



Center on the Developing Child  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

# Building a Platform for Research & Development that Produces Breakthrough Impacts

## **JACK P. SHONKOFF, M.D.**

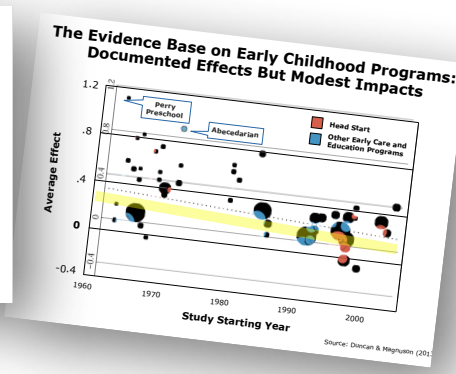
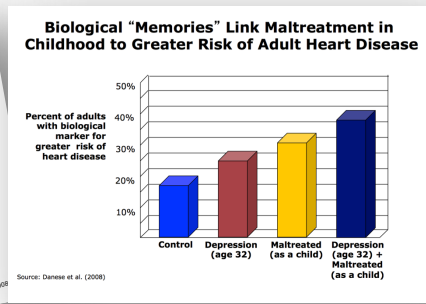
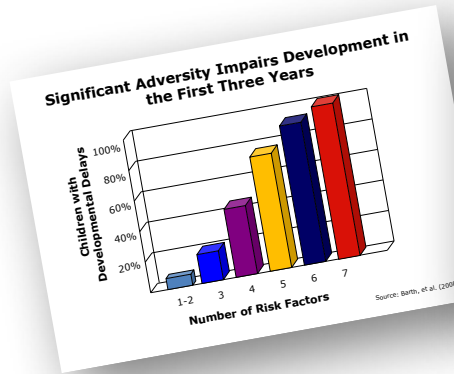
Julius B. Richmond FAMRI Professor of Child Health and Development  
Professor of Pediatrics and Director, Center on the Developing Child  
Harvard University

Closing Presentation

Pre-Conference Forum hosted by Telethon Kids Institute and Goodstart  
Perth, Australia | March 30, 2017



