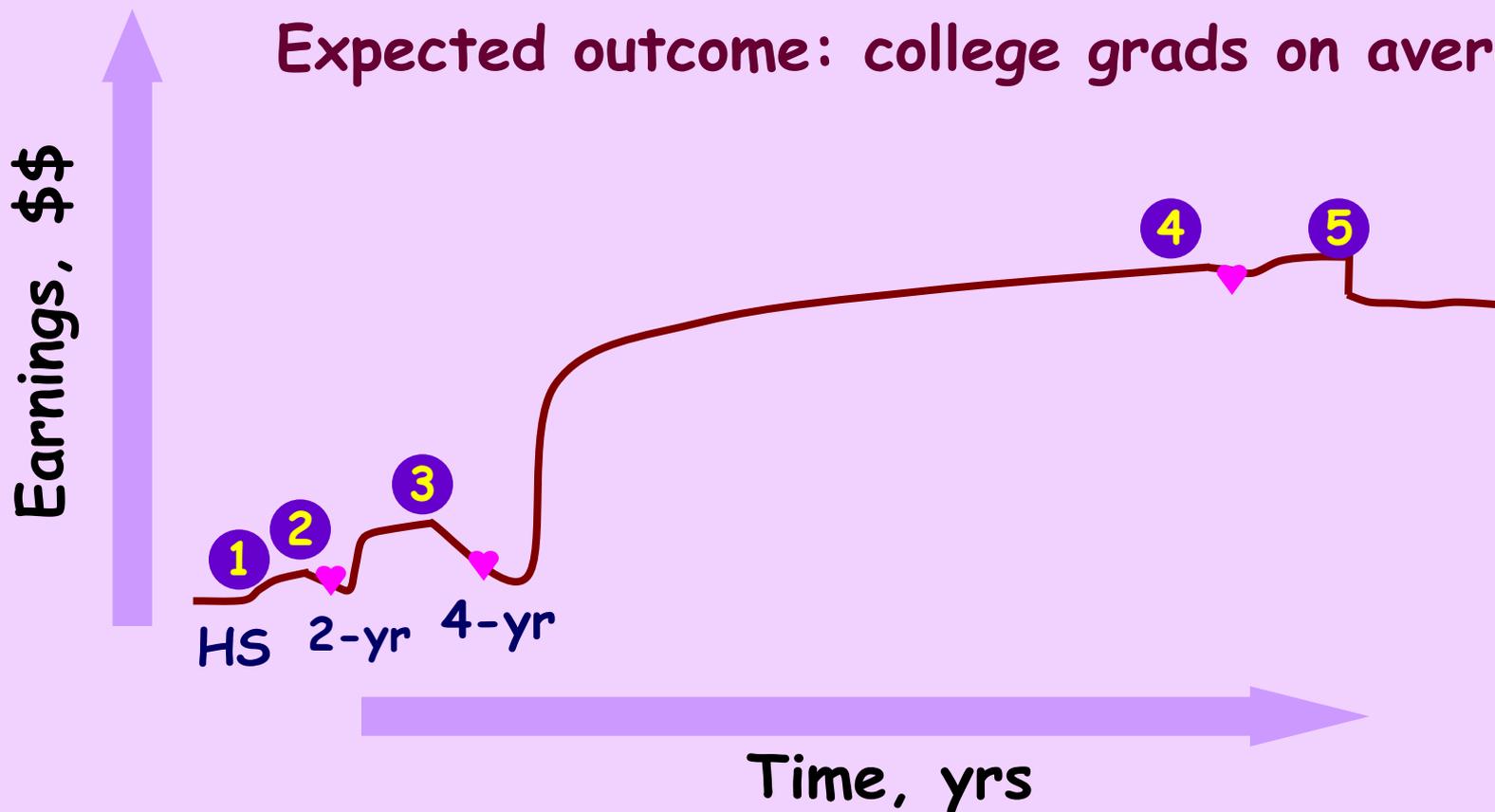


Youth in Care: The Big Picture!



