

The Influence of Politics and Policy on Balanced Assessment Systems

Scott Marion, Center for Assessment

Reidy Interactive Lecture Series

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Political Boundaries and Balanced Assessment Systems

- **Coherence**

- Learning targets
- Curriculum
- Design specifications
 - Format, items

- **Comprehensiveness**

- Issues of implementation
 - timing and format
- Who are the stakeholders?
- Resources

- **Continuity**

- Information flow
- What is building on what?

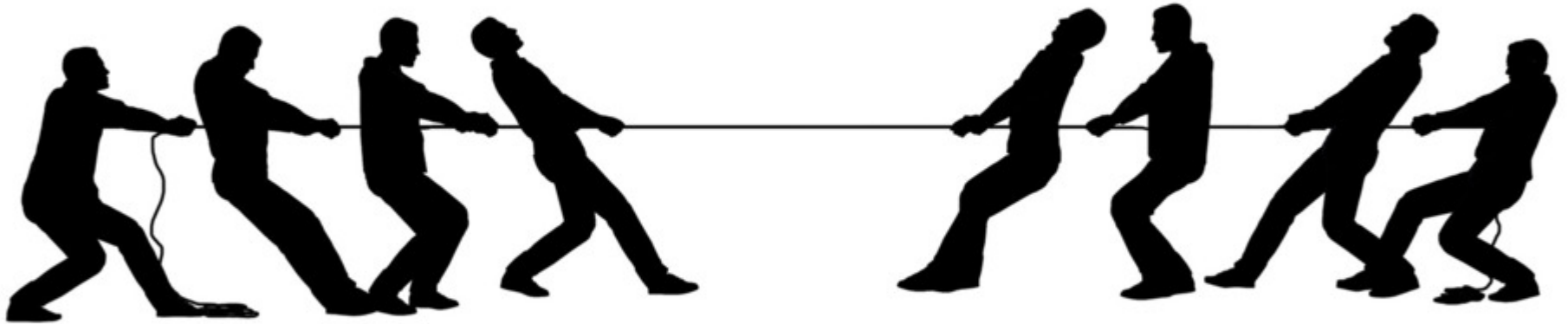
- **Efficiency**

- Trying to avoid being overrun by too many assessments

- **Utility**

- For whom?
- How?
- Based on what theory of action?