# The Challenges We Are Facing Together

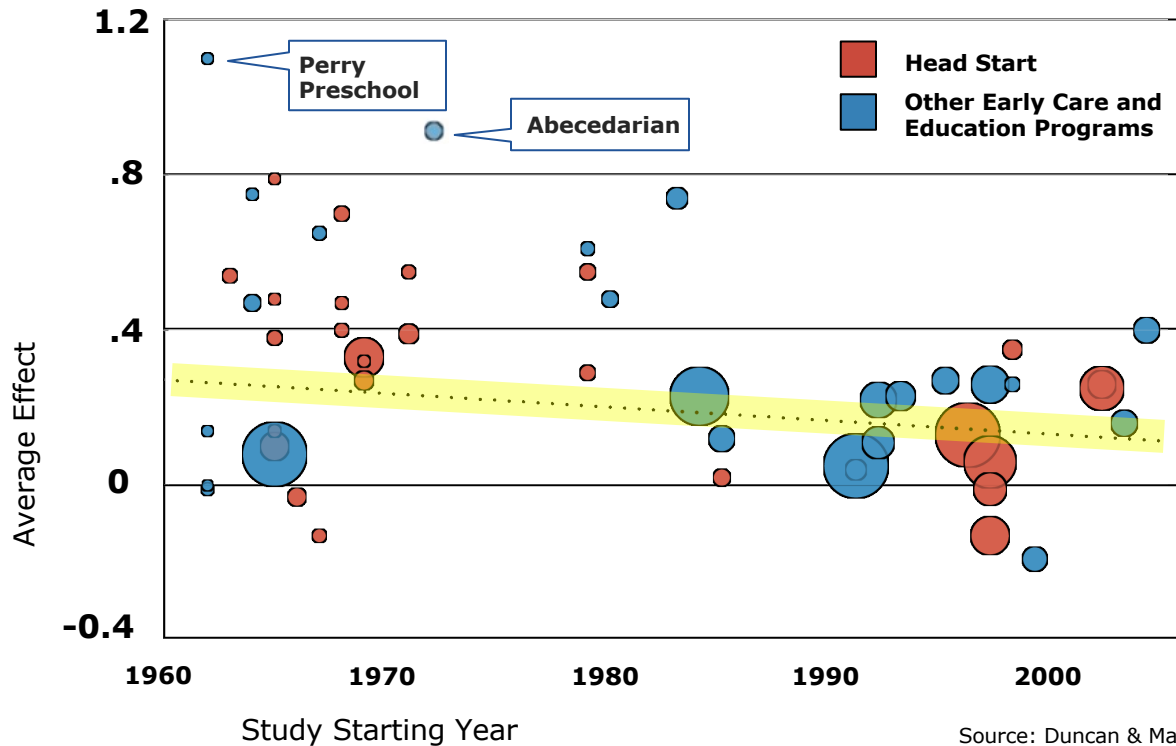


Preventable disparities in early learning, school achievement, social mobility, and lifelong health are large and (in some cases) growing.

Best practices make a difference, but it's not big enough and hasn't increased substantially in 50 years.

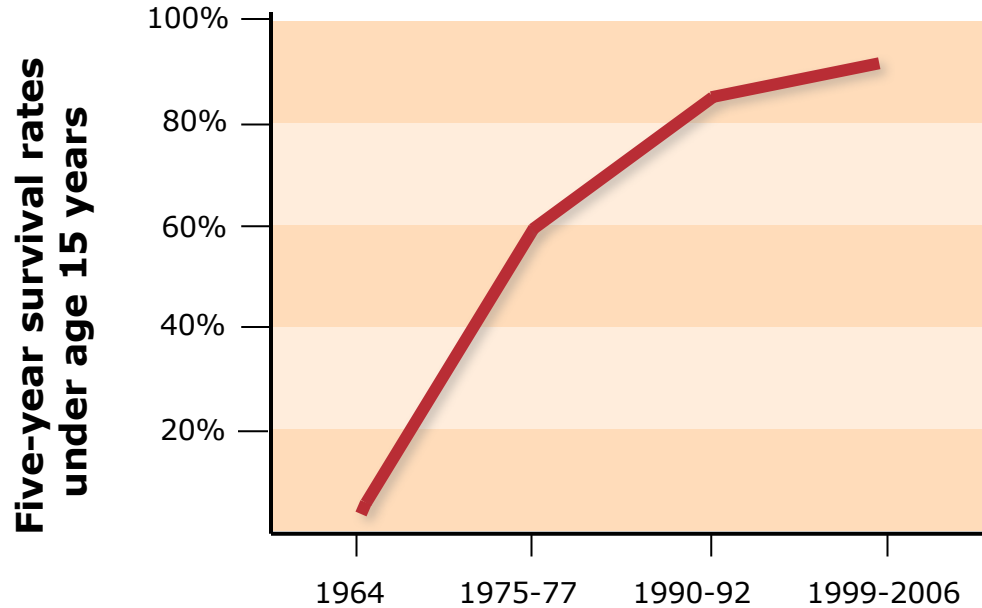
Creative change agents are innovating in different places, without a clear pathway to broader impact at scale.