ASSUME: LIFE LONG LEARNING CURVE IS A DESIRED OUTCOME FOR ALL

Expected outcome: college grads on average



Key:

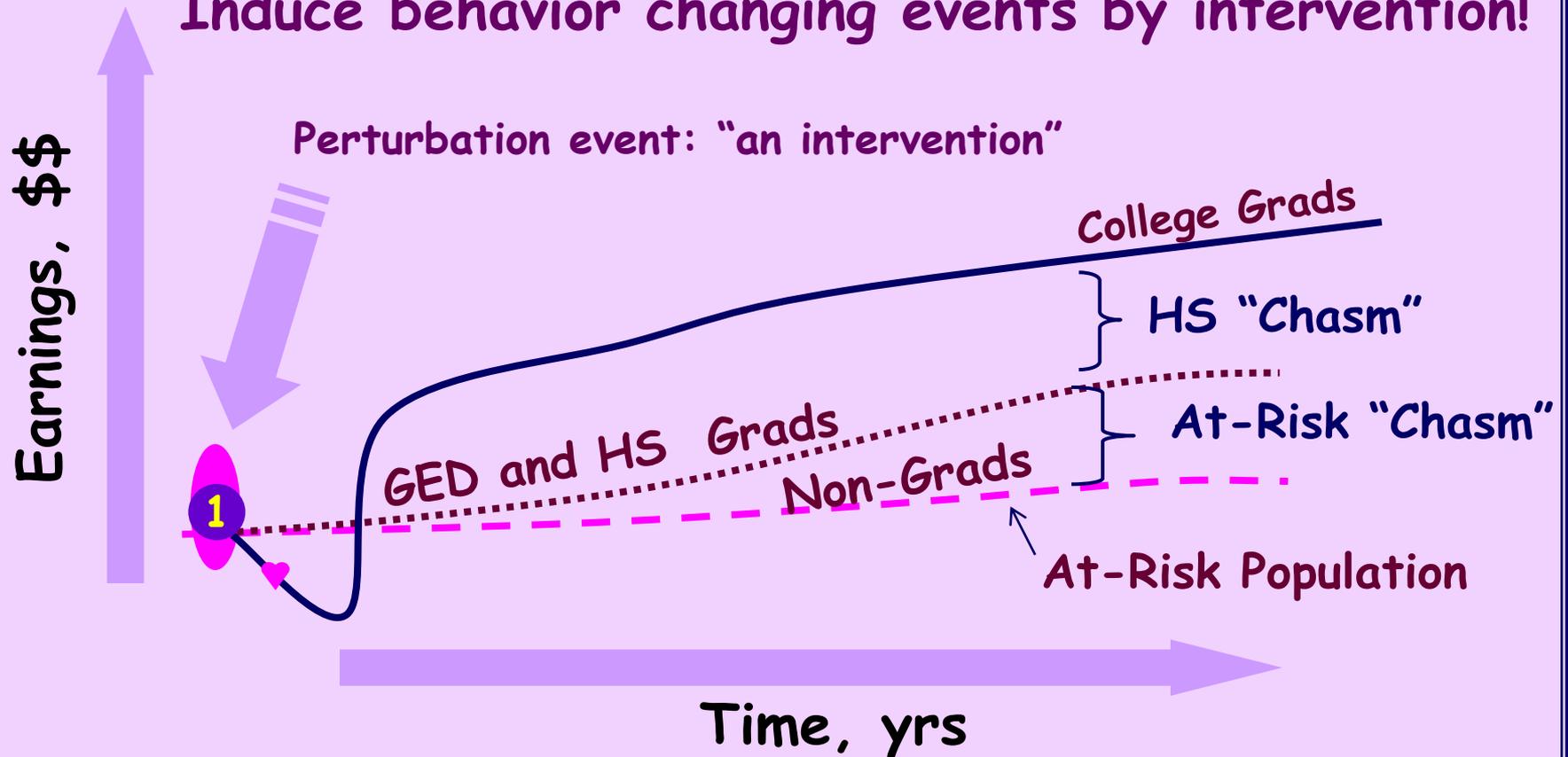
Behavior changing events 4

Investment periods ♥

MY RESEARCH EMPHASIS

How to?

