

Emerging Conceptualizations of Early Childhood Professional Development

Martha Zaslow
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Purpose of Presentation

- This presentation will point to indications that we are in a period of active review and revision of underlying conceptualizations regarding early childhood professional development (ECPD)
- The emerging conceptualizations are critical to how we will approach ECPD provided by through higher education in the future

Presentation based on Zaslow, M., Tout, K., Halle, T. & Starr, R. (in press). Professional development for early educators: Reviewing and revising conceptualizations. In S. B. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of Early Language and Literacy Development*. New York: Guilford Publications

Structure of Presentation

- Identify core components of ECPD
- Describe traditional conceptualization for how these core components function in affecting quality and child outcomes
- Summarize reasons this conceptualization is being questioned
- Describe emerging conceptualizations
- Discuss implications for ECPD through provided through higher education

Components of ECPD

Knowledge-Focused ECPD:

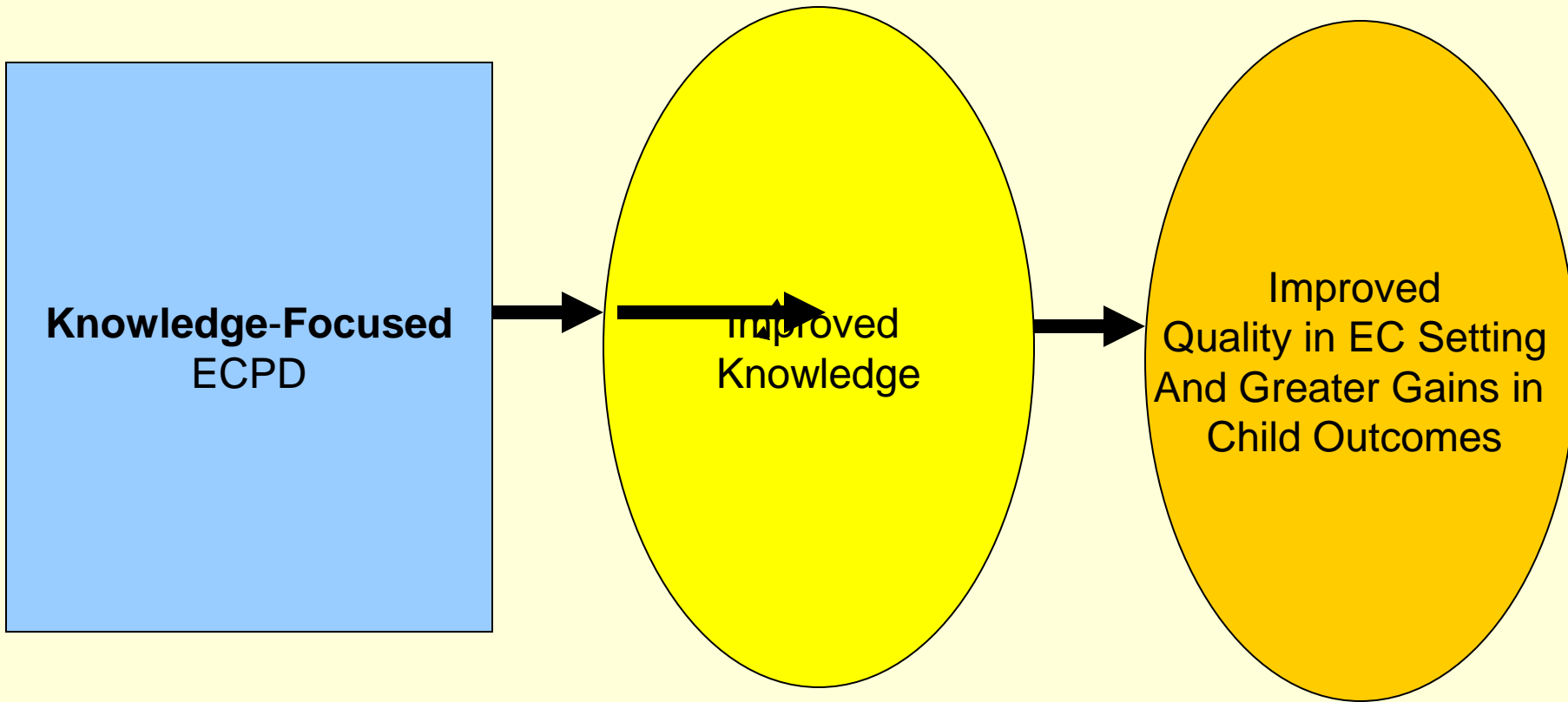
- Coursework
contributing to a degree
- Training