# The Evidence Base on Early Childhood Programs: Proof of Concept But Modest Impacts



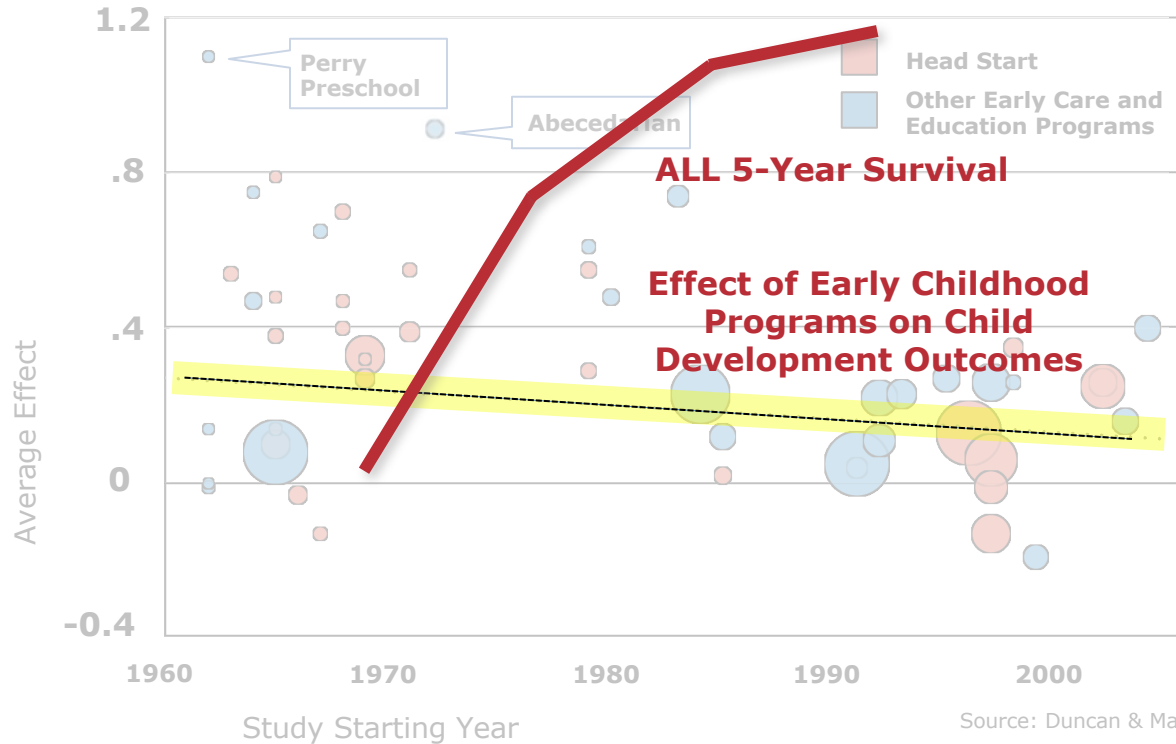
Source: Duncan & Magnuson (2013)

# The Vision: Learning from 50 Years of Progress in Treating Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia



Source: Hunger, Lu, Devidas (2012)

# What Can We Learn from These Contrasting Stories?



# The Time Has Come to Really Find Out What Works – and How, for Whom, and in What Contexts

We rarely know precisely what an “evidence-based” intervention actually does and why or how it changes developmental trajectories.

We know even less about for whom it produces a large effect and for whom it has very little or no impact.

It’s time to shift from a 20<sup>th</sup> century agenda focused on proof of concept and returns on investment to a 21<sup>st</sup> century quest for larger impacts at scale.

# Innovation is About Co-Creation and Risk-Taking

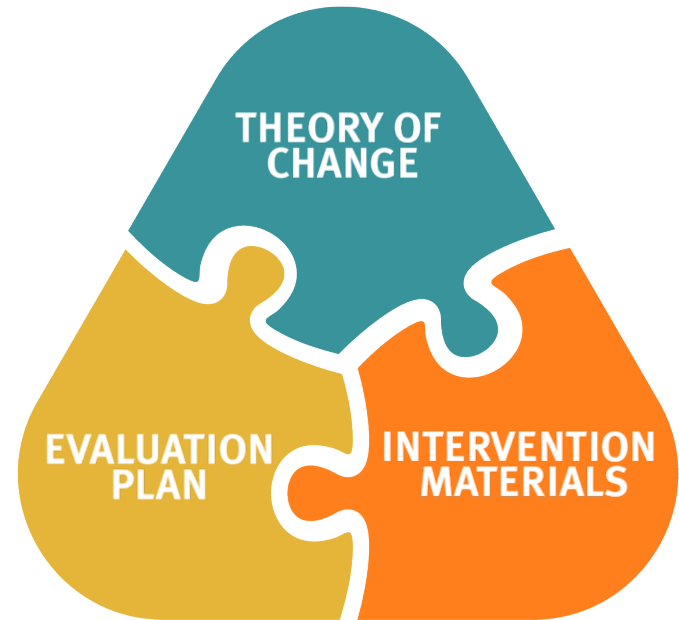


# Successful Innovation Requires Greater Precision in Thinking and Measurement

**Theory of Change:** Can generate testable hypotheses about how changes in targeted domains will lead to specific outcomes