Induce behavior changing events by intervention!



Key:

Behavior changing events 4

Investment periods ♥

MY INITIAL FINDINGS

(based on an assessment of ILP interventions)

General:

- Intervention has No Impact On: Education Attainment, Housing, and Employment
- No Longitudinal Data (i.e., cannot predict outcomes)
- Binary Data Only
- No Emphasis on Human Capital Accumulation
- Less than 1% Participation in Completing All ILP Sessions
- African-American and Other Minorities Performed Better than White Reference Group
- Quality of Data Precludes Accurate Statistical Analysis
- Data Does Not Support Incremental Program Improvements (Big Picture)

ONE CONCLUSION FROM FINDINGS: A CASE FOR INCREASED RIGOR IN SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

- To Counter Hand-waving by Policy Makers and other Stakeholders
- Assures Fiscal Accountability for Social Programs and Initiatives
- Enables the use of Predictive Analyses (e.g., probit models)
- Enables Progress through Incremental Improvements Over Time
- Offers Extensibility (i.e., lego design)

Child Welfare Informatics: A Proposed Subspecialty for Social Work and Child Welfare Professionals



Toni Naccarato, MSW, PhD

SUNY Albany's School of Social Welfare and
Department of Informatics

ABSTRACT

Informatics is a term that has been used and applied to data collection, analysis, and information and communication technologies across many disciplines including public health, nursing, medicine, and, more recently, to social work. To date, no collective discussion involving policy makers, practitioners, and researchers in the social work field defining child welfare informatics and its implications to the discipline, including curriculum development has occurred. This paper offers a perspective to begin the dialogue of child welfare informatics and presents a working definition and role specification for those working as child welfare informaticians. Finally, recommendations are made on how to evolve child welfare informatics. These recommendations include highlighting the importance of informatics as a subspecialty within social work, its prospectus for child welfare policy reform, and implications for interdisciplinary, social work curriculum development.

WHAT IS INFORMATICS?

Definition:

The interdisciplinary study of the design, application, and the use of information technologies

Informatics subspecialties have been developed in public health, nursing, medicine, clinical and more recently - social work

However, there has been no collective discussion to define *child welfare informatics* (Nguyen, 2007).

CHILD WELFARE INFORMATICS (CWI): A PROPOSED DEFINITION

"CWI is a subspecialty in social work that integrates child welfare, computer science, and information science to manage and communicate data, information, and knowledge in child welfare practice. CWI facilitates the integration of data, information, and knowledge to support children and families; child welfare researchers, policy makers, and practitioners; and, other stakeholders and providers in their decision making in all roles and settings. This effort is accomplished through the use of information structures, processes, and technology."

DATABASES ON A LEGISLATION TIMELINE

1930s	1935	1940 - 75
Initial Call for Research	Social Security Act	Federal Data Collection
Advocacy for more rigorous research methods to assess social programs	Title V established Child Welfare Services designed to help state and local agencies provide preventive and protective services for children, including foster children.	Federal Government Voluntary Collection of Foster Care and Adoption Data