Coherence Requires Coordination

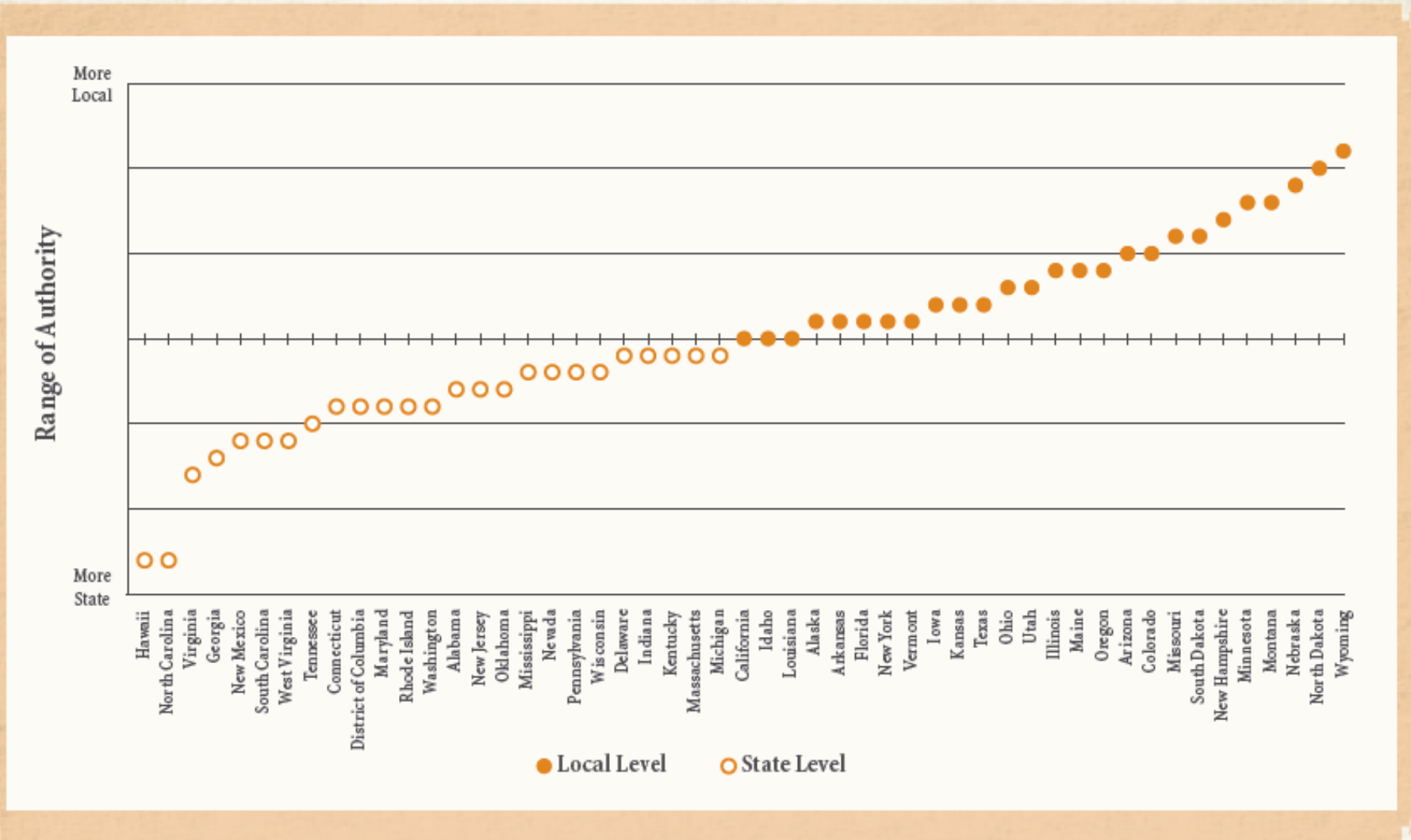


The Challenge

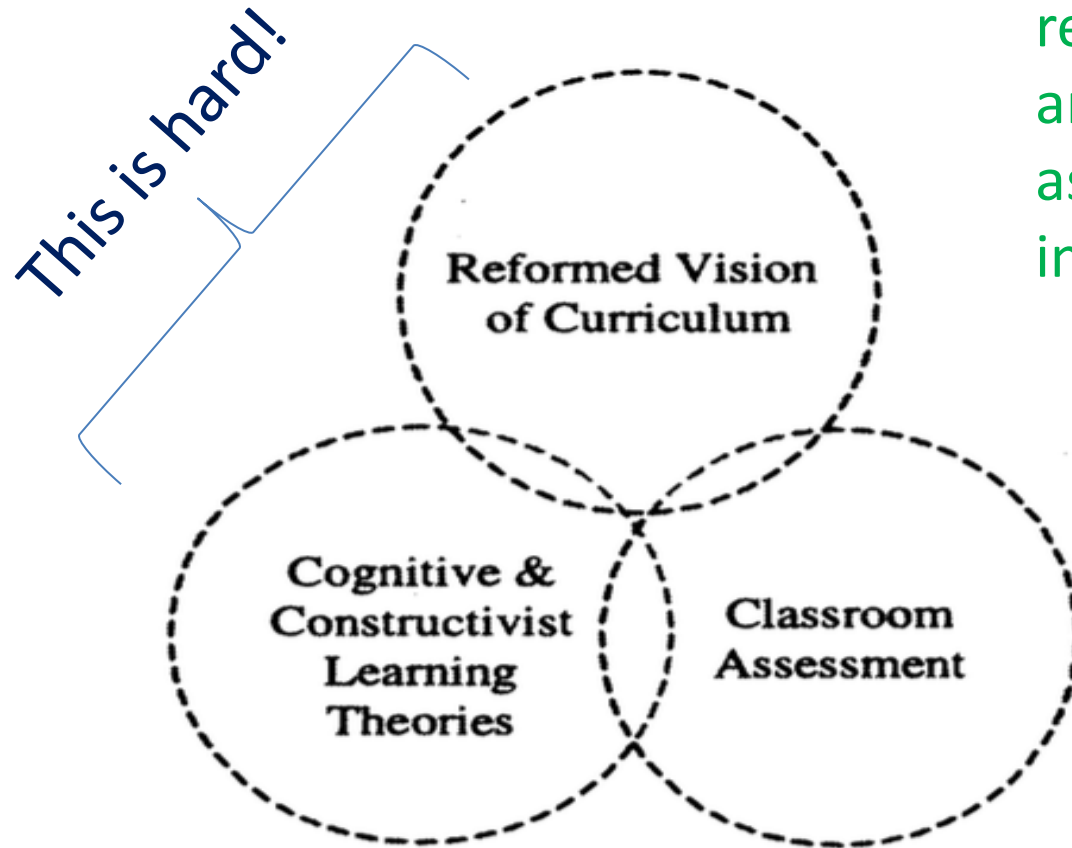
- Balanced assessment system design and implementation is hard in the best of conditions
- The challenges are exacerbated when the various assessments are owned by different political entities
 - Issues of local control and the role of learning targets and curriculum