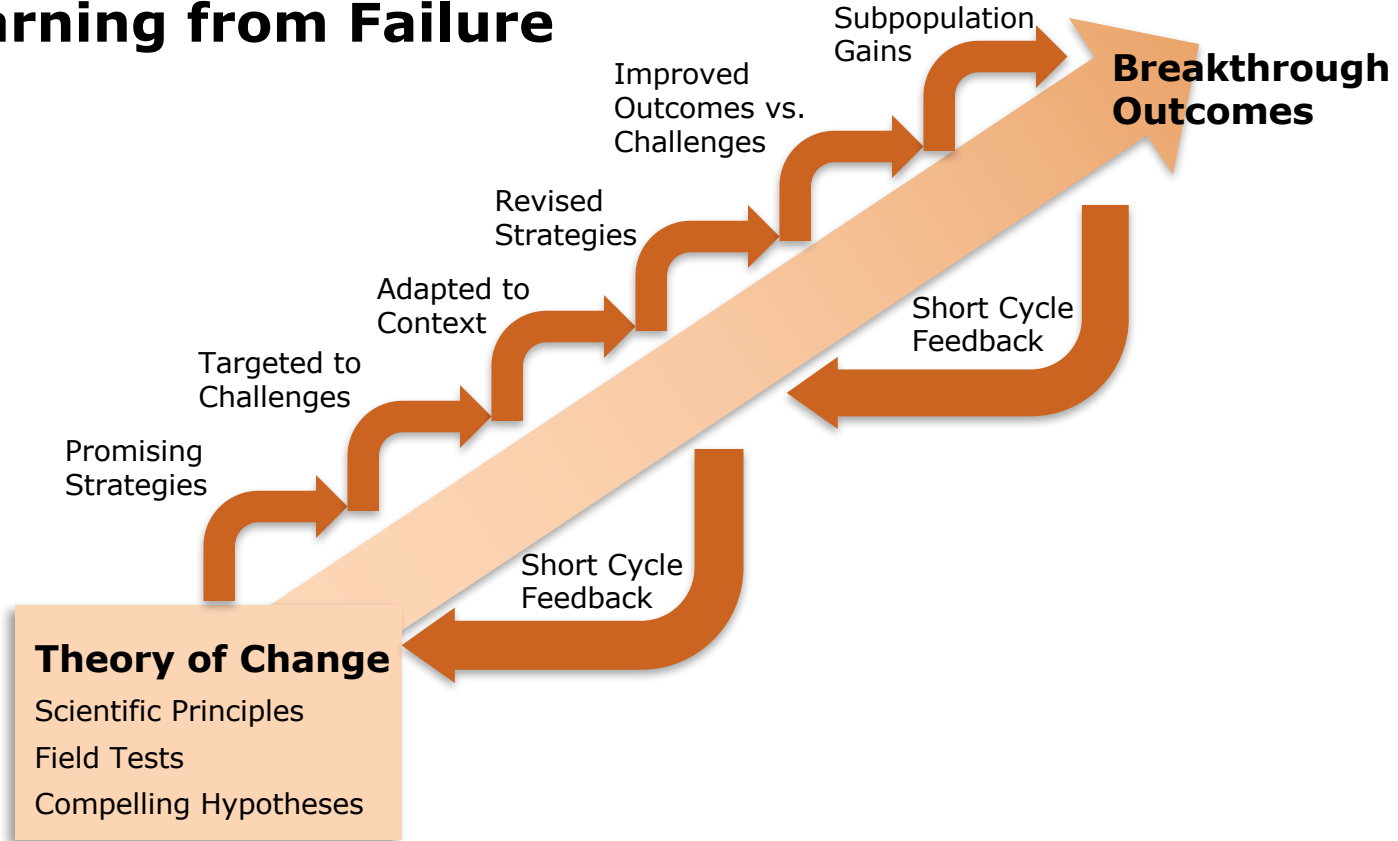
**Intervention Plan and Materials:** Well-defined, clear, feasible, and aimed at specific target domains

