

Session 2A: Setting the Context-Framing and Background on Balanced Assessment Systems

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Tinkering Toward Balance

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Reidy Interactive Learning Series

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Advance Organizer

- A little history
- Searching for unicorns (more things to get wrong than right)
 - Challenges
 - Barriers
- A reimagination

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL



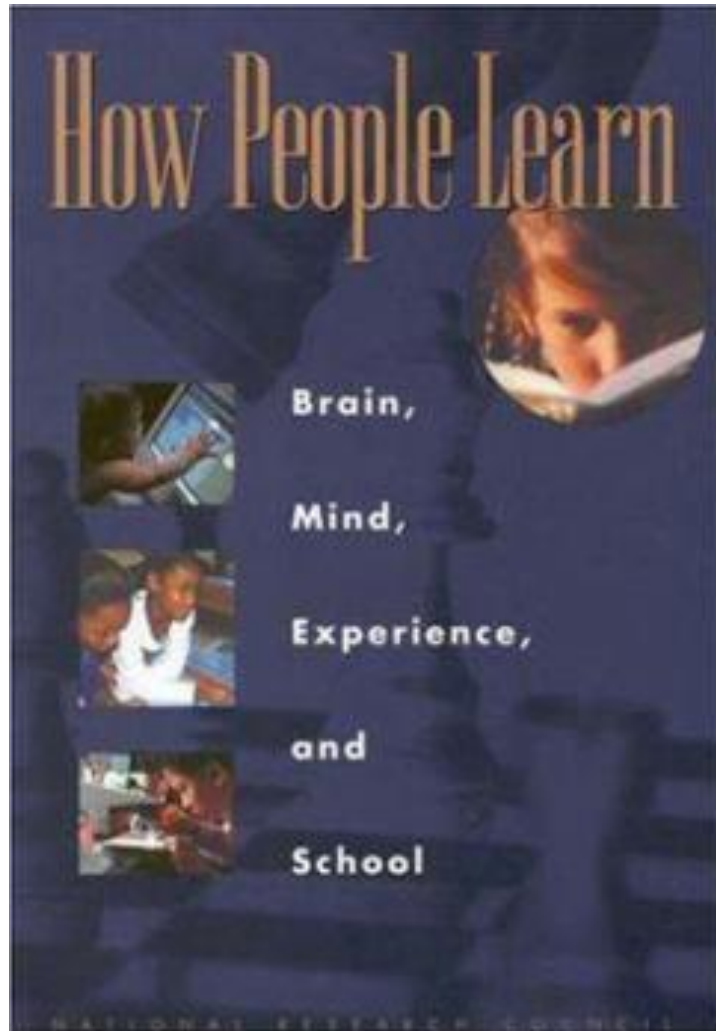
Knowing what Students Know

The Science
and Design
of Educational
Assessment

In the beginning, there was *Knowing What Students Know*

*Assessments at all levels—from classroom to state—will work together in a system that is **comprehensive, coherent, and continuous**. In such a system, assessments would provide a variety of evidence to support educational decision-making. Assessment at all levels would be linked back to the same **underlying model of student learning** and would provide indications of student growth over time.*