Components of ECPD

Practice-Focused ECPD:

- Individualized
- Interactive
- Observing, modeling, reflecting and discussing, providing feedback
- On-site or via internet link

Traditional Conceptualization



Prevalence of the Traditional Conceptualization

- Nearly half of the states in the United States have pre-service requirements and nearly all have in-service requirements for education or training of teachers in center-based child care programs (LeMoine, 2005).
- May involve practica or student teaching requirements in college coursework
- However, the pre-service and in-service requirements do not generally involve a requirement for the early educator to demonstrate specific practices in the early childhood setting.

Questioning the Traditional Conceptualization

- Reviews of research from previous decades concluded that educational attainment of teachers is associated with quality and child outcomes.
- However, a reexamination of this issue with data from pre-k settings in multiple states did not find the expected pattern (NCEDL study data; Early et al., 2006).
- To provide a careful analysis of this issue, coordinated analyses were conducted in 7 major EC datasets (Early et al. 2007). This research found little evidence of an association of observed quality or of child outcomes with:
 - The lead teacher's educational attainment
 - Whether the lead teacher had a bachelors' degree
 - The major of the lead teacher's highest educational degree

Questioning the Traditional Conceptualization

There are multiple possible interpretations of this pattern (summarized in Burchinal, Hyson & Zaslow, 2008)

- The quality of the higher education programs was not specified in these analyses
 - Hyson and colleagues (2008) found that about 25% of applications of EC higher education programs for NAEYC and NCATE accreditation were rejected upon first submission
- Cohort effects: There may be differences over time in the characteristics of the early educators with higher educational attainment who remain in EC classrooms
- There may be problems with the underlying conceptualization: It may fail to capture adequately how ECPD contributes to quality or child outcomes

Questioning the Traditional Conceptualization

Further evidence of the need to question the traditional conceptualization comes from a Study by Neuman and Cunningham (2009). They randomly assigned EC educators to receive:

- A college course built around the most recent research on early language and literacy development
 - The college course paired with on-site coaching
 - A control group (PD as usual)
- There were no effects of either treatment approach on early educator knowledge regarding language and literacy
- There were also no effects on the quality of the early education environment for the treatment group that received only the college coursework
- However there were large and educationally meaningful improvements in language and literacy stimulation in classrooms and home-based early childhood settings when coursework was combined with on-site coaching.

Emerging Conceptualizations

Three emerging conceptualizations change the placement in the model of the knowledge-focused component:

- #1: systematically pairs practice-focused and knowledge-focused components
- #2: places the primary emphasis on the practice-focused PD
- #3: Views changes in knowledge as deriving from rather than preceding changes in practice