**Evaluation Plan:** Rigorous measurement of target domains, underlying capacities, and pre-determined outcomes, designed to be shared with others using common measures

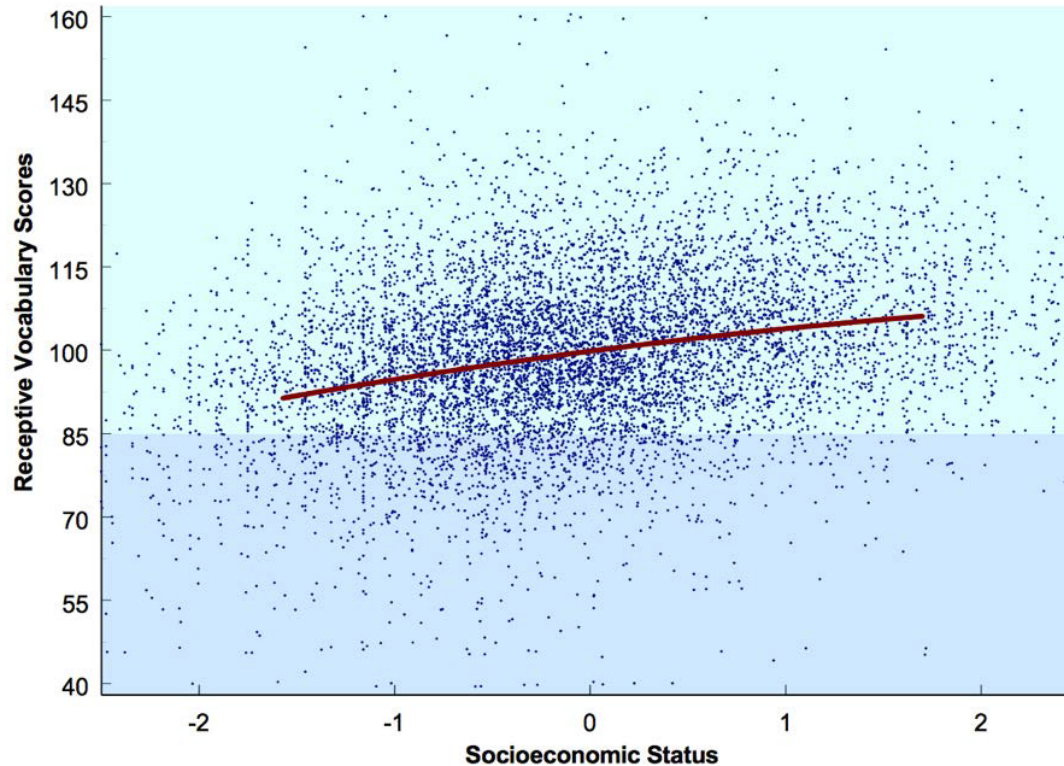




# The Road to Breakthroughs is Through