

A Day of Dialogue: Closing the Gaps among Practitioners, Funders, Policymakers, and Researchers

Summary of Proceedings

A Forum Sponsored by the Children's Collabrium, June 5, 2007

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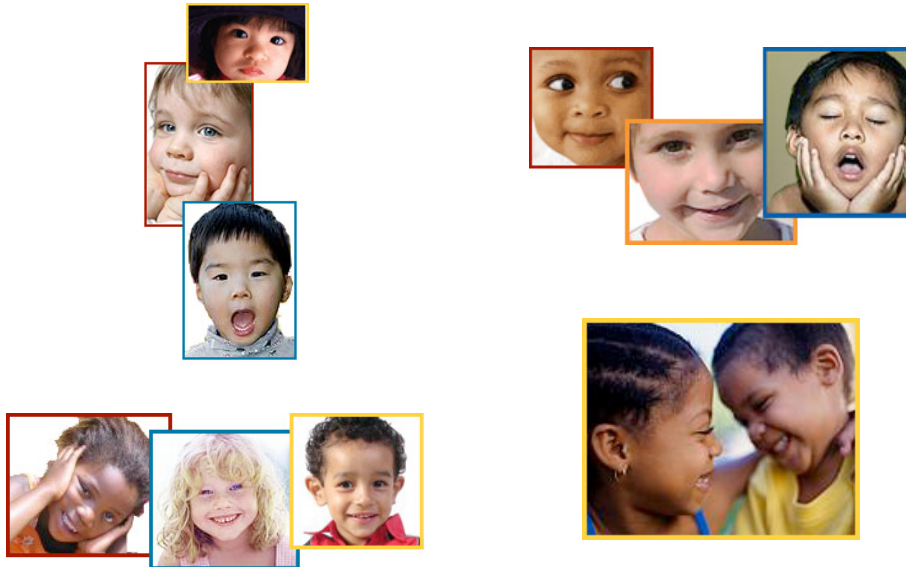


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A Day of Dialogue: Closing the Gaps among Practitioners, Funders, Policymakers, and Researchers: Structure of the Day

In his article, “Science, Policy, and Practice: Three Cultures in Search of a Shared Mission” (2000), Jack P. Shonkoff wrote about the challenge of communicating across the three cultures of science, policy and practice to enhance the field of child development.¹ Shonkoff identified three cultures impacting early education: research on child development, the design of social policies, and the delivery of human services for children and families. The Children’s Collabrium identified a fourth culture, which is critical today for the successful implementation of programs for young children, funding.

The Children’s Collabrium, a non-profit organization in California committed to transforming research and information on early learning and development into sound policy and excellent practice, built on the work of Shonkoff by hosting a gathering of over 100 leaders in the field of early care and education (ECE) on June 5, 2007. The intent of the one-day conference was to encourage a dialogue about new directions for child development in the twenty-first century.

Kris Perry, Executive Director of First 5 California, in her introductory remarks the morning of June 5th acknowledged, “scientists ask questions, policymakers want answers, practitioners want to act. The challenge is to blend these different worlds or construct sturdy bridges across them.” Ms. Perry called for systemic change in which all interest groups focus on an agreed upon goal for children.

Following her remarks, the audience listened to four panels of experts. Each panel included a funder, a practitioner, a policymaker and a researcher. For each panel, one of the four cultures was told what that his/her particular group should know that would facilitate the work of the other three cultures (i.e., What funders need to know that would facilitate the work of practitioners, policymakers/advocates, and researchers.) Additionally, the

group addressed representatives of the other three cultures offered a response to the comments of the co-panelists. Finally, conferees were invited to respond to and/or ask questions of the panelists.

The highlights of the presentations and discussions that follow are organized by the category of the culture which was challenged to respond to colleagues in the field who represented other interest groups.

How Funders Contribute to the Early Education Field and What They Should Remember



The role of funders: The funders of the early care and education community (i.e., foundations, government agencies, businesses, individuals and others) deliver significant support for the provision of services to children and families, be those services full-day, full-year child care or part-time preschool. Such funding either facilitates the participation of economically disadvantaged children and their families in such programs or permits ECE programs to augment and/or improve the quality of services delivered to clients. These moneys may spell the difference between continued program operation and the instability of services, perhaps even the closure of a particular program.

