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Discussant comments

Prepared for APPAM/MDRC Institutional  
Member Forum: The Future of Applying Behavioral  
Science to Improve Social Policy

December 13, 2016

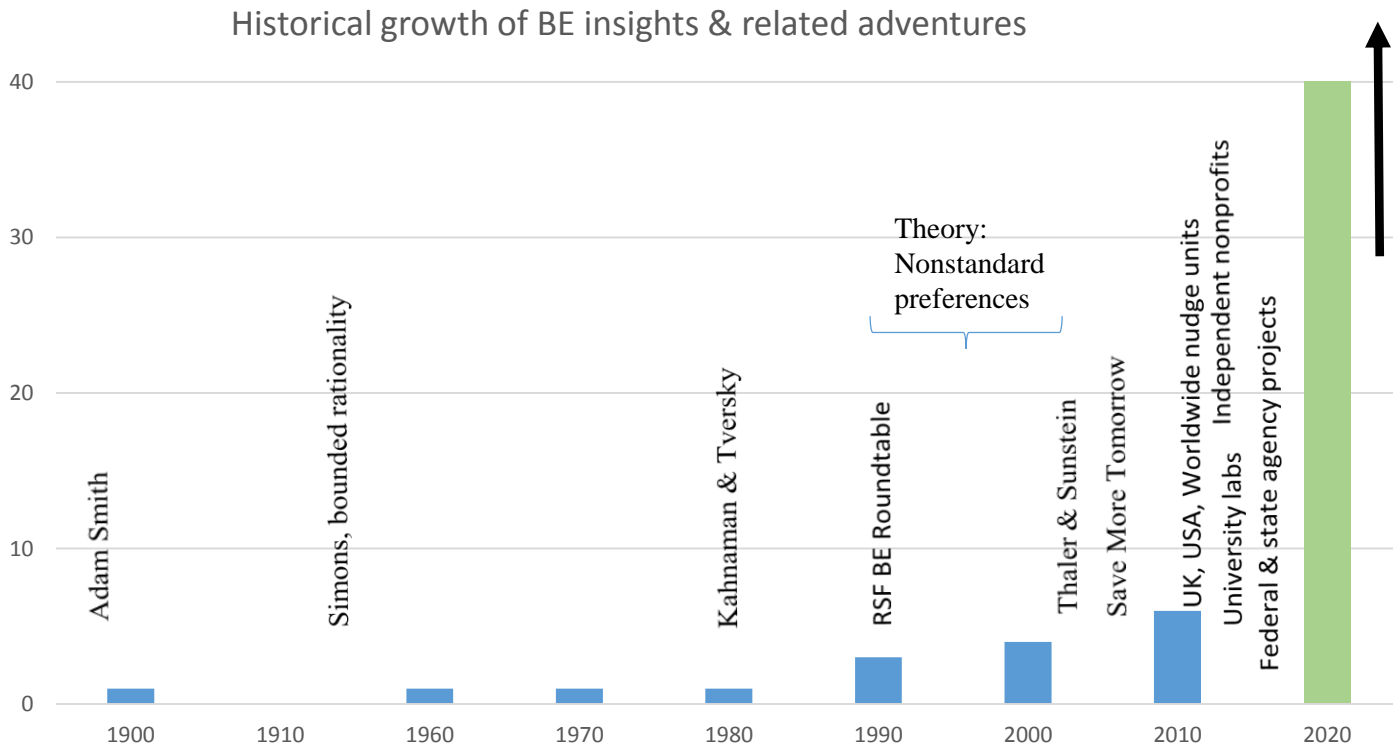
# General reactions

- Growing body of exciting work in the domains of family and children
- Discovering BE solutions (diagnosis: BIAS, ideas42, nudge units);  
Designing BE interventions (BIP lab, Chicago Crime Lab, etc.);  
Enhancing existing programs and interventions via behavioral insights
- Deepening our understanding of (messy) actual family behavior and structuring environments as compared to predicting behavior agnostic to the environment.
  - Re-conceptualize domains like parenting and delivery of services such as child care subsidies
- Generating change in key/one decisions (nudges) and habits.
- Appealing low cost, and rapid fire, real-time learning and design.  
(Complement to collective of necessary larger evaluation and research efforts.)