 - Turnover and shifting priorities
 - State accountability policies
- Most discussions of balanced assessment systems focus on technical and mechanical issues, but policy and politics are a linchpin!

Range of state-local control of education

Figure ES-1: Which states vest authority at the state—or local—level?



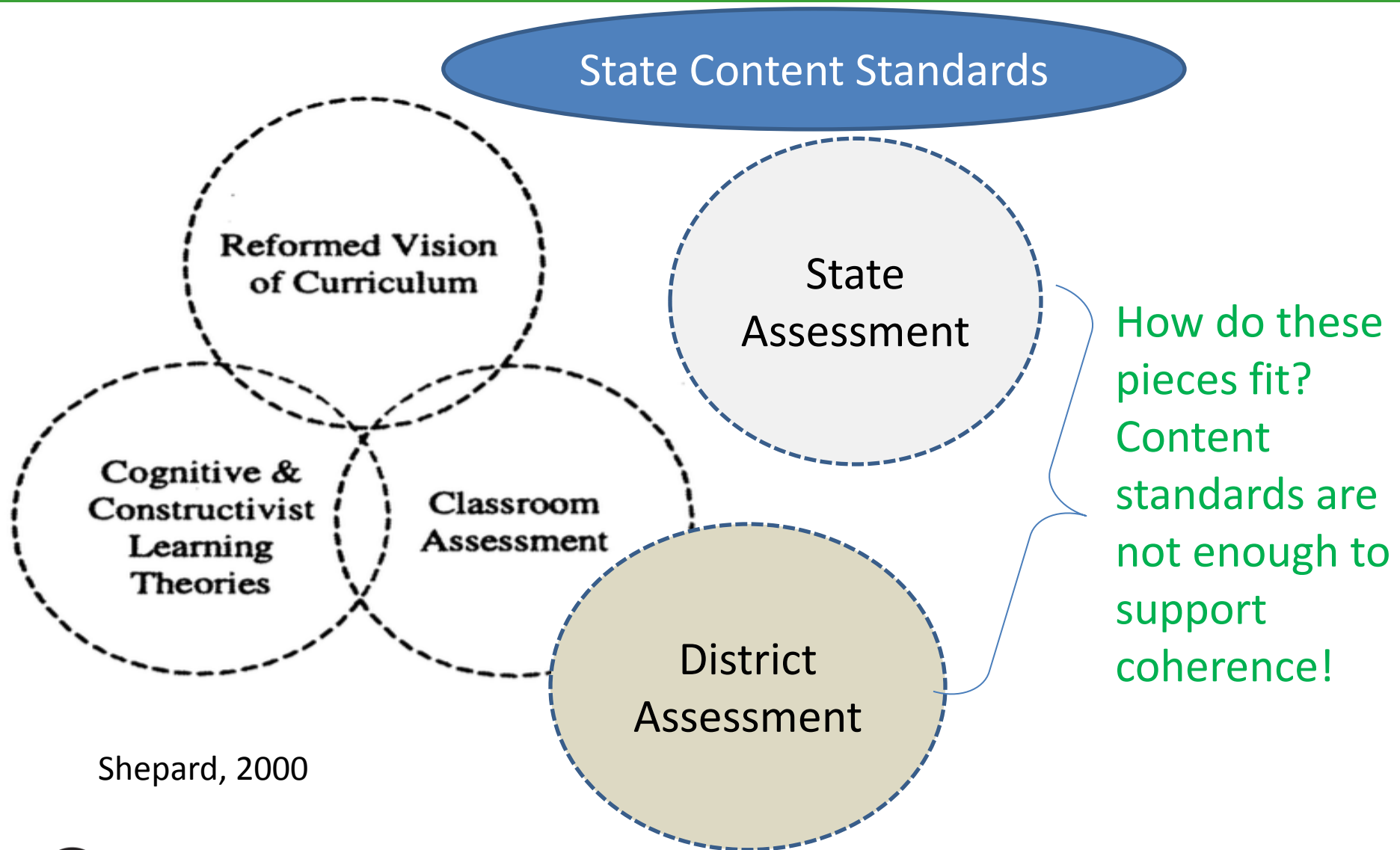
Learning targets & curriculum: implications for coherence



