

# ed

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*Long-Term Consequences of Child Care*

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# Moussorgsky



Hal Robinson, 1966 *CourierJournal&LouisvilleTimes* • Billy Davis

R e m e m b e r i n g   h o w   w e   b e g a n . . .

*It was 1966. The Green Bay Packers were basking in the limelight of winning the first Super Bowl. The cassette was introduced as the newest technology for music. The Mamas and the Papas had exploded onto the music scene with two hits: "California Dreamin" and "Monday Monday."*

*And a two-year-old girl named Beth Robinson was the first enrollee at a new child care research center in three trailers on Cameron Street in Chapel Hill, NC. To mark the occasion, her father played a record of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, fourth movement.*

**B**eth's father was Hal Robinson, co-founder with Ann DeHuff Peters of the behavioral sciences arm of the Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The other arm of the institute was the Biological Sciences Research Center, headed by Morris Lipton.

Those were the post-Kennedy days. Research money was beginning to flow toward disadvantaged children, mental retardation, and poverty. The civil rights movement was growing. Grants from the National Institutes of Health had gone out to a number of institutions that year concerning mental retardation, but the only one that focused on prevention was the one that came to UNC-Chapel Hill. Or more specifically to a child development unit now known as the Frank Porter Graham Family and Child Care Program.

"Hal was determined that our daughter would be the first enrolled," said Nancy Robinson, who directed research at the center. The Robinsons wanted to examine this basic question: Could child care help prevent intellectual deficits in what are now called at-risk families? Peripheral questions had to do with whether group care for infants was or was not a good idea, and what it took to do it well; and how mixed-race and mixed-socioeconomic groups could be created in a positive way.

The playing of Beethoven on Beth's first day was not only for dad. One way to help children at risk, so Hal theorized, was to stimulate them visually and aurally.

"I remember going to violin class. I learned how to play 'Humpty Dumpty' and the teacher, a woman I think, laughed a lot. I liked it," said Beth, now a geophysicist working in US Office of Management and Budget. "I remember being outside with my dad and mom in the morning, and I tried both of their coffees. I liked dad's a lot better (he took milk and sugar) than mom's (black.)"

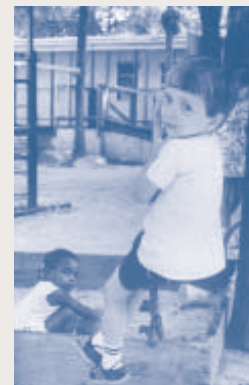
"It was exciting. There was a sense of starting a project, a sense of doing something unique. We all had a sense of mission," said Joe Sparling who in the spring of 1967 joined the team that now included Isabel Lewis and Frank Loda, a pediatrician.

They were also part of an even grander, revolutionary idea that had been kicked around for a year or two: an entire complex for at-risk children from birth to age 12. It would be the first such complex in the nation and seed money had already been planted by the federal government, UNC-Chapel Hill, the Carnegie Foundation, the state and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro School system.

Part of the new complex would be an elementary school, and Sparling was recruited to help design and to be administrator of the school. In the meantime, he was named associate director of FPG.

The idea behind the complex, according to a newspaper article at the time, was "the prevention of intellectual deficit due to cultural deprivation and the enhancement of personal and social development." The medical facility would "be concerned with discovering the causes, prevention, treatment and cure of mental retardation and emotional disturbance."

From day one it was an intervention program for children at risk, but it was also a program that from the beginning set up a "real world" community mix of children and families from many walks of life.



Courtesy: Durham & Louisville, Inc. Photo by Davis

**"Moussorgsky" and the "sight of goldfish dangling in a plastic bag on the crib" was how Newsweek magazine described the Robinson's project in a 1968 article. The children were also taught French.**

*Those early days were filled with the camaraderie of shared struggles. Sparling remembered rushing to cover his data when it rained because the roof leaked in one trailer. The children's playground was mostly sand and large rocks. Play equipment included tractor tires for swings and riding "horses" made of tree logs nailed onto 2 x 4s. Metal barrels with "diapers" written on them stood by the front door of one trailer.*



*Courier Journal & Louisville Times/Billy Davis*

"There was a spirit of hopefulness. We talked about breaking the cycle of poverty. Really break it. We said it as if we were going to do it. We had a sense that we were going to accomplish something," said Sparling, now retired.

**B**ut as cost figures came in and other considerations were weighed, the complex eventually fell through, as did the ideal of a "real world" community. Funding became available only for children considered directly at risk.

The vision of scattered small buildings was replaced by a large administrative building that housed all the services. The Robinsons left, although the child care center itself continued and grew.

In 1970, **Jim Gallagher** was named director of FPG. He recruited Craig Ramey to take over the child care project, which was expanded and refined into the Abecedarian Project. Considered one of the premier longitudinal child care studies in America, it continues today with data showing that significant benefits of the "stimulating child care" persist until at least the children are adults. (See related story on page 2.)



*Courier Journal & Louisville Times/Billy Davis*

From the very beginning, there was a medical component studying health of children. For example, **Al Collier** and others began studying the frequency of child illnesses in the center. Their research expanded into respiratory tract infections and complications (children's respiratory tracts were cultured every two weeks at the center), vaccines against respiratory pathogens, new ways to detect respiratory infection, and otitis media.

