young children. I suspect that the problems are not restricted to South Carolina and Tennessee. If the authors have published information to the contrary, I welcome the chance to review it. My point is that in my professional experience, most often, it has been the misuse of particular assessments for inappropriate purposes that results in both assessment and service delivery problems for young children and their families (see Bagnato, Neisworth, & Munson, 1997).

If I understand the investigators' survey, they queried a sample of 1,275 professionals (53% return rate) and 1,099 parents (32% return rate) and obtained face, content, and social validity information (Bagnato et al., 1997) on GGOs they extrapolated from the extant

assessment literature for young children. For me, the authors' second research question, *Can a single, parsimonious set of outcomes be formulated to describe the growth of children between birth and age 8?* (p. 10), represents the fundamental issue of their work with GGOs. I believe that their question is an important one. I consider the survey information presented as only a "baby step" in the difficult albeit worthwhile efforts needed to validate GGOs empirically. I want to be clear; the survey is a logical step to establish initial face, content, and social validity of GGOs. Nevertheless, consensus-driven methods are simply not sufficient to establish either the psychometric or functional nature of GGOs and their ultimate usefulness for early childhood special education (ECSE) practitioners and researchers (see Wolery, 1995). Without the necessary psychometric, feasibility, acceptability, and usability work on measures related to the outcomes, we are left with two problems: (a) How are GGOs different from or similar to existing developmental and readiness domains and milestones, and (b) How will GGOs be interpreted and used with young children and their families? I understand that Priest and colleagues argue that GGOs are different from developmental and readiness measures and that they believe the outcome measures will be more useful for the field. Nevertheless, I remain unconvinced by their assertions and the data they provide from their survey.

In the remainder of my review, I will suggest several important lines of inquiry that the authors should carefully consider and address in their efforts to study GGOs systematically. I suspect from their professional presentations, several technical reports available through an Early Childhood Research Institute on Measuring Growth and Development web site, and a published conceptual article (McConnell, 2000), that they have considered the issues and they are attempting to deal with them. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, information related to the recommended lines of research is not presently published. If I am incorrect, the authors ought to have discussed those findings and provided accompanying ci-

erature for young children. For  
ors' second research question,  
*parsimonious set of outcomes  
to describe the growth of chil-  
birth and age 8?* (p. 10), rep-  
ndamental issue of their work  
believe that their question is an  
. I consider the survey infor-  
ted as only a "baby step" in the  
t worthwhile efforts needed to  
s empirically. I want to be clear;  
a logical step to establish initial  
and social validity of GGOs.  
consensus-driven methods are  
fficient to establish either the  
or functional nature of GGOs  
nate usefulness for early child-  
education (ECSE) practitioners  
rs (see Wolery, 1995). Without  
psychometric, feasibility, ac-  
d usability work on measures  
outcomes, we are left with two  
How are GGOs different from  
existing developmental and read-  
s and milestones, and (b) How  
interpreted and used with young  
their families? I understand that  
eagues argue that GGOs are dif-  
developmental and readiness mea-  
they believe the outcome mea-  
more useful for the field. Nev-  
remain unconvinced by their as-  
the data they provide from their  
inder of my review, I will sug-  
important lines of inquiry that the  
d carefully consider and address  
s to study GGOs systematically.  
om their professional presenta-  
l technical reports available  
rly Childhood Research Institute  
Growth and Development web  
published conceptual article  
(2000), that they have considered  
they are attempting to deal with  
heless, to my knowledge, infor-  
d to the recommended lines of  
ot presently published. If I am  
authors ought to have discussed  
s and provided accompanying ci-

tations in the Priest et al. article for interested professionals.

For GGOs to become meaningful for the field, four basic lines of inquiry need to be addressed. I view all four lines of inquiry as interrelated and especially important for establishing both the psychometric and functional nature of GGOs. First, psychometric examination of GGOs and the specific measures used to assess them should be performed to determine whether or not the measures and outcomes yield convincing interrater agreement, test-retest reliability, and internal consistency information. Similarly, concurrent validity investigations should be conducted to establish the relationship of the measures for GGO items and domains to other existing developmental, readiness, and achievement measures that are better known psychometrically. Second, GGOs and their accompanying measures should be demonstrated to be and not merely assumed to be useful outcomes for important stakeholders in early childhood special education. Specifically, the measures employed will need to be shown to be easily administered by and satisfactory to practitioners, parents, and researchers (i.e., feasible and acceptable). Third, even following determination of the psychometric nature and the feasibility and acceptability of GGOs, studies to assess the day-to-day usefulness of the outcomes and accompanying measures for practitioners and researchers will be needed. For example, whether or not GGOs and their measures are commonly used to make accurate decisions about further assessment (i.e., adequate sensitivity and specificity) and specific interventions will need to be carefully examined. Finally, although the authors imply that their efforts were primarily preventive (i.e., identifying young children in need of intervention), if GGOs are robustly related to readiness and early achievement, their use may also be directly linked to effective interventions and meaningful child developmental and educational progress (i.e., treatment validity). If these four lines of interrelated research are addressed and convincing evidence results in GGOs and their accompanying measures, particularly for those children who require effec-