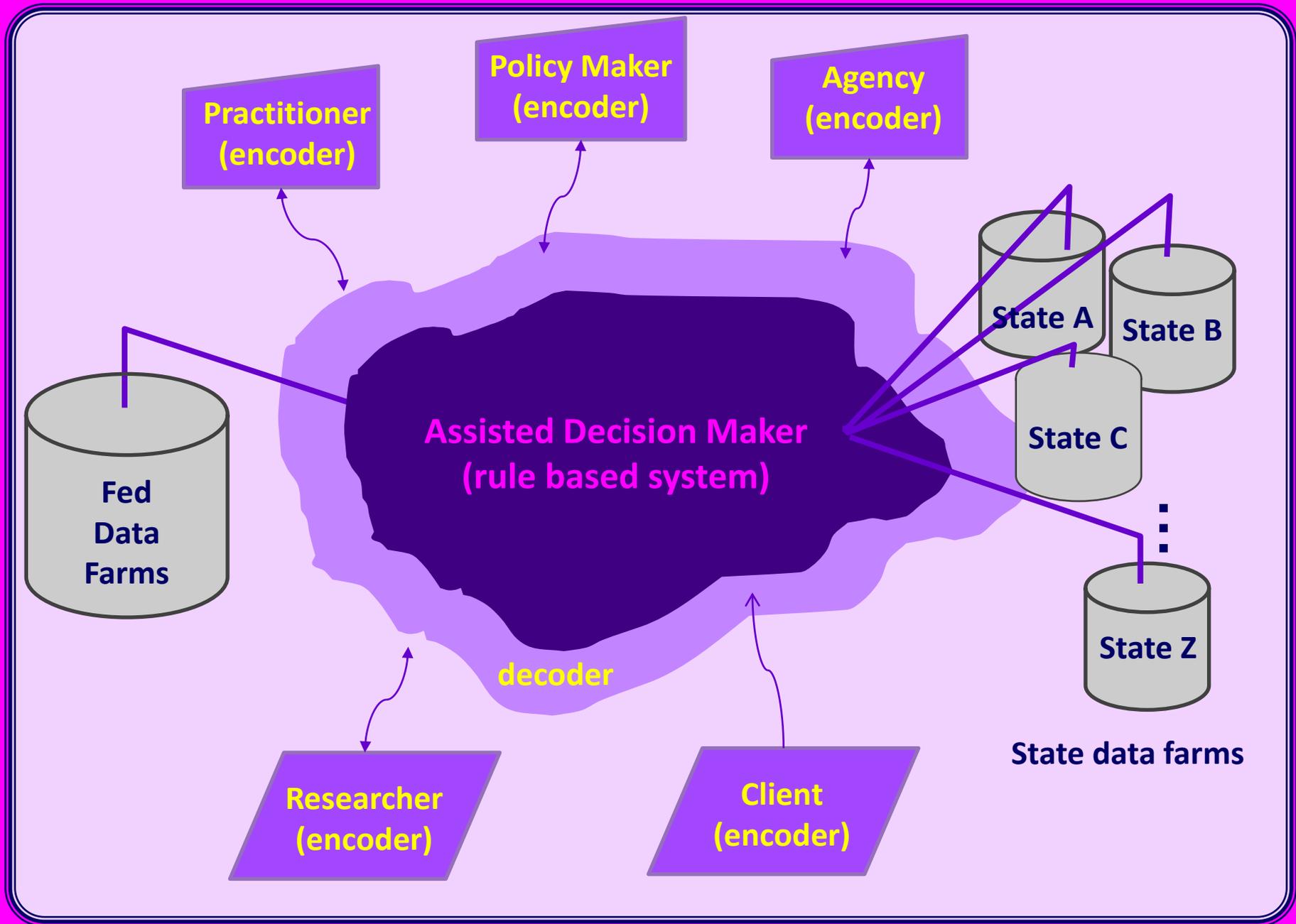
1970	1980	1982	1986
Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS)	PL 96-272: Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act	American Public Welfare Association's (APWA) Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS)	Title IV-E Social Security Act
MMIS was developed for billing and payment of Medicaid Claims	The beginning of the outcomes movement in child welfare and state self-assessment.	APWA begins to publish foster care and adoptions data from VCIS.	Mandates that states establish the Adoptions and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System

DATABASES ON A LEGISLATION TIMELINE

1993	1996	1997	1999
PL 103-66: Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act	Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Amendments Established the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)	PL 105-89: Adoption and Safe Families Act	PL 96-272: Foster Care Act
Federal incentives to states for funding and establishment of State Automated Child Welfare Information Systems	NCANDS was established as a voluntary national data collection and analysis system. This was in response for accountability and the use of measurable outcomes.	Established Child and Family Services Reviews to develop outcome measures to assess states' performance in safety, permanency, and family and child-well being	Requirements established for the federal government to develop a data collection system regarding youth who are in foster care or who have aged out of foster care; Currently, the National Youth in Transition Database is being designed for the states.