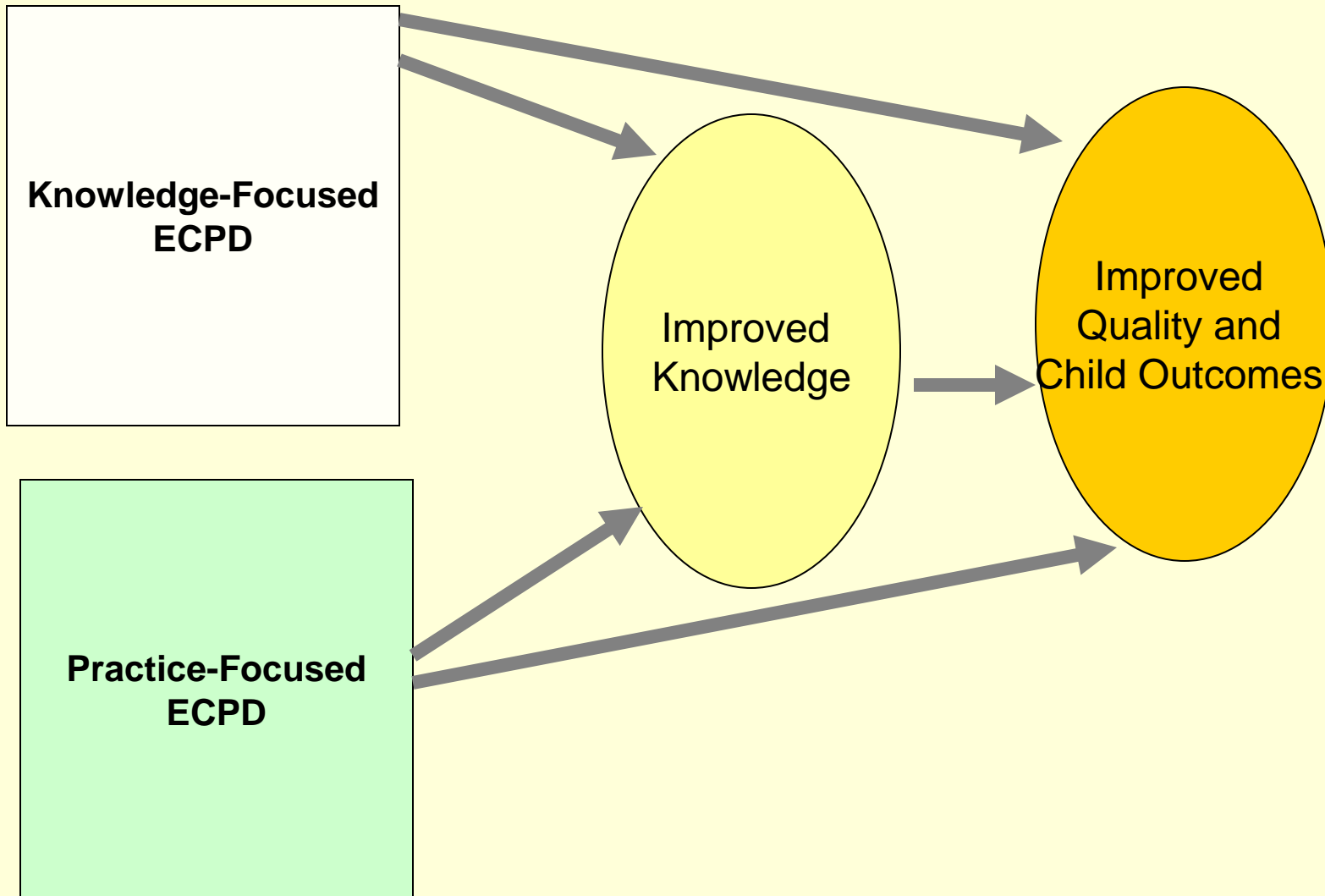
Emerging Conceptualization #1: Pairing of Components

- The Early Childhood Educator Professional Development (ECEPD) Programs suggest the emergence of a conceptualization involving pairing of knowledge-focused and practice-focused components
 - The ECEPD projects were funded by the US Department of Education
 - They had the goal of increasing access to and quality of professional development for early educators working in low income communities
 - They have been called a “National Laboratory” for early childhood professional development practices
- A cross-site evaluation, conducted by Child Trends, focused on 18 ECEPD projects funded in 2003, 2004, and 2005 (Tout, Zaslow, Halle and Starr, 2009)

Emerging Conceptualization #1: Pairing of Components

- All 18 projects involved a combination of knowledge-focused and practice-focused components. This suggests a conceptualization in which professional development needs to include both knowledge- and practice-focused components in order to have effects
- This conceptualization must be seen as a hypothesis in that:
 - The ECEPD projects generally did not test how the two core components contributed to outcomes (The study by Neuman and Cunningham summarized earlier is an important exception)
 - Did not directly examine mediating processes