Rapid Cycle Iteration and Learning from Failure

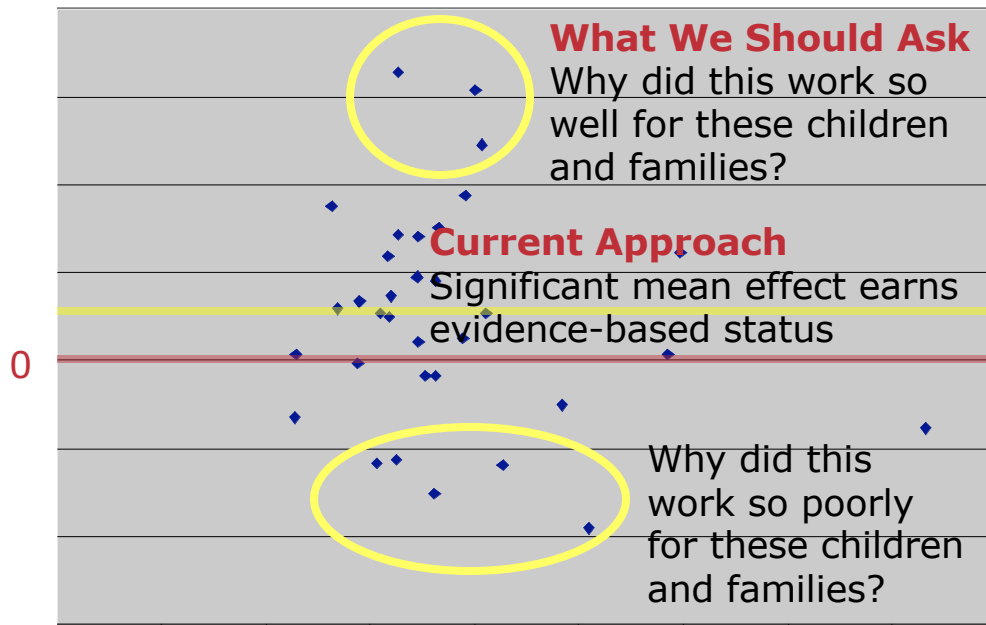


# Understanding Individual Differences is the Key to More Effective Policies and Programs

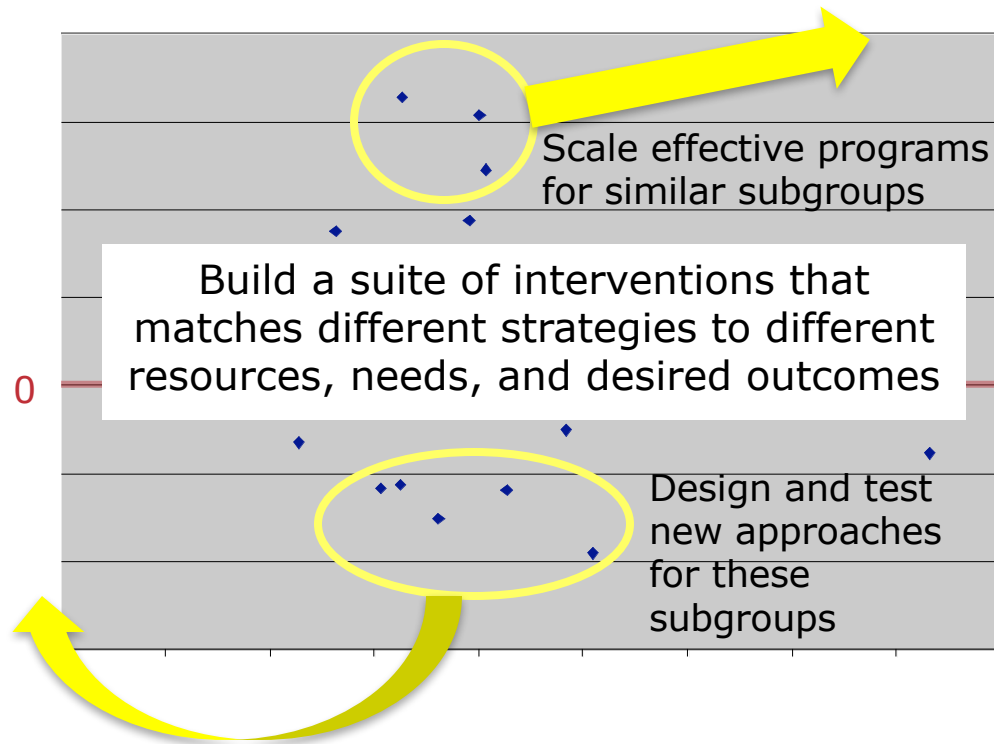


Source: NLSCY, Cycle 4 (2000-01)