Often funders embrace specific initiatives, which conform to or support their particular interests. These initiatives may be limited in their time frame or more far reaching. In either case, potential recipients of any moneys must be responsive to the desires of funders in order to successfully apply for and ultimately utilize such resources.

What panelists believe funders should remember:

- Need to encourage a unique identifier (code or number) for each child so that they can be followed over time.
- Need to streamline reporting requirements
- Should understand the "big" picture; financial constraints of programs and researchers
- Should be flexible, patient and in for the long haul
- Need to know more about research (i.e. expect child outcome data as program is being implemented)

- Need to invest in stories and case studies
- Need to recognize that practitioners are responding to multiple demands
- Should recognize the lack of coordination among public agencies
- Must understand that public funding isn't sufficient to cover cost of providing ECE services or providing a system for quality
- Should fund research and understand costs involved and understand true costs of running programs

“Funders need to engage in politics and advocacy. There are the way things should work and the ways that they do work. Funders need to engage in the policy making sphere. Funders need to understand that politics is not linear. There is a need for patience and funders need to be in there for the long haul. Funders also need flexibility. Funding comprehensive advocacy needs patience, capital, and a light touch.”

*Catherine Atkin, President
Preschool California*

“Reimbursement rates do not meet true operational costs. Quality staff demand higher wages. Most centers don't have time to set up a fundraising campaign. Some grants only pay for actual attendance and vacancies are not paid for so programs over enroll. The definition of full-day is defined by the State of California as six hours. Full day care for working parents is more than six hours.” Castro advises the California Department of Education to form a blue ribbon advisory committee to look at the true operational costs because increasing Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) is not enough. “There is a lack of coordination between funders: each funder has minimum requirements. There is a need to streamline the systems.”

*Martin Castro, President
Mexican American Opportunity Foundation (MAOF)*

“Funders need to understand that it is not realistic to expect research like the Chicago Parent Study or the Perry Preschool study over night. The best research investment a funder can make is to ensure that the program is funded according to a plan. Collecting data on every single child may not be the best approach. It is too costly. We can only do it on a random sample. Finally, funders need to understand that if they really want to understand causality, then the gold standard is random assignment. Even having a control group is not the most practical way.”

*Susan Muenchow, Senior Researcher
American Institutes for Research*

A funder's response to the panelist's comments: Funder Phil Halperin, Silverpenny Foundation, observed,

“As a private funder, framing is critically important. Unless you create a crisis, you will have just incremental approaches. In reality, the system doesn't exist.”

Halperin reminded the participants that most of funding for preschool will come from public dollars. Minimal money comes from private funders who need to strategically deploy resources. Without real, meaningful public funding, foundation dollars won't make a difference.

How Practitioners Contribute to the Early Education Field and What They Should Remember



The role of practitioners: The individuals and organizations, which comprise the early care and education field, are varied. The field includes individuals providing care in their homes for children, either as licensed family child care providers or individuals who are exempt from licensing regulations as determined by the State of California. Further a large segment of services are delivered in licensed child care facilities/centers serving infants and toddlers, preschoolers and/or school-age children. The operators of these programs may be non-profit, proprietary, or public entities. They may operate on a year-round basis or for a period that closely parallels the traditional K-12 school year.

Regardless of the auspices of early care and education services, such programs are reliant on the availability of trained staff; that is, individuals who are charged with offering children not only supervision, but also activities that stimulate a child's growth and development. They also require a physical plant in which to deliver these services, as well as materials that facilitate children's care and learning during the day.

The services that practitioners offer permit parents and others to earn an income, which supports the family, or acquire the skills necessary to support their families upon the conclusion of a training program. Services also assist children to acquire the information and skills required in order to enter the K-12 system ready to learn and succeed.

What panelists believe practitioners should know:

- Understand the rules that govern funders/accountability
- Think about putting information from researchers into practice
- Need to do a good job of data collection and success stories
- Create one voice within the field: they should be *on the same page*,
- Need to build quality improvement into the ECE system, including cultural competence
- Link with K-12

Dr. Peter Mangione, Co-Director of the Program for Child and Family Studies at WestEd and a researcher suggested that what we need from practitioners, legislators, and society is to engage in reflective practice. Unless they can think about what they are trying to do with information from research, then it won't work. He suggested that practitioners need to be action oriented; to

find the place in their work, where they can engage in the reflective part of their work. Mangione recommends that a dialogue be created inviting multiple perspectives.

