

Child Care Policy Research Consortium  
20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration  
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The Little Consortium That Could

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Child care and the research to understand it has had a long and winding history with steep hills, deep valleys and a few long, straight stretches of smooth-running track. Among federal agencies, the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) and its parent the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) have taken up much of the load, laying miles of track, building the engines, and hooking up the cars that haul child care policies, services and outcomes throughout the land. In the past twenty years, the railroad has begun running more efficiently, delivering better goods. The Child Care Policy Research Consortium (CCPRC) has played a crucial role in building cultural energy, social awareness, sound knowledge, and accrued wisdom carefully applied.

Historically, child care in the United States consisted largely of informal "kith and kin" arrangements between parents, relatives, neighbors, friends, or caregivers found in the community. Center-based programs were mostly private nursery schools with part-day enrichment programs for children of the well to do. Federal involvement came about in response to national crises. In the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) established emergency nursery school programs. During World War II, Rosie the Riveter went to work and full-day child care centers were subsidized under the Lanham Act. Most of these centers were closed after the war, when mothers were expected to return home. But Rosie remained on the job, jump-starting an upward trend in working mothers that became evident by end of the next decade.

The 1950s seem to have been relatively quiet, a respite from war with people rebuilding their lives. But changes were seeping up out of the ground. Martin Luther King took a stand. Rosa Parks took a seat. Marilyn Monroe got out in front with a new “bullet” bra. A few others started thinking about burning theirs. Sputnik shattered our complacency. Child development theories began shifting. B.F. Skinner and behaviorism stood their ground but folks like Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, Erik Erikson and Carl Jung showed that a lot is happening underneath the surface, that nature and nurture are intertwined. So popular ideas about the nature of childhood, stages of development, and the needs of children began to change.

The 1960s saw increasing awareness of poverty, and policy discussions turned to ways in which children could be inoculated against its effects. The War on Poverty began. Expanding on the nursery school model established a hundred years earlier, Head Start was formed as a demonstration project to promote child development through high quality part-day programs. Basic full-day child care for working parents was funded under Title IV-A welfare programs as a strategy for economic self-sufficiency. Within ACYF, child care bounced between Head Start and the Children’s Bureau, reflecting the essential tension between policies focusing on child care seen as a child-development program and child care as a support for working mothers. This tension has created major blockages and barriers that still crop up throughout the early childhood world today. The Child Care Policy Research Consortium helps to dissolve such challenges by building networks and finding ways to research issues of mutual interest across sectors and domains.

During the 1970s policy-makers struggled to understand and respond to the needs of children and their parents. Center program quality and home-based care came into focus as it became apparent that the issues facing parents, providers, and policy-makers were highly complex and intertwined. The ACF Head Start Bureau and Children’s Bureau began working together to bring about a more unified, collaborative approach. The visionary Home-Based Head Start Program came into being, greatly expanding the reach of Head Start and laying down new track into

kith and kin care. ACYF took on major research initiatives, including the National Child Care Consumer Survey, the National Child Care Center Study, and the National Day Care Home Study. These ground-breaking projects focused on the policy implications of group size, child-caregiver ratio, and provider training as proxies for child care quality. Together they provided the first comprehensive look at child care practices in the United States, including parent preferences and needs. Today, these early studies are archived within the consortium's internet-based knowledge management system, [\*Child Care & Early Education Research Connections\*](#), where they are being used by a new generation of researchers in a fresh look at enduring questions.

If the train rolled along smoothly and gathered speed in the 1970s, it nearly came to a halt in the following decade as the mountain of welfare reform and simultaneous efforts to reduce federal spending blocked its path. ACYF lost funding for research and a new national infant study was cancelled. However, remaining funds were used to create the first state-level profiles of demand for child care and a few local demonstrations were put in place. This proved to be a silver lining that gave impetus to later efforts, largely developed by the Child Care Policy Research Consortium, on mining administrative data in state child care agencies for research purposes. A variety of local research and demonstration models were also put into place during those years. At the same time, the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) was carrying out large welfare demonstrations in five high-poverty states with the idea of identifying effective models for replication. Child care played only a minor role, but it did become more visible in the culture of welfare politics and broadened collaborative efforts. At the same time, some of us began thinking more seriously about the possibility of one day being able to understand needs, services and outcomes across policy levels and domains. We believed that if a few variables could be linked across national, state and local studies, we could gain significant insight into market dynamics and outcomes in different policy environments. However, despite the millions of dollars spent on the massive welfare reform evaluations, we were unable to get even a smidge of cross-site data, and the

1980s closed with a large gap in knowledge about how child care works within the framework of poverty and welfare services.