Shepard, 2000

Coherence depends
requires tight connections
among curriculum,
assessment, and
instruction

Learning targets & curriculum: implications for coherence



Shepard, 2000

Turnover: Coherence requires stability!

- Changing visions of education
- Four (4) different state tests in 5 years? Not a joke!
- Changing or threatening to change standards (CCSS)!

All affect the implementation of balanced assessment systems, whether state- or district-led



State Accountability and Assessment Policies

- I focus on two main policy considerations:
 - The influence of state accountability policies
 - The footprint of state assessments

The Perverse Effects of High Stakes Accountability

Stakes, if they work at all, do so by mobilizing resources, capacities, knowledge, and competencies that, by definition are not present in the organization and individuals whom they are intended to affect. If the schools had the assets in advance of the stakes, they presumably would not need the stakes to mobilize them. In this context, stakes make no sense as policy instruments unless they are joined in some systematic way with assistance that is designed to create the organizational assets that are required to respond to the stakes. In the absence of this kind of assistance, most schools and systems will respond within the constraints of their existing assets, which are, by definition, inadequate to respond to the task (Elmore, 2004, p.288).

Policy chaos

- If the state employs high stake accountability policies, districts and schools will have a hard time implementing balanced local assessment systems



Such policies tend to suck the air out of the room and control the conversations!

An Out-of-Balanced System

State
accountability
and assessment
policies can have
a crushing
influence on
classroom
assessment
systems



What's the right balance?



- Should states use very light footprint assessments to reduce the impression of the state tests?
- Should the state use the state assessment to send important signals about expectations for teaching and learning?
- Of course, there are some middle-ground approaches, such as matrix sampling

What can we do?

- Focus where we can focus...
 - Building district capacity to create high quality systems of assessment
 - Working from the classroom out
- Loose-coupling from the state to district
- Tight-coupling within districts



How do we deal with these challenges?

- Which entity (or entities) has to address the challenges of coherence and comprehensiveness?
- What is the most appropriate role for states in supporting balanced assessment systems?
- How can districts fend off onerous state accountability policies?
- Can a high quality classroom assessment system operate in a bubble? Why or why not? How?