The Motivation and the Glue



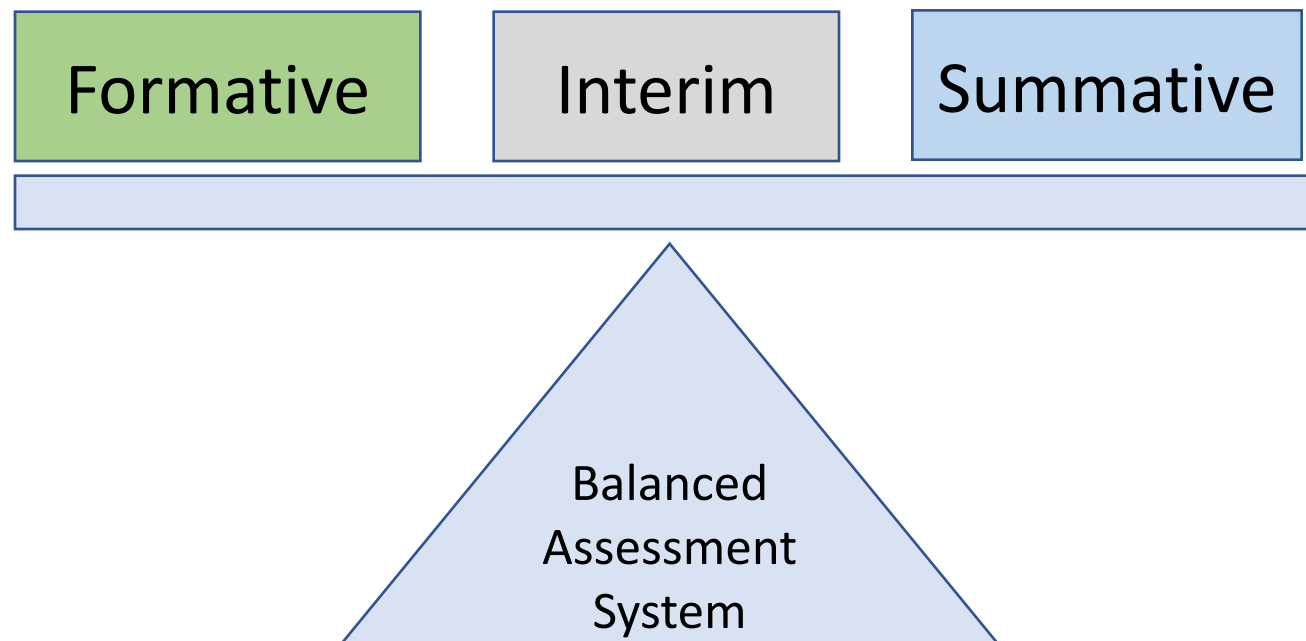
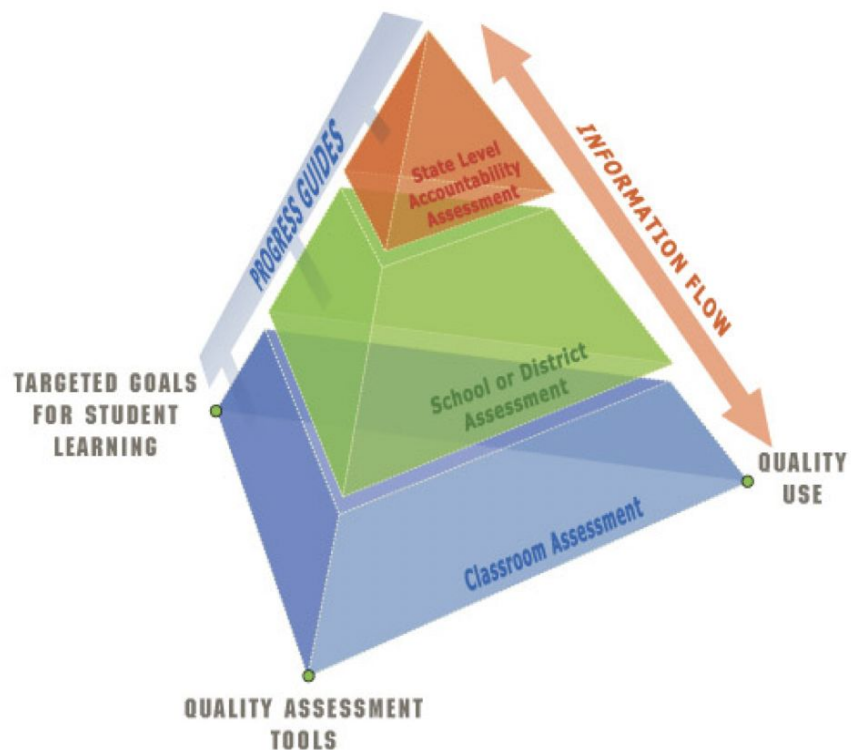
- *Knowing What Students Know* was written after the publication of [How People Learn](#), a National Research Council project summarizing and extending our understanding of human learning.
- Assessment design must start from a clear conception of learning.
- See also, Lorrie Shepard's (2000) [The role of assessment in a learning culture](#).