# Keeping the cart behind the horse

Evidence-building phase; Continue to invest in developing the *science* of behavioral science.

**Gap:** Testing underlying cognitive biases, perhaps in some academic circles? How to bridge knowledge and theory-building across sectors?



# Use BE as method of inquiry: *Convert assumptions into questions*

- Re-training of conventional disciplinary training, and best practices.  
What outcome, when, in what context, and with whom
  - Not just new tools in an old tool box but questioning whether the screw driver was the right tool in the first place, or even if it is, whether we continue to call it a screw driver
- Asking the right question and matching the right solution to the problem.  
Why is a BE intervention not working?
  - Implementation assumption gone awry (e.g. reading a text)
  - Too many other structural or psycho-social barriers to overcome
  - Targeting the incorrect cognitive bias, or not the overwhelming one

# Deeper incorporation of the context of poverty

- Time, money, and mental bandwidth are limited resources.
- Are we asking parents to spend more time on the right things, and less time on other things?

# Not losing sight of higher-order principles

Critiques of libertarian paternalism (Riccardo Rebonato)

“Interventions motivated by and seek to exploit cognitive deficiencies in order to obtain outcomes deemed to be ultimately preferred by the nudged person.”

- Why is it a good idea to interfere with the {DOMAIN of CHOICE} decision of a typical, mentally healthy, and well informed citizen?
- *Who* determines personal and social welfare (who is the social planner)?
- Easier to exploit than eradicate biases

Simple, Non coercive, Cheap, Easy to reverse, Very effective

**beELL™**: nudging children to a better start



Harnessing insights from the behavioral sciences to build positive parenting habits and optimize the impact of existing early childhood interventions.