Emerging Conceptualization #1: Pairing Components



Further Examination of Pairing Approaches

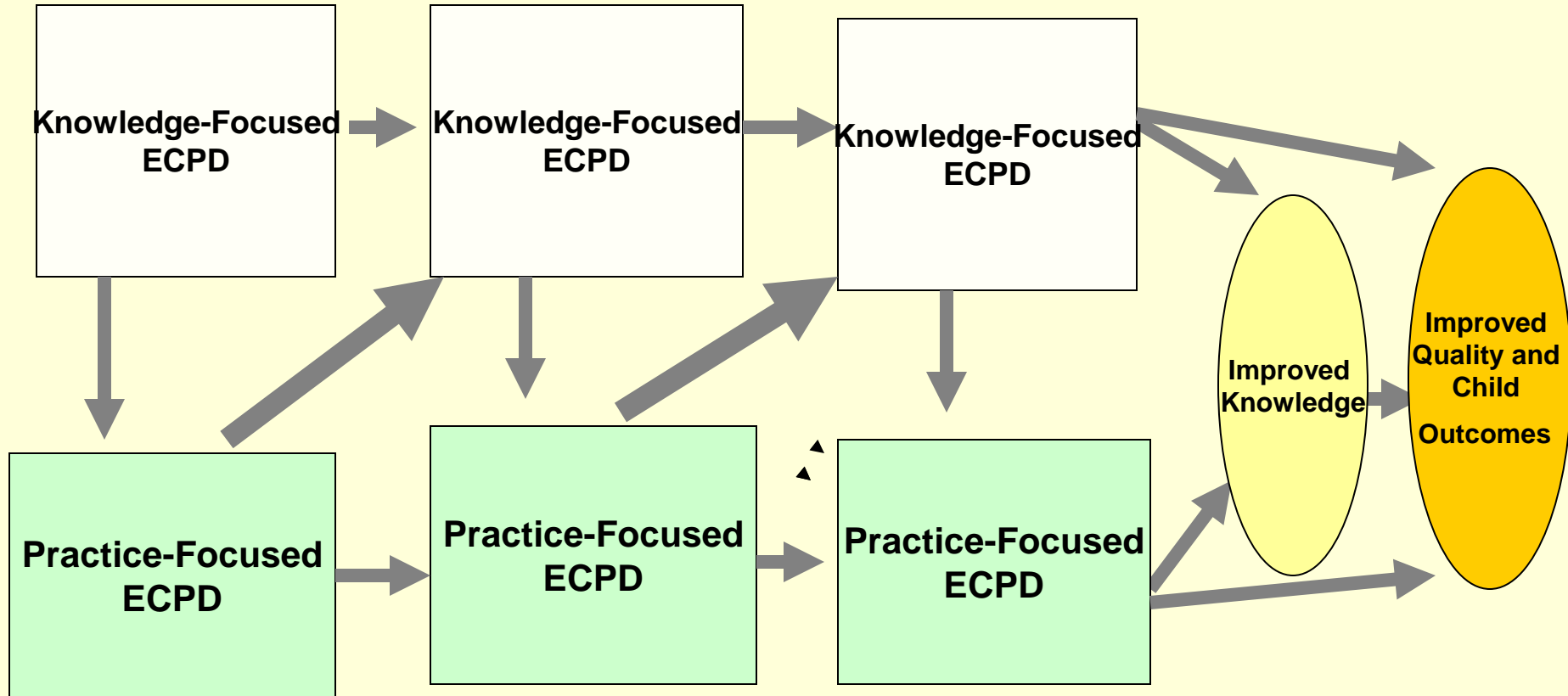
- The cross-site evaluation of the ECEPD projects identified 10 projects that met criteria for rigor in research design as well as reporting on methodological issues
- While all 10 included both knowledge- and practice-focused components, evidence of positive effects on early childhood settings &/or child outcomes was found in 8 of the 10
- This pattern of findings suggests that some but not all pairing approaches may provide a basis for positive effects
- The cross-site evaluation concluded that there is a need for closer examination of both the knowledge- and practice-focused components and how they are combined.

