An Overview of the Evaluation of the Georgia Pre–K Program

Gary T. Henry
MacRae Professor of Public Policy
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Evaluation assists sensemaking about policies and programs, through the conduct of systematic inquiry to describe and explain operations, effects, justifications, and social implications of policies and programs.

Four Purposes of Evaluation

Assessment of Merit and Worth
- What are the program’s net effects?
- Which outcomes and processes matter most and to whom?

Program Improvement
- Which variations in program implementation or fidelity explain variations in children, family, and community outcomes?
- Descriptive studies of implementation and monitoring outcomes, including studies of “best practices”

Accountability and Oversight
- Is the program implemented as required?
- Are the outcomes as expected?

Knowledge Development
- Questions include net effects and studies of factors influencing outcomes as well as methodological studies
- Most common for evaluation conducted in academic settings

(Mark, Henry and Julnes, 2000)
Desired Effects of Evaluation

Assessment of Merit and Worth
- Justify program continuation, expansion or need for alternative program
- Causal attribution main objective: unbiased estimate of effects

Program Improvement
- Usually correlational analysis to systematically explain program variation and highlight factors for change
- Current UPCOS study

Accountability and Oversight
- Usually descriptive with comparative or externally established standards

Knowledge Development
- Important for contributing to child well-being more broadly
Georgia Pre-K Program

Year | Enrolment
--- | ---
FY94 | 8,712
FY95 | 15,588
FY96 | 43,968
FY97 | 56,962
FY98 | 59,723
FY99 | 60,471
FY00 | 60,985
FY01 | 61,795
FY02 | 63,613
FY03 | 65,364
### TABLE 1.
**NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN GECS PER TESTING PERIOD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2001 Preschool</th>
<th>Spring 2002 Preschool</th>
<th>Fall 2002 Kindergarten</th>
<th>Spring 2003 Kindergarten</th>
<th>Fall 2003 1st Grade</th>
<th>Spring 2004 1st Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>795*</td>
<td>793**</td>
<td>786**</td>
<td>785**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tested</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA Pre-K</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-preschool</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In the fall of 2002 (kindergarten), 570 children were eligible to continue the study and 225 children with no formal preschool experience were added to the study.

**The decreases in the number of eligible students in the spring of 2003, fall of 2003 and spring of 2004 were due to parental or school withdrawal from the study.
Accountability and Oversight: Monitoring Study

Figure 1 – Direct Assessments Relative to the National Norm for Georgia’s Preschool Students
Figure 2. Outcomes of Children enrolled in Georgia Pre-K

- PPVT
- WJ-LW
- OWLS
- WJ-AP
In this study, no differences were found in children’s outcomes when taught by teachers with bachelor’s degrees when compared with teachers holding associate’s degrees or technical diplomas. Children who had Pre-K teachers with a middle of the road teaching style are more frequently withdrawn, had a less positive attitude toward school and learning, and performed less well in math than children whose teachers applied a child-centered style. The social behaviors of children who had adult-directed teachers in Pre-K were rated lower than those of children in child-centered classes. No other differences were significant.

In 42 out of 45 comparison measures, children taught using the High Reach curriculum performed less well than children taught using other curricula, but only in 13 comparisons were the differences significant. On average, children who were taught using the High/Scope curriculum performed significantly better at the end of kindergarten than children taught using High Reach in nine comparisons (expressive language, letter word recognition, elision, applied problems, composite math, academic skills ratings, positive attitude toward learning, withdrawn behavior, and behavior ratings).
### Assessment of Merit and Worth: Alternative Treatment – Propensity Score Matched Design

**Table 5**
Direct Assessment scores at Fall and Spring of Pre-School Year and at Entry to Kindergarten

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Head Start N=106</th>
<th>Pre-K N=201</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Bootstrap Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PPVT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry to preschool</td>
<td>84.01</td>
<td>88.42</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of preschool</td>
<td>85.87</td>
<td>92.93</td>
<td>7.06**</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry to kindergarten</td>
<td>90.18</td>
<td>93.54</td>
<td>3.36**</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WJ - LW</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry to preschool</td>
<td>97.47</td>
<td>97.68</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of preschool</td>
<td>97.85</td>
<td>101.90</td>
<td>4.05*</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry to kindergarten</td>
<td>100.02</td>
<td>104.27</td>
<td>4.25**</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WJ - AP</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry to preschool</td>
<td>89.49</td>
<td>92.44</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of preschool</td>
<td>91.26</td>
<td>94.92</td>
<td>3.66**</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry to kindergarten</td>
<td>93.33</td>
<td>97.56</td>
<td>4.23**</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OWLS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry to preschool</td>
<td>83.68</td>
<td>88.68</td>
<td>5.45**</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of preschool</td>
<td>84.93</td>
<td>91.61</td>
<td>6.69**</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .05, * p < .10.** Tests of significance are indicated next to the differences.
## Knowledge Development: Peer Effects

### Table 6
**Kindergarten Outcome Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PPVT</th>
<th>Letter/ Word (WJ_LW)</th>
<th>Cognitive Skills (WJ-AP)</th>
<th>Story and Print Fall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class ability score</td>
<td>4.90**</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>-2.27</td>
<td>5.64**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.84**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.98**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Considerations for LA preschool future evaluations

1. **Design and Approach**
   - Stable program or “Reform” model? Stable operations?
   - Longitudinal
   - Defining purpose: don’t overpromise
   - “Counterfactual” problem: strength of causal attribution
     (unbiased estimates of effects); “control or alternative treatment

2. **Measurement and Methodological**
   - Implementation variation and implementation fidelity measures
   - Outcomes: consistency and age appropriate

3. **Logistical and Practical**
   - Intellectual property rights: Publication and dissemination
   - Nature of relationship between evaluator and sponsor
     - Need for flexibility as project evolves