

Fulfilling the Promise of Preschool Education for All

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“Paradox” of Early Care and Education Policy

Early experience has broad, persistent effects

- Learning, development, and health
- Educational, social, and economic success

ECE can produce high rates of return

- Lower remedial education, abuse/neglect, crime
- Higher earnings, better health, longer life
- Child care for parents: higher earnings, gender equity

Large scale public programs often fail to reproduce results

- Weaker, less persistent benefits
- Highly variable outcomes
- Lower rates of return, sometimes too low



Long Ago and Far Away: the Perry Preschool Runs the First “4 Minute Mile”

Population

- Highly disadvantaged children with low IQ

Program

- Half-day preschool in public school at ages 3 and 4
- One *highly qualified* teacher per 6 children
- Weekly home visits with one-on-one tutoring
- Strong supervision and continuous improvement

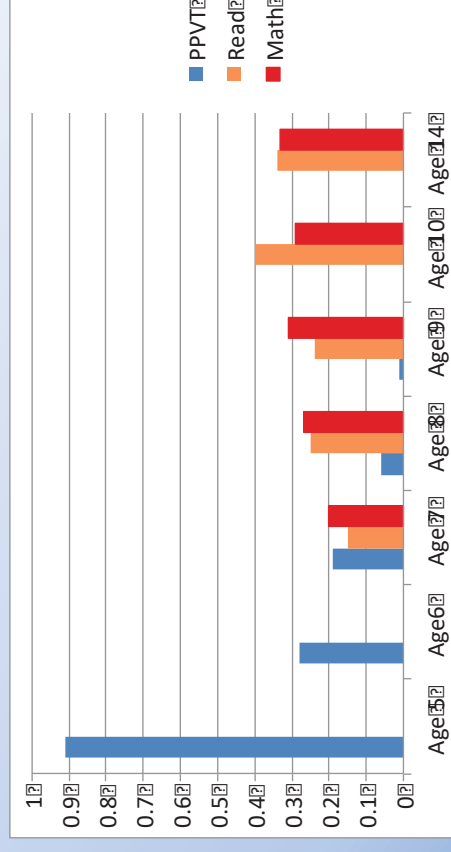
Research

- Randomized trial begun in 1962
- N = 128 with minimal attrition to age 40+

Barnett, W. S. (1996) Lives in the balance: Age 27 benefit-cost analysis of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program.



Perry IQ and Achievement Effects over Time



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Perry Preschool Long-term Outcomes

- Decreased special education
- Increased achievement persists
- Increased graduation rates
- Decreased delinquency and crime
- Increased employment and earnings
- Total value of benefits over a lifetime many times larger than cost

Half Century Later: Pre-K Impacts at Scale are...

- Small on average
- Highly variable
- Sometimes near zero or negative in follow-up
- Most discouraging examples:
 - Head Start and EHS no lasting impacts in RCT
 - TN state pre-K RCT: positive effects reverse to negative by grade 2
 - Quebec universal child care negative effects

RETURNS ON INVESTMENT IN ECE: USA

Program	Population	Cost per Child \$	Earnings Benefit	Full Benefits	Earnings B/C	Total B/C
ABC 0-5	VERY LOW SES	\$83,530	\$147,359	\$208,283	1.76	2.49
PERRY 3-5	VERY LOW SES	\$20,854	\$91,646	\$179,446	4.39	8.60
CPC 3-5	LOW SES	\$9,719	\$32,933	\$105,294	3.39	10.83
HEAD START 4-5 (Kay/Duncan)	LOW SES	\$7,982	\$20,022	\$22,392	2.51	2.81
HEAD START 3-5 (NHIS)	LOW SES	\$	None	?	1.58	?
TENN VPK 4-5		\$	Negative	?	Negative	?
OK/GA (Cascio) 4-5	UNIVERSAL	\$4,086	\$24,094	Greater	5.90	Higher
TULSA (Bartik) 4-5	UNIVERSAL	\$9,183	\$14,415	\$17,378	1.57	1.89

What explains this paradox?

Small scale results not *exactly* reproducible

- Best case examples not fully generalizable--outliers
- Populations and contexts differ at scale—life is better
- Outcomes highly dependent on population & context

Governments **underinvest in quality, a political problem**

- Costs upfront and obvious; benefits long-term, uncertain, difficult to measure, and dispersed
- Design failure—do not replicate effective models, all were multiple years, highly intensive, expensive
- Implementation failure—not a problem of scale, but shifting priorities, inadequate accountability & capacity
- Focus on what is easy, the wrong goals

LESSONS FROM RESEARCH REVIEW FOR PERSISTENT GAINS AND LARGE BENEFITS

- Aim high with intentional teaching
- Focus on unconstrained domains
 - Language
 - Math (broad, not just simple operations)
 - Self-control, character, SED, creativity?
- Individualize 1-on-1 & small groups
- Strong implementation with accountability
- Deep and broad gains from a “big” dose (intensity, duration)
- Universal (targeted is leaky & lower quality)

Example: Court Ordered Pre-K in NJ, USA

- Supreme Court asserts a child’s right to ECE as necessary to be a fully participating citizen
- Design (and cost) based on children’s needs
- 31 cities with high poverty
- 44,000 children ages 3 and 4
- Part of systemic education reform