Lisa Gennetian, NYU



**beELL™**

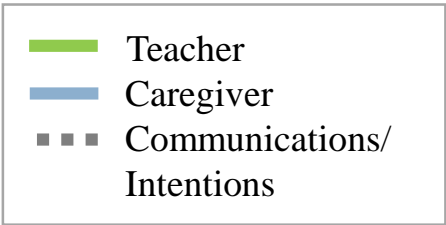
**Website** <http://beELL.org>

**Twitter** @beELLOrg

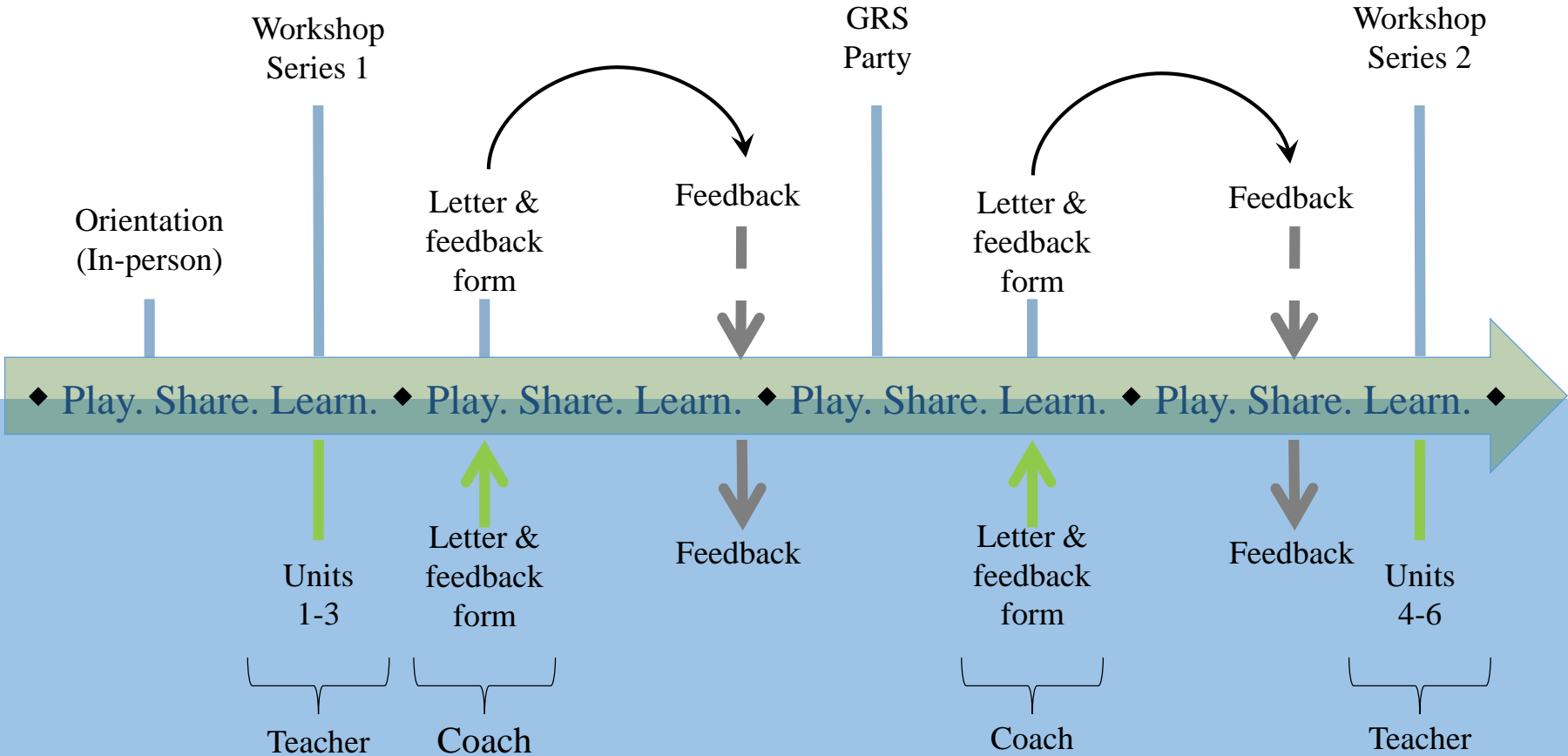
**Email** [beELL.nyu@gmail.com](mailto:beELL.nyu@gmail.com)

**beELL** is a collaboration between researchers at New York University and education and government institutions.

# Mapping GRS In Practice



HOME



CLASSROOM



# beELL-GRS activity chart




## Intervention: Letter + Goal Chart

**GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL THIS WEEK**

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Return by: \_\_\_\_\_

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|
|        |        |         |           |          |        |          |

Use the stickers to show your teacher what GRS activities you did this week:

 LITERACY    MATH    SELF-REGULATION

★ Favorite activity: \_\_\_\_\_

How much time did you spend on GRS activities this week (check one)?

Less than 15 minutes    15-45 minutes    More than 45 minutes

I didn't have time to do GRS activities this week. Please tell us why: \_\_\_\_\_

**GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL THIS WEEK**

USE THIS BOOK!

**GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL**

PLAY. SHARE. LEARN.

GRS

FUN ACTIVITIES FOR CAREGIVERS AND CHILDREN

What we did this week in class:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This week's activities for your child:

| Activity Name                           | Pages |
|---|-------|
| 10 minutes                              | _____ |
| 10 minutes                              | _____ |
| 10 minutes                              | _____ |
| <b>BONUS:</b><br>Your favorite activity | _____ |

★ Reach the goal of 30 minutes or more this week on GRS activities!