Guided By Straightforward Principles

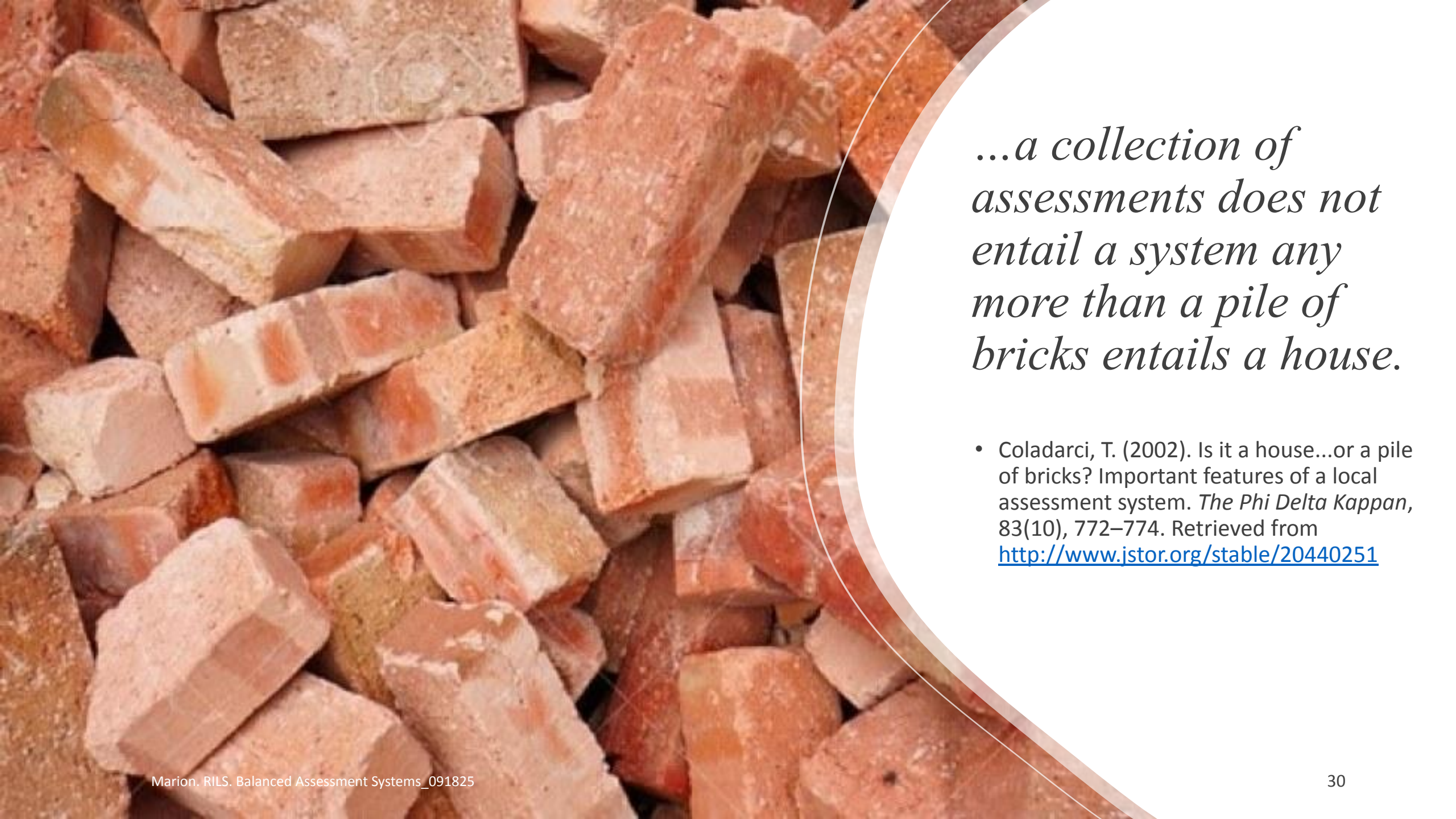
- **Coherence:** the model for how students will learn key knowledge and skills is compatible with the various assessments.
- **Comprehensiveness:** a range of approaches is used to provide a variety of evidence to support educational decision-making.
- **Continuity:** documents student progress over time like a continuous record rather than the snapshots provided by most current tests. Models of student progress in learning should underlie the assessment system.



These Images Makes Balance Seem Easy



But they are misleading!



...a collection of assessments does not entail a system any more than a pile of bricks entails a house.