Further Examination of Pairing Approaches

- Examples of differences across ECEPD projects *all of which included both knowledge- and practice-focused components* include:
 - The extent of supervision of on-site staff
 - Whether the focus of on-site visits was pre-determined, left open for the early educator to determine, or set jointly,
 - The dosage of each component, and
 - The extent to which the components were linked
- One of the conclusions of the cross-site evaluation of ECEPD projects is that the projects with evidence of positive effects tended to systematically *link their* knowledge-focused and practice-focused components

Variant of Emerging Conceptualization #1

Showing Intentional Linking



Emerging Conceptualization #2:

Primary Emphasis on Practice-Focused Component

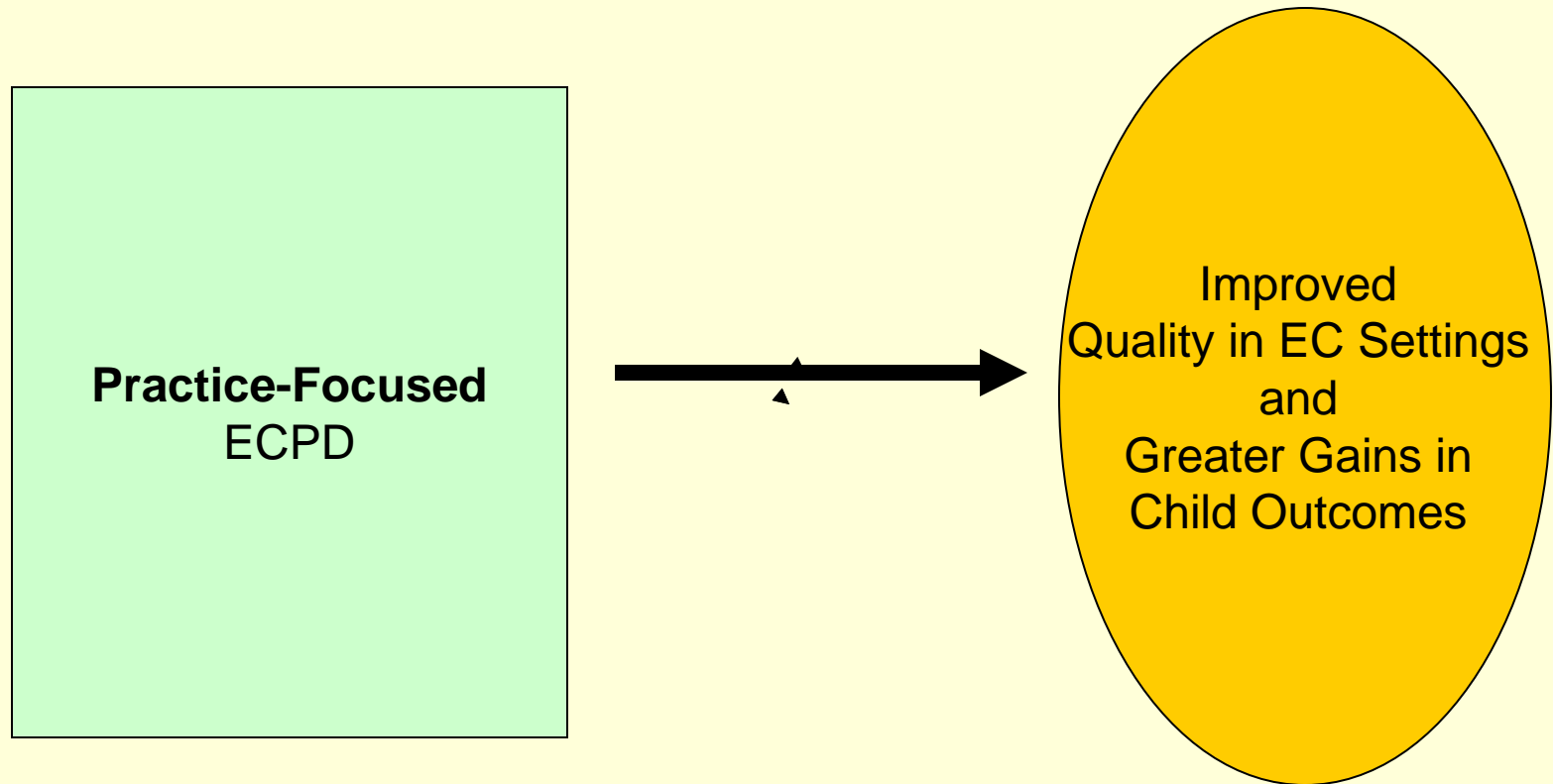
- The study by Neuman and Cunningham (2009) had contrasted the combination of coursework and coaching with coursework alone. Findings could not illuminate what happens when PD involves only a practice-focused component
- A subsequent study by Neuman and Wright (2010) looked at coaching alone, coursework alone, and a no-treatment (wait list) control group.
 - Improvements in observed quality of the classroom environment were found only for the coaching group
- These findings raise the possibility that it is the practice-focused component of PD that may be the “active ingredient”