•WHAT IF?
WE REPLACE LEGAL INTERVENTION/
REGULATION WITH OPENESS/TRANSPARENCY
TO ALL DATA PRACTICES?

- IF:
 - 1) USE OF ENCRPTION TECHNOLOGIES NOT LEGAL PERMISSIONS FOR ACCESS
 - 2) ISOLATION OF PRIVATE INFORMATION FROM ALL PRACTITIONERS BY SOFTWARE DESIGN
- THEN:
 - 1) SYNERGY CAN BE BUILT BETWEEN ALL STAKEHOLDERS AND CLIENTS
 - 2) NEW INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE TOOLS INCLUSIVE OF SIMULATATORS COULD BE DEVELOPED



RECOMMENDATIONS

Figure 1 illustrates a proposed model of a CWI collaboration hub. Currently, subsystems such as the practitioners, researchers, agencies, policy makers, and clients may collect and work with their respective data in isolation. These data may or may not be fed into an information system and may or may not be shared. State and federal data warehouses may collect different and sometimes incomplete data elements. In terms of managing, tracking, and confidentiality, today's database management tools and security protocols are highly developed and easily adaptable to handle the collaboration as suggested by Figure 1. Indeed, today's encryption tools exceed the human error prone systems currently in use. Having child welfare *informaticians*, whose roles and training were solely focused on these competencies of data management, tracking, and security would be helpful for acceptance into formal social work education and practice

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- First, child welfare workers typically have knowledge regarding word processing, presentation software, and basic spreadsheet programs. However, it is not always the case that they are specifically trained in database programs or understand transactional database interfaces that typically underlie large state and federal information systems such as SACWIS.
- Second, many child welfare workers desire to work with and help children and families and they do not necessarily understand the need for collecting and analyzing data. Thus, many child welfare workers do the minimal recording necessary when inputting data into the SACWIS. This leads to many data fields being skipped and a problem with missing data.
- Third, in most social work programs and child welfare training workshops the focus is on learning how to be a user of IT and SACWIS, but not how to troubleshoot and build information systems. Thus, when hardware breaks down or the network crashes, it leads workers to believe that the exercise in using the SACWIS, or the computer is a waste of time and resources. Further, many state and county agencies do not have adequate financial resources to purchase new computer systems after a reasonable period of time. This leads to workers stating that their "systems are too slow and work takes twice as long."

NEXT STEPS

This paper calls for a dialogue to begin regarding the importance of *CWI*, which has direct implications for future curriculum development in this important area in social work education. A definition for the subspecialty of *CWI* will undoubtedly continue to evolve. Future endeavors toward redefining *CWI* should include: the role of research in knowledge building and the critical role that informatics can play in understanding practice effectiveness; and that a definition for *CWI* is useful to other disciplines, as they define informatics practices within their own subspecialties. This is needed to help others within and outside child welfare understand the legitimacy of the practice of social workers who specialize in *CWI*.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

- NEED A SOCIAL WORK SUBSPECIALTY FOCUSING ON CHILD WELFARE INFORMATICS
- HIGHLY EVOLVED DATABASE TECHNOLOGIES COULD BE LEVERAGED
- BENEFITS TO CHILD WELFARE RECIPIENTS BECOME TRANSPARENT AND SHARED BETWEEN ALL
- COSTS OF CHILD PROTECTION COULD BE LOWER WITHOUT EXCESSIVE INTERVENTION BY COURTS
- MUST ESTABLISH HIGHLY INTERACTIVE SECURE INTERFACES

thank you