

**NIEER**

**RUTGERS**

Graduate School of Education



# ECEC EVALUATION: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PAST?

AMSTERDAM

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# To Maximize Policy of Research and Evaluation

- Strategy: a high level plan to accomplish a specific goal usually over a long period of time
- Descriptive studies--where are we, where are we going?
  - How good are services? How are children and families doing?
- Causal studies--what are the results, why did they happen?
  - You need a clear counterfactual
- Integrate research, practice and policy
  - Objectivity comes from design not distance
- Plan communications from the beginning & invest in them
- Be honest--learn as much from failure as success, GPS
  - Even Start, Early/Head Start, Abbott Pre-K (1<sup>st</sup> 5)



# Why is the Perry Preschool Study So Influential?

- 1) **Audacity**
- 2) **Simplicity**
- 3) **Intensity**
- 4) **Validity**
- 5) **Materiality**



# Audacity

- A public school administrator conducting a *true experiment*
- Creating a half-day preschool in the public school beginning at age 3 in 1962
- Believing that student progress could be dramatically changed for very low income African American children
- “Someone had to run the first 4 minute mile”



# Simplicity

- An experiment with two groups
- Focused on *educating* the child
- At each follow-up all results presented in a short monograph
- Extensive use of graphics to present results
- \$7 to 1 (age 27)



# Intensity

- Program
  - One highly qualified teacher per 6 children
  - Learning community focused on teaching
- Research
  - Extensive data on program, children and families
  - Broad and deep measurement of outcomes in multiple domains with frequent follow-up
  - Minimal attrition



# Validity

Strong basis for “truth” claims: RCT with minor exceptions—no field study is perfect--and information on *what and how*

- Researchers and program developers were part of the same team and key researchers were experts in practice
- Many statistical controls, measures of family background
- Valid and reliable measures of cognition, achievement, school behavior, etc.



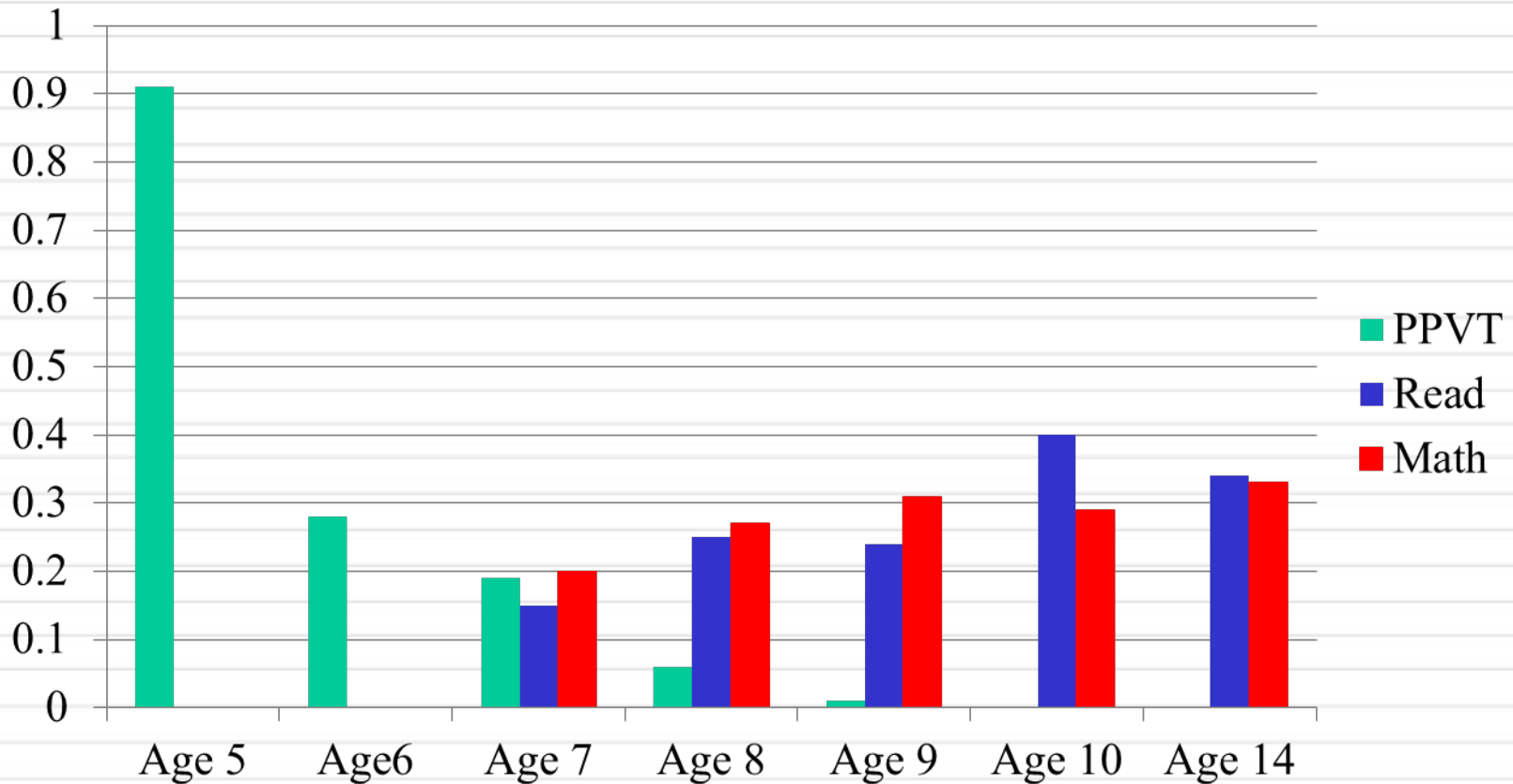
# Materiality--measures that matter

- Achievement and Behavior in School
- Special Education, Retention, and Dropout
- Delinquency and Crime
- Employment and Earnings
- Benefit-Cost Analysis--what is the economic value?





## Perry Preschool Cognitive Effects Do Not Fade Out Over Time





# Nurse Family Partnership

- Home visitation for disadvantaged mothers and children beginning prenatally
- Conducted by David Olds, program developer
- Series of randomized trials (true experiments)
- Moved on to more diverse populations
- Different geographic & socio-economic contexts
- Compared para-professionals to professionals
- Developed legislative agenda to fund programs



# **NJ's Abbott Pre-K (31 high poverty cities): Rapid and timely research to inform policy**

- Descriptive research to:
  - Persuade key stakeholders in ECEC and education
  - Persuade State Supreme Court
  - Persuade media and general public
- Initial Studies
  - Most existing ECEC is very low quality
  - Most of the children began school far behind
- After Implementation Begins Measure Progress
  - To chart a course for reaching goals
  - To generate continued support



# Lessons for Program Evaluation

- Must begin with a clear goal or goals and a plan (which will change)
- Simple studies can capture the public imagination and understanding
- Have developers and decision makers (policy and practice) and researchers work together from the very beginning
- Distance between researchers and policy/practice leads to error
  - Evaluations designed by policy makers and programs alone tend to be weak
  - Evaluations designed by researchers alone tend to mismeasure & misinterpret
- Long-term consequences matter to people more than short-term
- Measure implementation as well as outcomes—to explain
- Communications are as important as the research



# Hope

Most important, this study and others like it offer us hope, hope that we can make a difference in the lives of children, especially those living in poverty, and hope that focused government action can be a part of the solution. Hope is a fragile thing, easily undermined by strong doses of unfortunate, seemingly intractable realities. But it is only with hope that we can make a lasting contribution to our society.

Larry Schweinhart