Emerging Conceptualization #2:

Primary Emphasis on Practice-Focused Component

- Other rigorous evaluations of PD approaches in which the primary emphasis is the practice-focused component also provide evidence of effects:
 - Quality Interventions for Early Care and Education (QUINCE) Evaluation (Bryant et al., 2010) evaluating the Partners for Inclusion model of technical assistance
 - The evaluation of My Teaching Partner (Pianta, Mashburn et al., 2008), involving web-based approach to individualized consultation
- Both evaluations report positive effects on quality as well as child outcomes

Emerging Conceptualization #2: Primary Emphasis on Practice-Focused Component



Emerging Conceptualization #2: Primary Emphasis on Practice-Focused Component

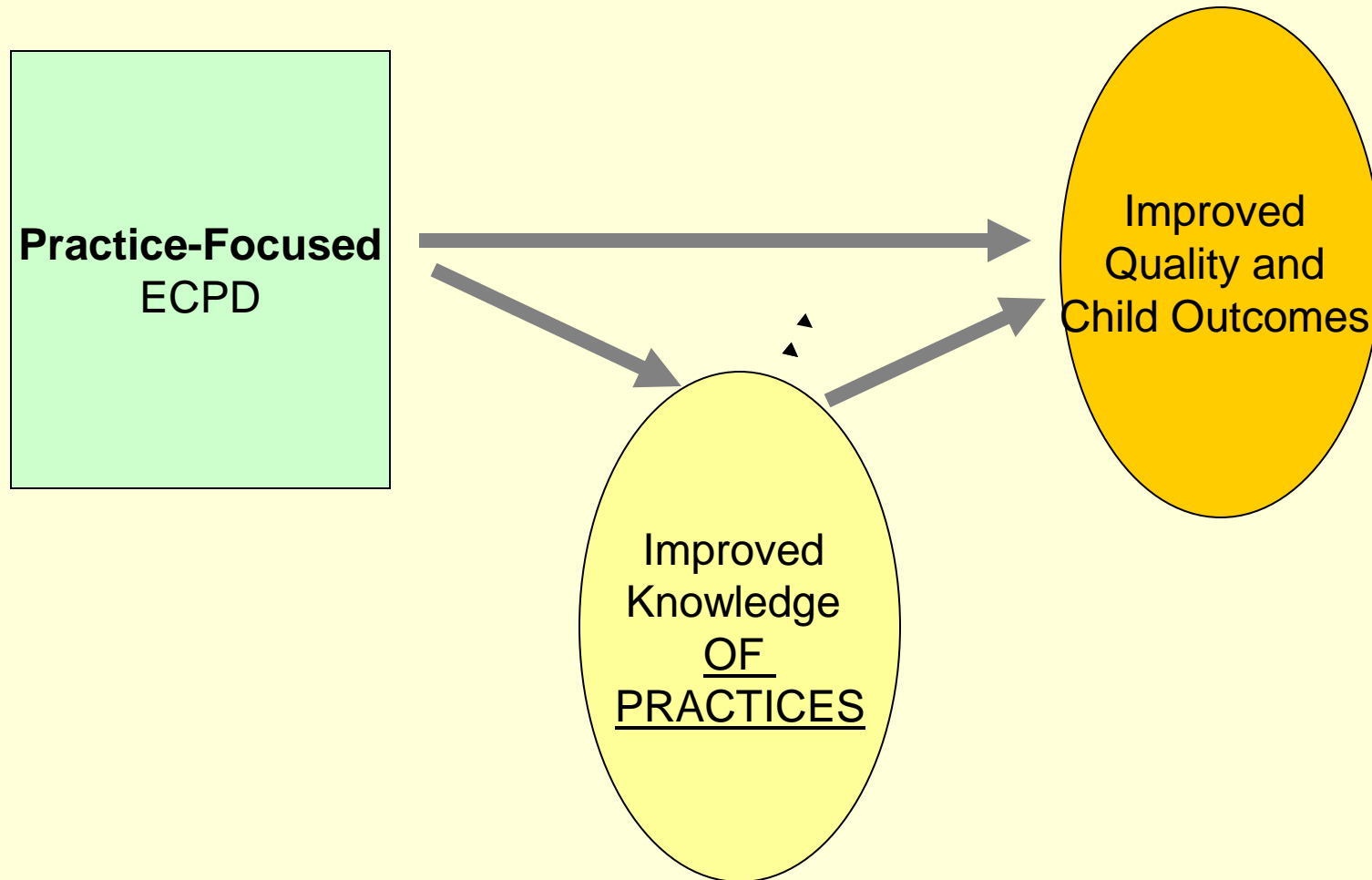
- This set of studies suggests the need for further evaluation of PD approaches with a direct emphasis on practice. There is promising evidence of their effectiveness.
- They raise the possibility that a separate knowledge-focused component may not add to positive outcomes
- But the ECEPD projects point to the further possibility that systematic linking of components may be of importance
- We need to ask directly whether the underlying issue is:
 - That knowledge-focused components don't add to outcomes? Or
 - That knowledge-focused components that are not tightly linked with practice-focused component don't add?

Emerging Conceptualization #3:

Knowledge Deriving From Practice

- Work just presented by Hamre suggests that we may be able to break down or eliminate the distinction between knowledge- and practice-focused components of PD:
 - Coursework can focus in a very systematic way on practice