- Coladarci, T. (2002). Is it a house...or a pile of bricks? Important features of a local assessment system. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(10), 772–774. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20440251>

The Unicorn of Educational Assessment

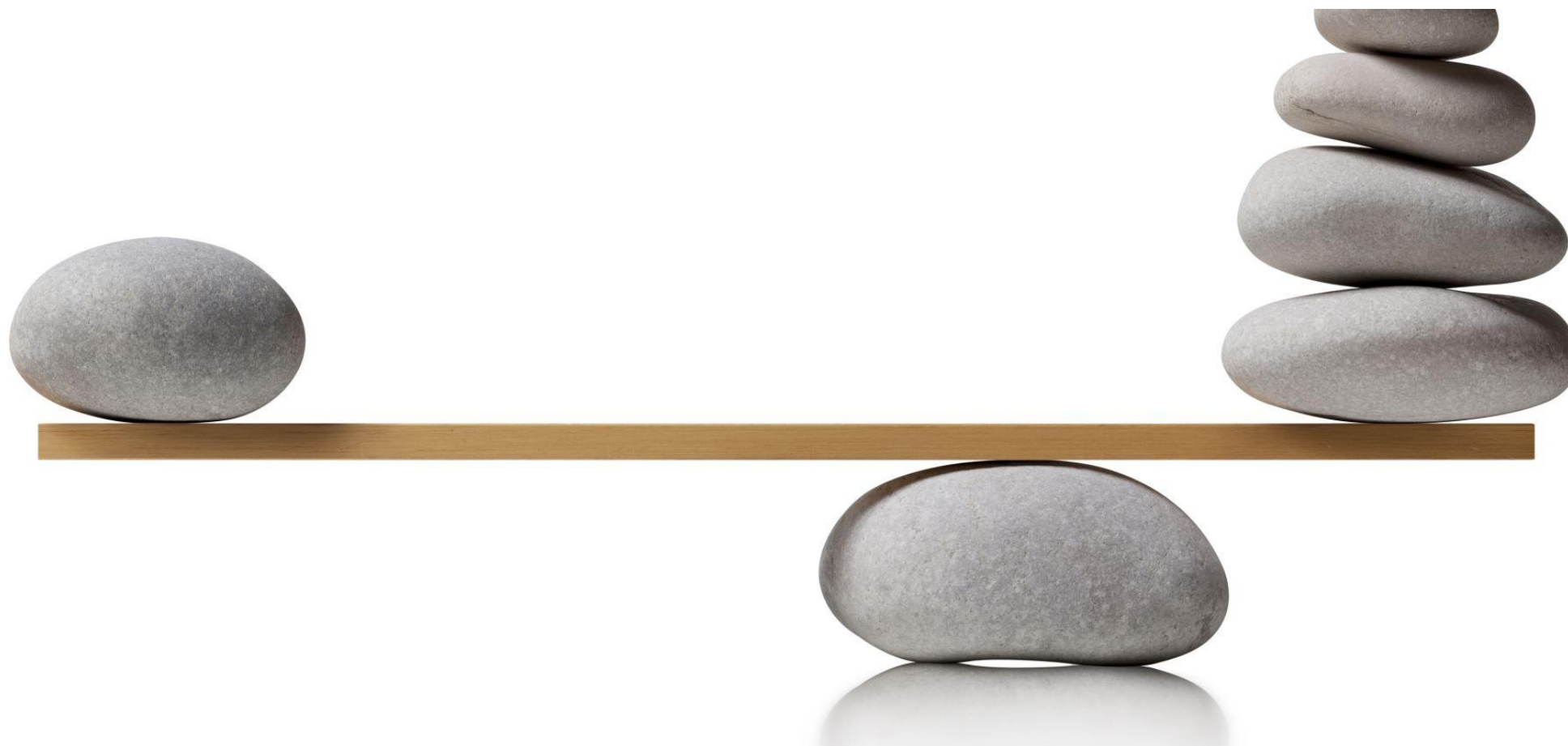
If balanced assessment systems make so much sense, why don't we see more in practice?

David Conley went searching for examples of balanced assessment systems for his 2018 book, but he found only partial examples.

Why?



Barriers to Balance



So Many Barriers...