“Practitioners need to form coalitions; they need a unified voice and the community needs to figure out how to organize them. He also encouraged practitioners to coalesce and engage parents, as partners; then a different voice will emerge that can influence policy and funding.”

**Dr. Gary Mangiofico, Executive Director
Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LA-UP)**

Giannina Perez, Children Now, and a former staff person for a member of the California State Legislature acknowledged that the advocate needs credible information from practitioners. She indicated that real stories matter a lot to policy makers and local data is also *gold*.

Advocates/policy makers need to know what is happening throughout the state and if the field thinks

the proposed policy is a sound way to go. There is a need to be able to translate the practitioner and research world into language that can be understood by policy makers. Her last piece of advice to practitioners is to invite policy makers and/or staff to the center or family child care home.

A practitioner’s response to the panelist’s comments:

“Practitioners need help taking research and putting it into place. (Relative to policymakers)...I’d like to see how we can smarten...(them up)...rather than dumbing down information from the field for the policy makers.” He also insisted, “Compromise can be deadly for children and families. ECE shouldn’t be the art of compromise. In ECE, you get what you pay for. While regulation and compliance help us meet the elements of the law, they don’t necessarily meet the needs of children and families.”

Dr. Gary J. Kinley, Executive Director
The Children’s Collabrium

How Policymakers and Advocates Contribute to the Early Education Field and What They Should Remember



The role of policymakers and advocates: Policymakers include elected officials and appointed government leaders who develop initiatives, as well as regulations, intended to respond to real or perceived needs of their constituents and others. Policymakers, especially elected officials, often also pass legislation that ultimately funds such initiatives. The efforts of policymakers often define the level of government involvement in the delivery of services, ranging from a significant one down to nothing. Regulations may facilitate the delivery of services to children and families or hamper the same.

What panelists believe policymakers and advocates should know:

- Understand that teachers need time with children
- Recognize that multiple funding streams should be replaced with one “adequate” funding stream with simplified reporting requirements
- Determine what is working, what’s not and discard the latter
- Determine if the policy is a “working families” issue or a child development issue
- As advocates, speak with a unified voice
- Advocate for workforce development...a quality issue; alignment among career ladders

The comments of panelists:

Sharon Seidman, a researcher in the academic world discussed the challenges of meeting the needs of child development students. She advised that policy makers need to give higher education a lot of support.

Representing practitioners, Dr. Wendy Wayne, who spent 20 years administering early childhood programs, advised policy makers that practitioners want to get back to the children. She advised that child development is a complex system with many different types of programs. Too much time is spent on managing contracts when dollars should go into improving the effectiveness of environment/programs. She urged policy makers to get rid of multiple funding streams so that there are fully funded, high quality programs for every child.

Funder, Phil Halperin observed that the in advocacy work for preschool everyone is too nice/too sweet. “We’re playing softball in a hardball game.” Halperin further advised that the problem needs to be defined. What is the problem we’re solving for? Lifelong learners? Helping families so they can make ends meet? Creating good employees of tomorrow? There is not a coming together as a group. We need to be willing to throw the ball at the batter’s head.

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How Researchers Contribute to the Early Education Field and What They Should Remember



The role of researchers: A range of individuals, sometimes affiliated with universities, other times with non-academic entities, conduct research intended to assess the impact of programs and services on children and their families or to document how people grow and develop over time. Research of this nature may be conducted as part of a short-term effort to obtain relevant information immediately or be a longitudinal study that details how a program impacts the study subjects. This research may be connected to a public policy initiative, a particular entity's desire to gain more information about its program, or the field's general desire to know how individuals grow and change over a period of time.