During the 1970s, Sparling and Isabelle Lewis devised 100 experiences for young children from birth to 36 months in the form of games. Each game was self-contained on a card with pictures and descriptions, and the games were presented in sections spanning about six months of developmental age. *Infant Learning Games* was first published in 1978 in a loose-leaf notebook format with removable game cards. Later, the book became a hardback and a paperback and 100 learning games became 150 and then 300. That led to other popular books for parents and teachers, such as *Learning games for the First Three Years* and *Learning games for Threes and Fours and Partners for Learning*.

The Abecedarian children graduated from child care into school.

Investigator **Frances Campbell** rounded up grants and the work continued. Also, beginning in the mid-1970s, FPG began providing training for UNC nursing students, offering instruction and practice in such areas as child health assessment, infant stimulation, day care, and behavior management.

Additional researchers were recruited and worked in such areas as nutrition, premature infants, otitis media, the effect of second-hand cigarette smoke on infants, child care quality, and inclusion.

By the late 1970s and 1980s, center researchers were securing a stronger national reputation and adding more research into policy implications. The Carolina Institute for Research on Early Education for the Handicapped examined the experiences and perspectives of families of children with disabilities.

Through the years, the configuration of the child care operations changed in response to new research. For example, the child care program admitted its first children with disabilities in 1984. And several years ago, age groupings became more flexible to accommodate children with varying development levels. Also, child-sized toilets designed specifically for children with disabilities were added so that children with disabilities could learn independence and gain competence.

In the mid-1990s, the playground area was redesigned and equipped following the standards of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which are based heavily on accident research.

The child care center has often been used to pilot a program. For example, **Jonathan Kotch**, a professor of maternal and child health at UNC-CH and an FPG fellow, directs a training program for early child care and education professionals, particularly in health and safety aspects. The study was

piloted at the FPG child care facility and later carried out at more than 65 child care centers.

Last year, two child care classrooms were added as part of a new model demonstration project for very young children (18-36 months of age) with autism and their families. FPG will disseminate the model to other early intervention programs in North Carolina and provide training and technical assistance.

Another study underway at the center may have significant program implications for early childhood teachers and child care center administrators. The project compares what happens when a child has the same caregiver for the first three years of life with what happens to children when caregivers change in each of the first three years.

The center continues to be a practicum site for students from a variety of health and education disciplines.

One of the original dreams of the founders of FPG died early on – a large research and medical complex and a laboratory school working with children at risk from birth to age 12.

*Perhaps it was ahead of its time.*

*But what didn't die were the goals and beliefs and motivations of the women and the men who created the Frank Porter Graham Center. Those dreams live on: Intervention.*

*Collaboration across disciplines and university departments. Solid research.*

*Helping young children and their families reach their full potential still drives our researchers and staff. Three decades later, you continue to feel the "excitement," the "spirit of hopefulness," and "a sense that we're going to accomplish something."*

DonTrull



*But knowledge cannot be pulled from basic research directly into practice any more than crude oil can be pumped from the ground into an automobile. It needs that crucial stage of development that transforms fundamental discoveries about children into curriculum products, teaching practices and parenting techniques.*



*Thirty-four years ago, Hal and Nancy M. Robinson helped begin the FPG Child Care Center. After leaving FPG, they joined the University of Washington. Before his death in 1981, Hal founded the UW Center for the Study of Capable Youth, now named for him. Nancy remained in the field of mental retardation but took up the reins of the center at Hal's death. Among the notable programs of the center, which serves gifted children, are a Transition School and Early Entrance Program for young teenagers, a clinic, summer program, and extensive research.*



**Nancy Robinson:** “The idea was prevention aimed at poverty. The war on poverty and the war on mental retardation were going on side by side but nobody was saying they were the same one. At the beginning, this center was both middle-class and lower-income and cross-racial...and that was also a big issue at that point. There was a huge question at the time about whether infants could be accommodated in group care. And so the center started with infants and 2-year-olds.”

**Nancy:** “In the child care center, children were grouped across ages, with a special effort to keep true siblings in the same group. Infants were kept together until fully ambulatory, I think, and then placed in the cross-age groups. Children were grouped by age for ‘preschool classes’ for ease of instruction and because there were some activities that just couldn’t happen if there were toddlers interfering.”

Earlier this year, Nancy Robinson visited FPG and at one point, she, former FPG Director Jim Gallagher and former Associate Director Joe Sparling, sat around reminiscing.

Here are selected excerpts:



**Jim Gallagher:** “I remember visiting you and Hal in 1965 or ‘66, I think it was. I was still at the University of Illinois; and you had put in a grant request to NICHD for your project here. I was part of a site team to visit and look around.”



**Joe Sparling:** “Reception to our work? Some departments, say at the school of education and psychology were in general very cool toward what we were doing. I think they felt that our work was perhaps too messy and too vague. It wasn’t what their professors ‘ought’ to be doing.”

**Jim:** “There were a number of other projects around the country working on mental retardation and trying to stimulate development... so there was a community of researchers and scholars who were communicating with each other doing the same thing.” 