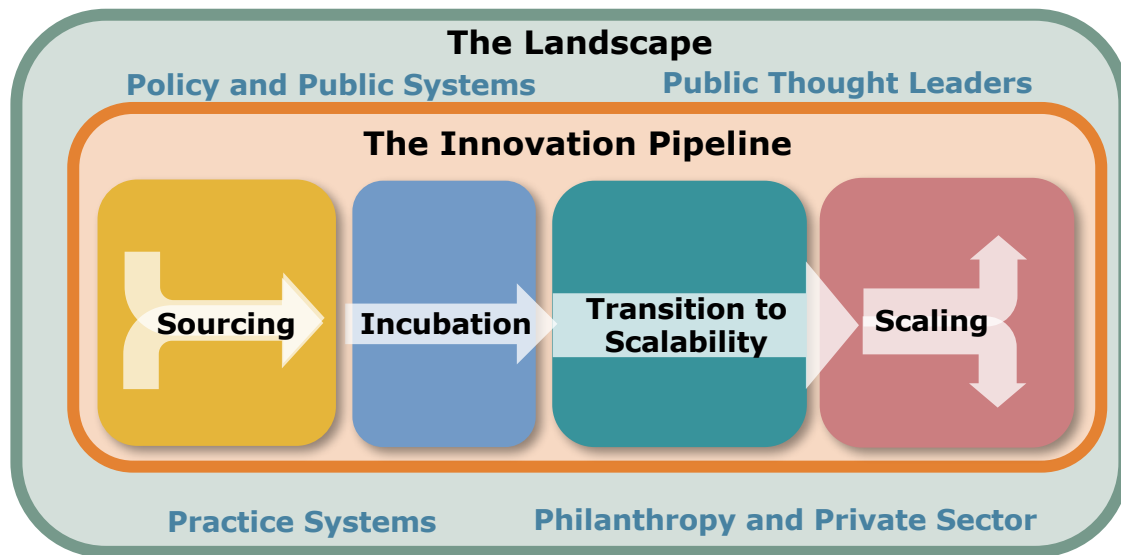
# Achieving Greater Impact at Scale Requires Rethinking the Criteria for Defining Evidence-Based Programs



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# An Innovation Ecosystem for Early Childhood Development Must Include the Broader Landscape



# Lessons We've Learned Over the Past Five Years

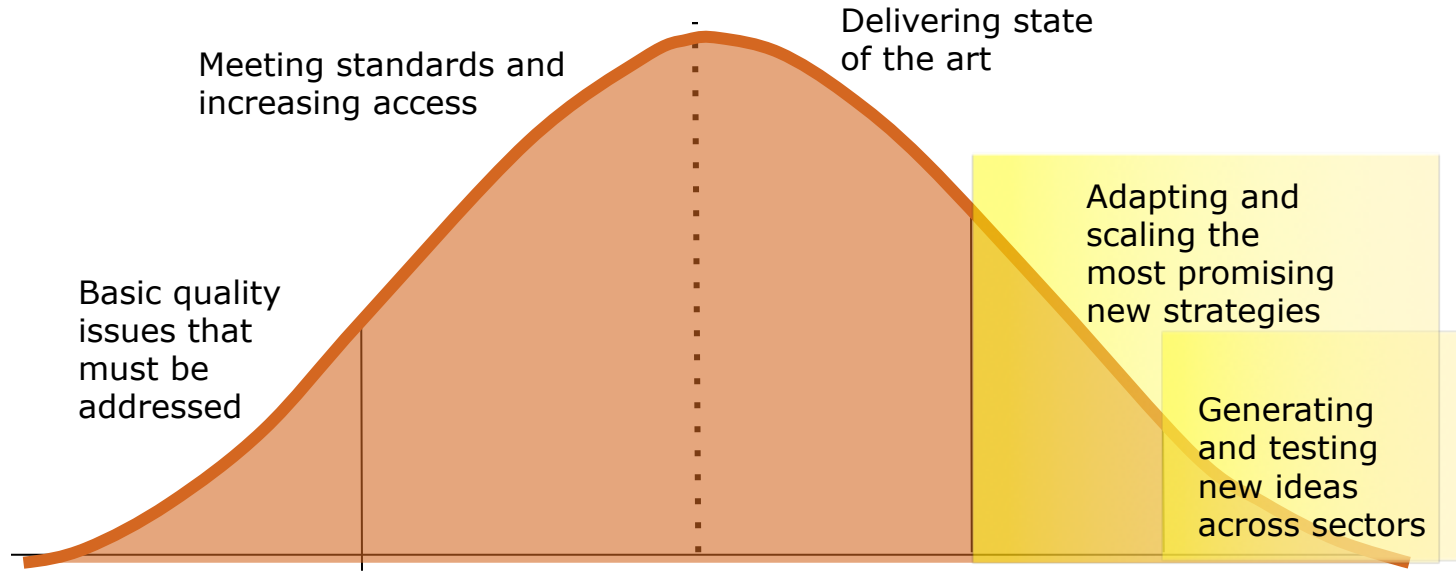
Identifying **specific challenges or unmet needs**.