tive interventions to resolve their developmental and readiness difficulties, our collective intervention expertise should be improved (see Guralnick, 1997). Hence, if GGOs fulfill their preventive purpose well (i.e., accurately identify children and hasten their participation in appropriate intervention), the outcome measures will also enhance their predictive validity with young children who have disabilities or who are at accelerated risk for school failure.

The recommended investigations and the difficult accompanying work are clearly a daunting challenge. If the investigators accomplish or have accomplished substantive parts of that much-needed work, they should be commended. Nevertheless, the psychometric and functional nature of GGOs appears to await additional investigations or at least dissemination of relevant information that will address the questions I raise. If the investigators have examined any of the issues, I encourage them to publish that information as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, although the outcome measures seem to have face, content, and social validity, at least for more than 50% of the professionals and 30% of the parents who responded to the survey, the usefulness of GGOs for the field of ECSE is yet to be determined. I respectfully submit that the authors' second question, *Can a single, parsimonious set of outcomes be formulated to describe the growth of children between birth and age 8?* has not been addressed adequately. If the psychometric and functional nature of GGOs and their measures cannot be established with reliability and criterion-related validity investigations and subsequent demonstrations of treatment validity, then their usefulness for the field will be circumscribed (see McConnell, 2000).

In the final analysis, "naming is not knowing"—at least not in a utilitarian sense. As B. F. Skinner (1945) pragmatically noted, "The ultimate criterion for the goodness of a concept is not whether two people are brought into agreement [i.e., analogous to face, content, and social validity—*added by author*] but whether the scientist who uses the concept can operate successfully upon his material—

all by himself if need be" (p. 293) [i.e., akin to effective assessment and intervention practices—*added by author*]. I understand that Skinner was referring to reliability issues or specifically interrater and interobserver agreement, but his thinking is generalizable to validity issues for educators. Without additional efforts focusing on the nature of GGOs and widespread dissemination of supporting evidence, the ultimate utility of the outcome measures, similar to a number of existing developmental and readiness milestones with unknown or insufficient psychometric qualities, will be limited. At this time, I am not convinced that GGOs will assist me in my professional endeavors to follow young children's developmental and educational progress throughout early childhood systematically. I sincerely hope that the authors will demonstrate that my current scepticism is unfounded.

### REFERENCES

- Bagnato, S. J., Neisworth, J. T., & Munson, S. M. (1997). *LINKing Assessment and early intervention outcomes: An authentic curriculum-based approach*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Binet, A., & Simon, T. (1916). *The development of the intelligence in children*. Vineland, NJ: Publications of the Training School at Vineland. (Reprinted by Williams Publishing Company, Nashville, TN, 1980).
- Fowler, F. J. (2002). *Survey research methods*. (3rd edition). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- Gould, S. J. (1996). *The mismeasure of man: Revised and expanded*. New York: Norton & Company.
- Guralnick, M. J. (1997). Second-generation research in the field of early intervention. In M. J. Guralnick (Ed.), *The effectiveness of early intervention* (pp. 3–22). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Hauser-Cram, P., Warfield, M. E., Shonkoff, J. P., & Wyndaarden Krauss, M. (2001). Children with disabilities: A longitudinal study of child development and parent well-being. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 66, (No. 3, Serial No.256).
- Herrnstein, R. J., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in American life*. New York: The Free Press.
- McConnell, S. R. (2000). Assessment in early intervention and early childhood special education: Building on the past to project into our future. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* 20, 43–48.
- McLean, M. (1996). Assessment and its importance in early intervention/early childhood special education. In M. McLean, D. B. Bailey, & M. Wolery (Eds.), *Assessing infants and preschoolers with special needs* (2nd Edition) (pp. 1–22). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill.
- National Education Goals Panel. (1999). *The National Education Goals report: Building a nation of learners, 1999*. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.
- Skinner, B. F. (1945). Rejoinders and second thoughts: Symposium on operationism. *The Psychological Review* 52, 291–294.
- Wolery, M. (1995). Some concerns about the process. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 19, 21–23.

---

Address correspondence to **William H. Brown, Ph.D.**, Department of Educational Psychology, College of Education, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina 29208. E-mail: [BBROWN@GWM.SC.EDU](mailto:BBROWN@GWM.SC.EDU)