From: \_\_\_\_\_

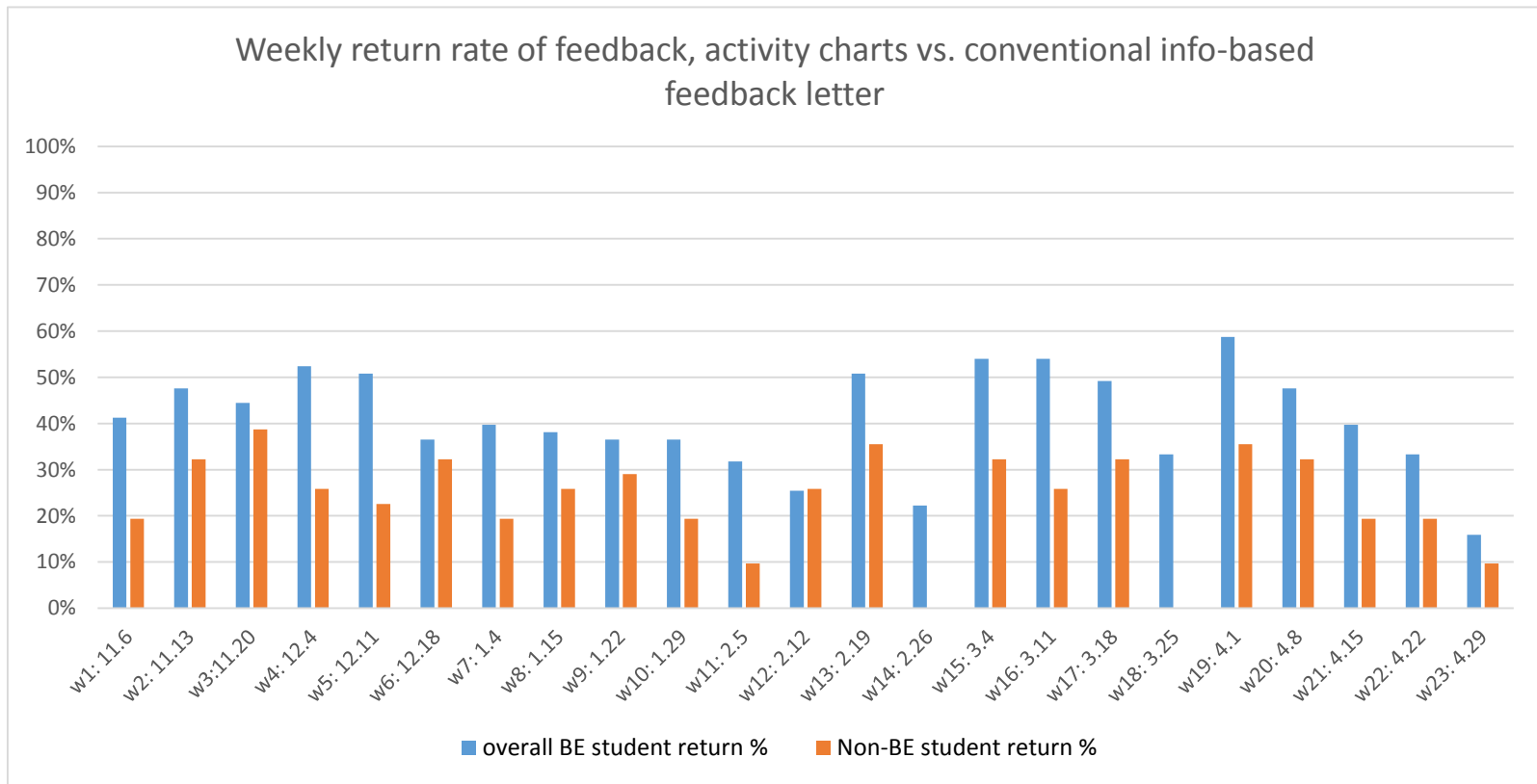
Broken down into three 10 minute chunks to cue 30+ minutes total

Calendar reinforces expectation of daily completion vs. "one and done" attitude fostered by old checkboxes

Icons reduce literacy demands; Stickers invite children's direct participation

# beELL-GRS activity chart improved routine processes

Nearly doubled return rate of weekly parent-teacher feedback



# Timing and desensitization: BE–technology intersection

beELL-NYC: SMS views to online content among control group mothers of infants who had not been previously receiving texts