 - Knowledge can be conceptualized as the ability to recognize specific positive practices
 - There is evidence that such awareness in and of itself can influence both specific kinds of knowledge and practice

Emerging Conceptualization #3: Knowledge Deriving from Awareness of Practices



Summary

In summary:

- Recent research is raising questions about whether knowledge-focused components of ECPD alone suffice to improve outcomes
- We are seeing the emergence of professional development approaches (and evaluations of these) involving a pairing of practice-focused and knowledge-focused components, and approaches with a primary emphasis on practice alone.
- A possibility emerging in the most recent research is that it may be important to think about *knowledge of practices*, and to distinguish this from more abstract knowledge.
- By redefining what knowledge is about in early childhood professional development, we may end up eliminating the distinction between knowledge-focused and practice-focused approaches

Implications for PD Provided Through Higher Education

The research suggests not that we need to reject knowledge-focused components of professional development, but rather that we need to reexamine their content and how they are linked with practice-focused components.

The most recent research suggests that higher education coursework can:

- (1) Systematically build in practice-focused components
- (2) Intentionally link knowledge-focused and practice-focused components
- (3) View knowledge as rooted in and deriving from practice rather than preceding it, and
- (4) Build in requirements for measurement of change in practice.

We need systematic evaluations of such higher education approaches