Regardless of the nature of the effort, the work of researchers assists practitioners, funders and policymakers to craft programs that meet the latter three groups' goals. Practitioners may modify the way they provide services to children and their families. Funders may institute new initiatives that are intended to address a particular area or concern. Policymakers may develop legislation or regulations that is responsive to the findings of part research or request that additional research be conducted

What panelists believe researchers should know:

- Understand that child development is a complex delivery system
- Recognize that what researchers say may actually be heard
- Do no harm; recognize consequences
- Keep research simple so that others understand; don't be too "nuanced"
- Recognize that studies like Perry Preschool are unrealistic for most programs; they are too expensive. Case studies can corroborate large studies
- Remember to collaborate with advocates and practitioners
- Realize that data collection is time consuming. Consider random sampling
- Facilitate the work of practitioners and funders by matching up and standardizing data collection

- Acknowledge that data collection needs additional funding
- Recognize the need for training in policy and have experience in the ECE field
- Experience cross training in policy, practitioner, research—funding for this has decreased
- Need training on negative results and how to report them
- Pursue research that has practical application and demonstrates effectiveness
- Conduct research that is driven by the needs of practitioners

The comments of panelists:

A panelist comments: “As a practitioner, I would like to see more research that would provide valuable outcomes for children and families (e.g. for group size, curriculum models, etc.)”

**Paul Miller, Executive Director
Kidango, Inc.**

Sharon Hawley, representing the California State Department of Education Child Development Division, the policymaker, pointed out to the researcher that the Department needs from practitioners and researchers an awareness of the limitations of the department (i.e. the department is not involved with rule making, rather carrying out what has been given to them by the legislature).

Kris Perry, Executive Director of California’s State First 5, reminded the group that Prop. 10 (the initiative that created First 5) was established because of research not to generate more research. This research said that 90% of brain development occurs in first 3 years of life. We don’t need more research in

this area.

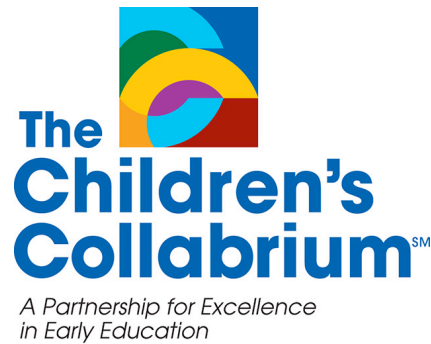
A researcher’s response to the panelist’s comments:

“We need people who can navigate among the four cultures that have been identified.... It is important for researchers to understand the policy context in which they are working. They have a responsibility towards policy makers and towards the people when they announce their findings.”

Susan Muenchow
American Institute of Research

An audience participant representing Monterey Peninsula College, Carolyn Carney, offered in response to the panel that we need people who can bridge domains. That is what higher education faculty do: we interpret law, research, public policy and help people to understand structure and policy.

Final Thoughts



Now that this first forum for the exchange of perspectives has passed, what are some overarching themes that emerged which we as a collective field should consider in the days, weeks, and years to come? The Board and staff of the Children's Collabrium spent a block of time at a joint retreat considering that question and identified a short list of possibilities as follows:

- Identify the basic tenets that all four groups are working towards
- Need for the ECE community to have a unified voice on 2-3 issues
- Link pre-Kindergarten efforts to K-12
- Conduct cross training of disciplines
- Need for training of researchers regarding working with media, understanding practitioners
- Continue the dialogue and understanding among all four groups

This *Day of Dialogue* should be viewed as a beginning, not an end, to conversations among the four groups. In light of that idea, the Children's Collabrium would like to know what are your thoughts as we strive to increase communication and collaboration both within the field of early care and education and beyond? Contact us via our website, www.thechildrenscollabrium.com, to share your comments and thoughts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

¹Jack P Shonkoff (2000) Science, Policy, and Practice: Three Cultures in Search of a Shared Mission *Child Development* 71 (1), 181–187.

Research on child development, the design of social policies, and the delivery of human services for children and families reflect three related yet separate cultures. The capacity to navigate across their borders, to understand their different rules of evidence, to speak their distinctive languages, and to achieve credibility in all three worlds while maintaining a sense of intellectual integrity in each, requires respect for their differences and a commitment to their shared mission. The transmission of knowledge from the academy to the domains of social policy and practice is a formidable task. This challenge could be facilitated by a simple taxonomy that differentiates established knowledge from both reasonable hypotheses and unwarranted or irresponsible assertions that are made in the name of science. An investment in effective “cross-cultural” translation offers a potent strategy for enhancing both the generation of new research and the application of cutting-edge knowledge to make a difference in the lives of children and their families.