One of the most important outcomes of changing attitudes and priorities in the 1980s was establishment ofACYF's Head Start-State Collaboration Network, which enabled federal and state programs to begin hooking up their individual cars to the engine of sociocultural and political change. This proved to be a major structural shift that over the next few decades brought child care, Head Start, and various other forms of support, such as health and employment programs, into working alliance throughout states and local communities. This helped create support for collaboration in research and evaluation that eventually enabled ACYF to begin funding the research partnerships that rapidly grew into the Child Care Policy Research Consortium.

By the end of the decade, the research train got moving again with an important study by the National Academy of Sciences, and it roared into the 1990s with ACYF's National Child Care Survey of 1990, which updated earlier consumer demand surveys. We informally linked the NCCS with a new national study of early education programs sponsored by the Department of Education. The Department of Navy joined for a sub-study of military families, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) brought a private sector perspective to the work. By using the same nationally generalizable sample, coordinating variable definitions and survey questions, and creating cross-cutting analyses, we were able to create the first national look at both the demand and supply of early care and education. ACF's National Study of Low Income Child Care followed these broadly based surveys to provide an in-depth look at the poverty sector.

On the policy side, welfare reform was implemented during the nineties, bringing changes to ACF and ACYF. Title IVA At-Risk Child Care consolidated earlier child care provisions to help parents move off welfare, while the new Child Care and Development Block Grant promised safe, affordable and high quality child care for

working parents. For the first time, child care gained a home of its own with establishment of the Child Care Bureau in ACYF. These important new programs with their huge funding streams changed the landscape for child care. Nonetheless, there were no research dollars for understanding and support.

Then in 1995, the ACF Office of Program, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) gave the Child Care Bureau \$300,000 for three Child Care Research Partnerships. These little projects joined together to leverage resources and collaborate on research goals and designs. Because of their success in building this strategy, a second wave of partnerships was funded a couple of years later. State Capacity-Building Grants were subsequently added, as were Field Initiated Child Care Research Projects, and Child Care Research Scholarships for doctoral dissertations. The Child Care Bureau now had \$10 million a year for research. The Child Care Policy Research Consortium was born.

As the new century took off, so did the CCPRC. So much good research was coming out of our little consortium that the Child Care Bureau was able to establish [Research Connections](#), the first web-based knowledge management system for child care research and evaluation. [Research Connections](#) is central to the CCPRC and strengthens it in many ways. The knowledge infrastructure for early care and education is becoming deeper, broader, and more internally aligned. High quality research reports, data sets and training opportunities are now readily available to universities, research organizations, and students. Parents, providers, advocates, support organizations, businesses, and the general public can find information they need to create solutions that work. Dynamic networks and alliances are growing, as the needs of children and the quality of their care become more consciously woven into our sociocultural, educational, and political life.

When I retired from the Child Care Bureau as Research Director and Child Care Team Leader in 2005, Dr. Ivelisse Martinez-Beck took over. Under her leadership the Little Consortium That Could has come of age as a modern, high-velocity, high-

capacity mainliner propelled by the love of children and a determination to help those committed to their wellbeing. Important new projects funded in the past decade both broaden and deepen the earlier work. I am immensely grateful to Ivelisse and to all of the diverse consortium members for making CCPRC so dynamic, so far-reaching, so professional, so grounded in true grit—for making knowledge about early care and education something that matters to so many. Your accomplishments are breathtaking. As I look back over the years, I am humbled and grateful to have taken a ride on this train. Now, as the long line of cars moves on, I may be sitting in the caboose but I am still on board!