Marion et al. (2019)

1. Influence of politics, policy, and political boundaries
2. Influence of commercialization and proliferation of assessments
3. Lack of attention to curriculum and learning in the design of assessment systems
4. Lack of assessment literacy at multiple levels of the system
5. Weak design thinking

Polikoff & Hutt (2024)

1. Technical Challenges
 - a. *Measuring Multiple Complex Domains*
 - b. *Interpreting Information Across Grade Levels for Multiple Dimensions*
 - c. *Weighting Multiple Measures*
 - d. *Scoring Student Work*
 - e. *Technological Challenges and Opportunities*
2. Political and Practical Challenges
 - a. *Poorly Designed Assessment and Curriculum Policies*
 - b. *Shifting Political Barriers*
 - c. *The Challenges of Curriculum-Embeddedness*
 - d. *The Lack of Capacity Across Levels of the System*

REIMAGINING BALANCED ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

A Project of the National Academy of Education

(Funded by Smarter Balanced)

Initiated to provide guidance to state and local educational agencies, as well as schools and teachers, regarding how to:

- Foster and maintain a culture of productive assessment use to improve ambitious and equitable teaching and learning at the classroom level;
- Design policy, professional learning, and other local systems necessary to implement balanced assessment systems; and implement a system to use the data to continually improve the assessment system and student learning
- Implement processes to use aggregate data to continually improve the assessment system itself to better serve all students, especially those most disenfranchised.



Motivation for *Reimagining*

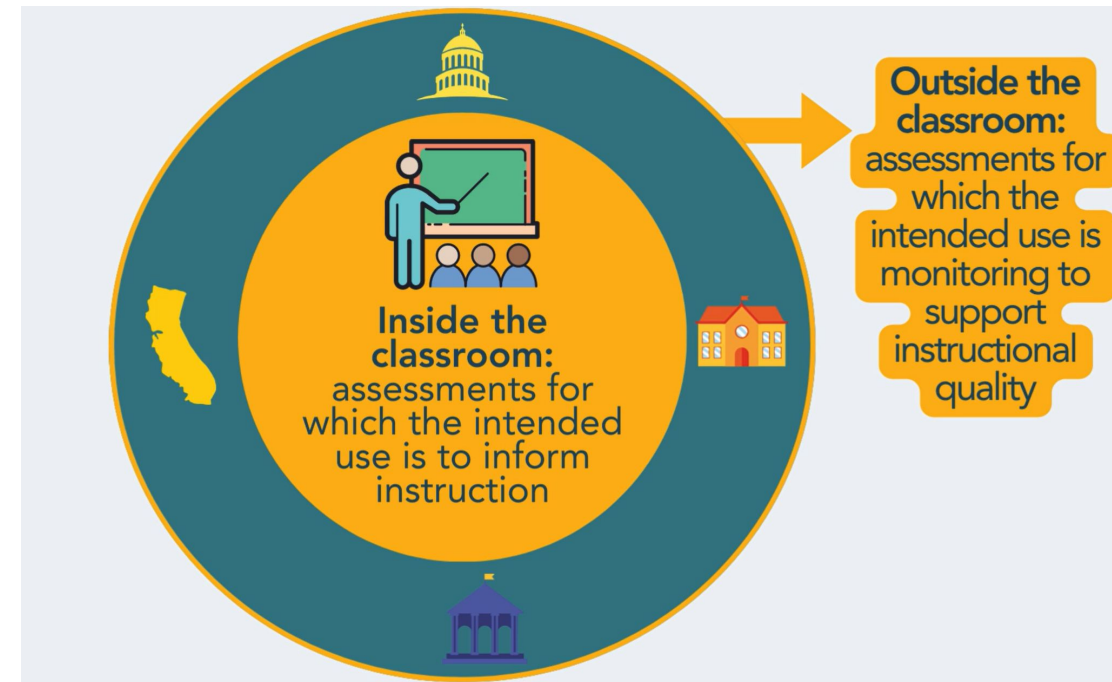
The Steering Committee was concerned about:

- The pernicious effects of test-based accountability policies on balanced assessment systems
- The explosion of commercial interim assessments as a “critical” component of balanced systems
- Privileging state-level assessments, generally at the expense (imbalance) of equitable and ambitious classroom learning and assessment environments.

The Steering Committee’s primary goal, building on *"Knowing What Students Know,"* was to shift the balance toward assessments that support ambitious teaching and learning in just and equitable ways.