Balancing **rigorous criteria and flexibility** for design, testing, and evaluation.

Activating **untapped energy across sectors** and emphasizing the importance of **risk taking and learning from failure**.

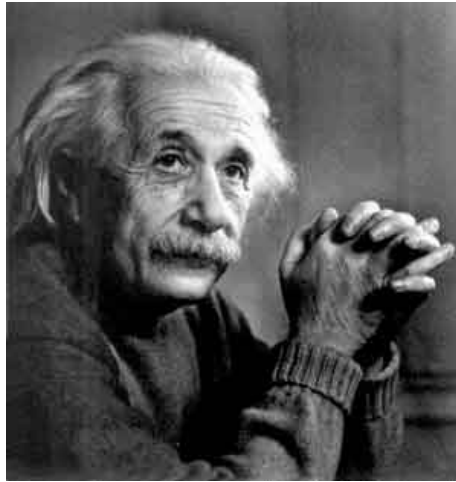
Recognizing the challenge of **building adult capabilities** in early childhood settings.

# A Vibrant and Increasingly Effective Early Childhood Field Requires a Full Spectrum of Engagement



(Adapted from Everett Rogers,  
*Diffusion of Innovations*, 2003)

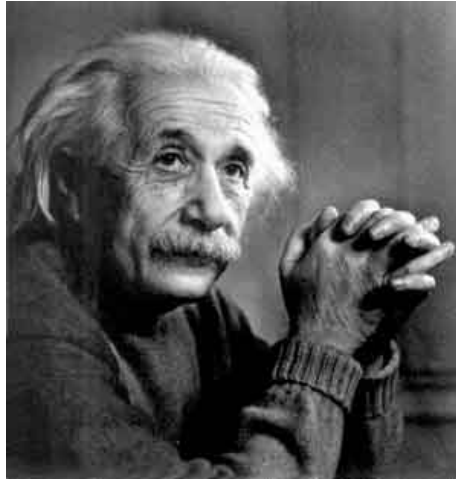
# Albert Einstein Nailed the Problem



“If you always do what you always did,  
you will always get what you always got.”



## Einstein Also Nailed the Solution



“To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science.”



# Center on the Developing Child HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The collage displays three overlapping pages from the Center on the Developing Child website:

- Left Page (Homepage):** Features a large image of a family and children. Text includes "Center on the Developing Child HARVARD UNIVERSITY", "About Science", "Reaching for Breakthroughs with Science", and "Innovation & Application".
- Middle Page (Science):** Titled "Science", it discusses the frontiers of 21st-century science and the importance of responsive relationships. It includes a "Key Concepts" section with a balance scale icon and a "Deep Dives" section with a DNA helix icon.
- Right Page (Innovation & Application):** Titled "Innovation & Application", it describes how the science of development is used to create practice models. It includes a "Key Concepts" section with a hand-drawing icon and an "Innovation in Action" section with a photo of a woman and child.

[www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)



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