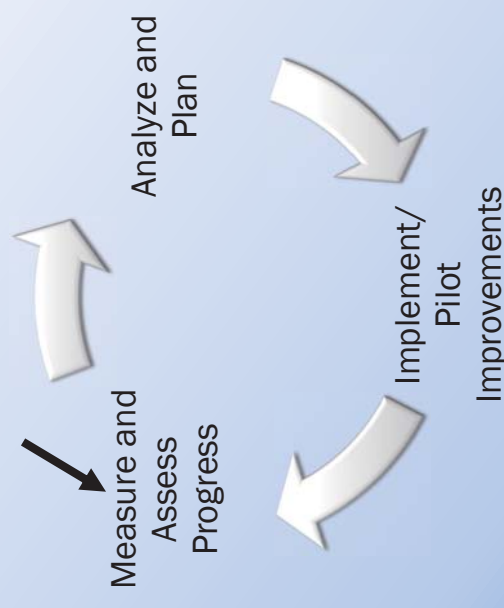
NJ Preschool Model

- Universal
- High expectations
- Adequate funding
- Strong teachers
- Small classes
- Ages 3 & 4 (2 years)
- Full day
- Public-private provider partnership
- Continuous improvement system (GPS)

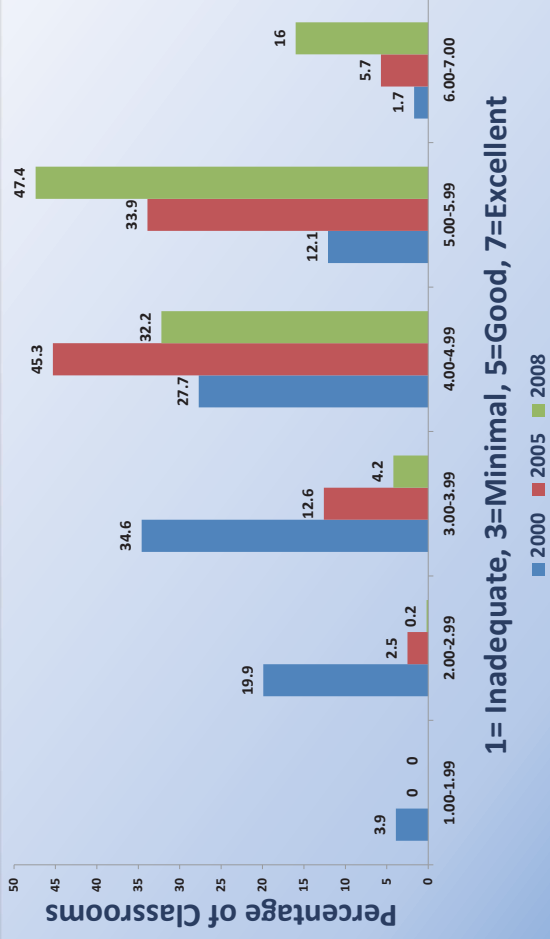


Continuous Improvement Cycle

Develop Early Learning and Program Standards



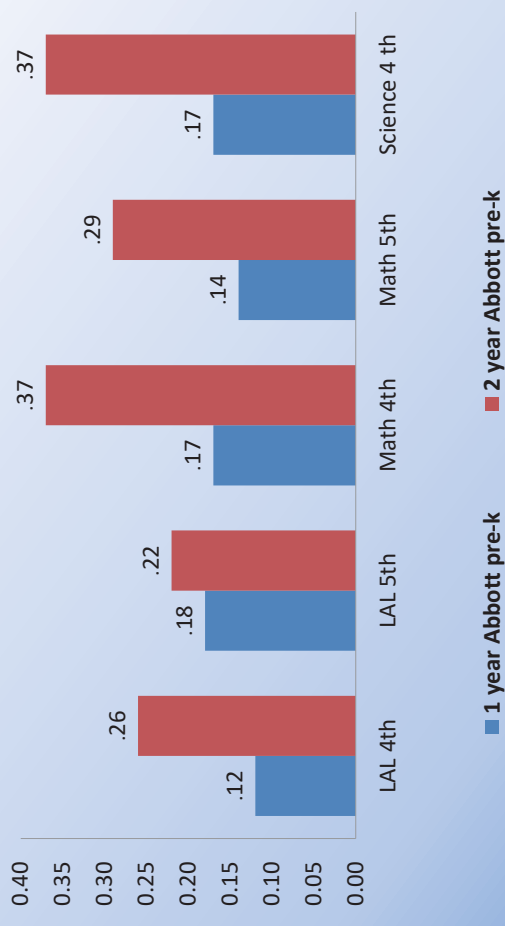
Transformation of Quality in NJ UPK (ECERS-R)



NJ Effects on Retention & Special Education at Grade 5



NJ UPK Effects on Achievement Grades 4 and 5



IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

- Begin with a vision of the good life for children and families
- Determine the investment needed to achieve goals based on proven examples
- Enable access for all children
- Build capacity for strong implementation
- Create a “GPS” at every level—continuous improvement not monitoring

LESSONS FOR PROGRAM DESIGN

- Start with the goals and design policies and programs to achieve them, cost follows design
- Structural features (resources) are necessary, but not sufficient
- Design includes infrastructure to support implementation including GPS
- Program features influence quality and outcomes jointly not independently
- Plan systemically: What “works” depends on what else happens before, after, and around preschool

LESSONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

- Focus on deep and broad domains that are foundational
- Intentionally teach with individualization
- Aim for large & meaningful initial gains
- Continuously self-assess practice using data and become part of “research” process
- Coordinate with home and other educators before, after, and around preschool (primary teachers may also need to adapt)

LESSONS FOR RESEARCHERS

- Seek principles for what works, rather than specific programs
- Study program structural features holistically
- Measure more types of outcomes
- Allow time for change
- Embed research in practice as a tool for continuous improvement
- Involve policymakers and practitioners as partners
- Seek “local” knowledge, limited by time and place

Policy makers and citizens have an important choice—will you choose the road to high quality pre-K for all?



“Two roads diverged in a wood,
and I - I took the one less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference.”

Robert Frost