An Updated Definition (we know it's long 😞)

Balanced assessment systems and practices are intentionally designed to provide **feedback to students and information for teachers to support ambitious and equitable instructional and learning opportunities...** Assessments outside the classroom, at the district and state levels, provide aggregate data to policymakers and education leaders, allowing for the monitoring of **educational opportunities** and support for high-quality instruction indirectly through the provision of appropriate curricular resources and professional development opportunities (Marion, Pellegrino, and Berman, 2024).



Yes, We Need Large-Scale Assessments

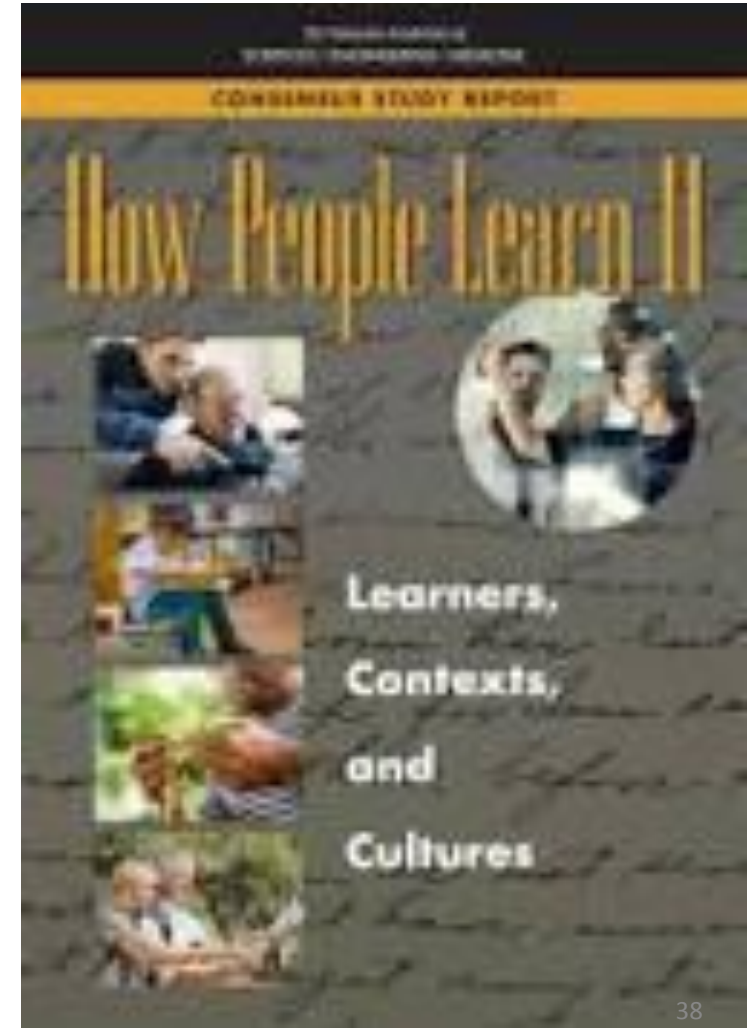
1. Monitoring statewide educational growth and achievement
2. Evaluation and continuous improvement
3. Transparency and public engagement
4. Signaling rich learning expectations

When designing a balanced system, we must ask: How **do the “other” assessments in the system support a rich vision of classroom learning and teaching, or how do they hinder this vision?**

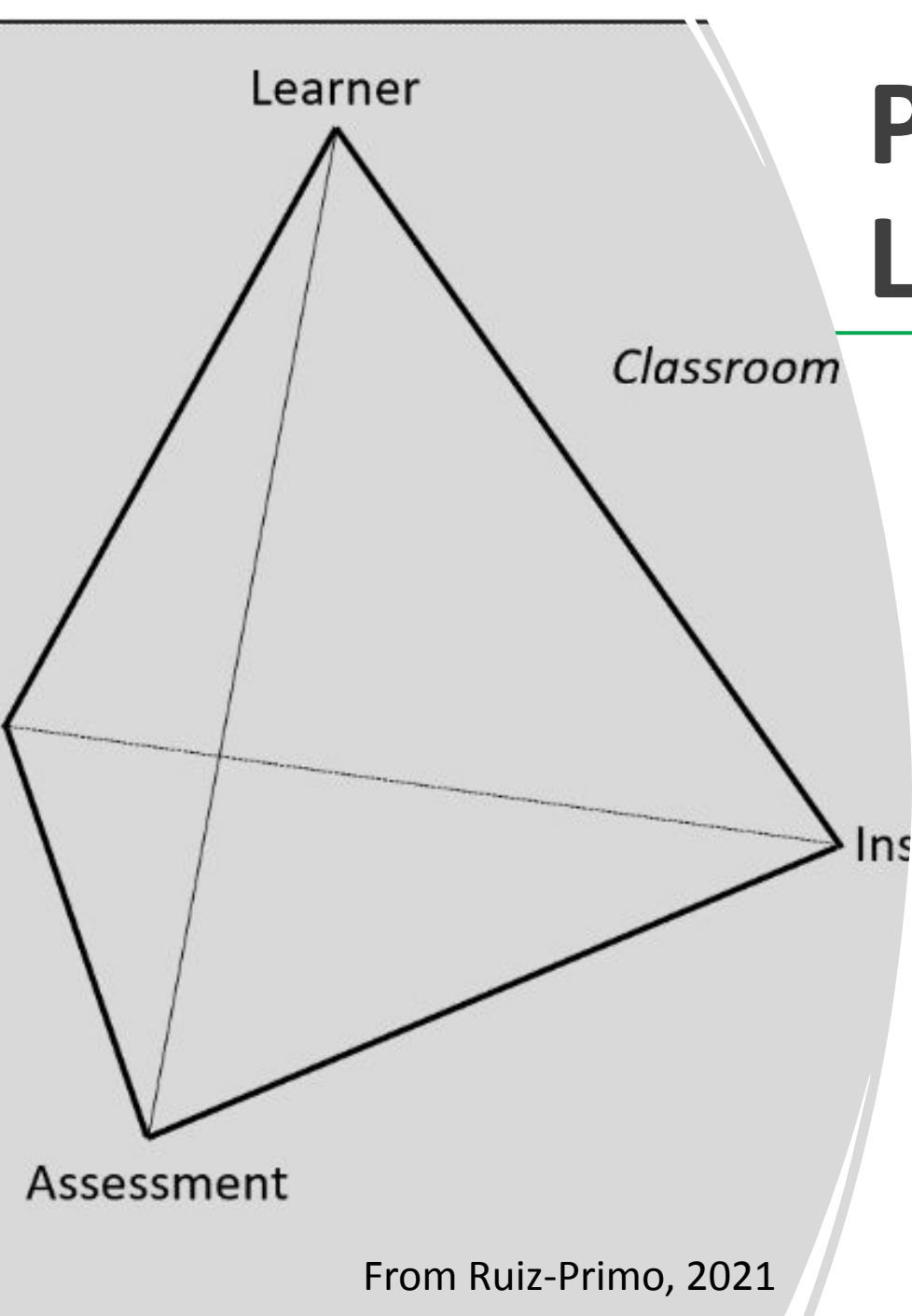


Centering Learning and Equity

- Theories, models, and data on disciplinary knowing and learning have changed substantially and are best represented by a broad **sociocultural perspective** on the general nature of knowing and learning combined with theory and research on **discipline-specific learning progressions**.
- A foundational chapter is called Human Learning and Development: Theoretical Perspectives to Inform Assessment Systems (Goldman & Lee).



Prioritizing Classroom Learning and Teaching



From Ruiz-Primo, 2021

- The entire volume is centered on rich classroom learning and teaching environments, or what Ruiz-Primo and Furtak (2024) call a “classroom activity system.”
- **Coherence starts in the classroom**
- If *coherence* across levels of the system is based on *shared models of learning*, then assessment design should start – at the classroom level – with an understanding of *deep disciplinary learning* and the supports needed to enact *ambitious teaching* practices.

Reimagining: A Comprehensive Approach

- In addition to the chapters already mentioned, we had chapters addressing:
 - The professional learning needs of educators and leaders
 - The respective roles of district and state leaders
 - The policy context and policy considerations influencing the implementation of balanced assessment systems
 - The role of organizational structure and culture in implementing complex educational innovations
- We are very proud of this volume (we could fill a Bingo card with the chapter authors in this room), but...

Was it Useful?

- **Yes!** Reimagining provided an important update to *Knowing What Students Know* and reframed “balance” to focus on classroom learning and teaching.
- **No!** While it provided important conceptual advances, it is not useable for school, district, and state leaders who have limited time.
- **Can we make this easier or at least more straightforward?**
 - That’s what Carla and Caroline will tell us...