

# Child Development Conference Has a Lot to Say

Betsy Diamant-Cohen



*Betsy Diamant-Cohen is a children's librarian with a doctorate who loves to present workshops for educators, programs for children and families, and presentations at conferences.*

American Library Association conferences involve a lot of walking since sessions are presented in numerous venues in huge convention centers and surrounding hotels. Even the exhibits are massive! Because of this, librarians are often distinguished from local residents by the comfortable shoes they are wearing. At the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) conference earlier this year, however, attendees could also be recognized by the portable poster holders slung over their shoulders.

SRCD works to advance developmental science, promoting its use to improve human lives. Every two years, SRCD holds a conference where researchers disseminate their most recent findings. Since child development research informs and supports our practices as children's librarians, I attended the SRCD conference in Baltimore in March 2019.

During 5,133 presentations, scholars and researchers from sixty countries presented glimpses into their work through paper symposiums (where they describe papers they are writing or which have recently been published), conversation roundtables, poster sessions, invited addresses, lunches with leaders, professional development sessions, and TAD talks (fifteen-minute lightning talks similar to TED talks). There were 6,586 presenting authors and 17,816 non-presenting authors. The conference focused on three themes:

1. **International** work to advance “understanding of children's development in diverse international contexts.”
2. **Interdisciplinary** work to cover “a wide ranges of areas related to children's social, emotional, cognitive, and neurobiological development.”
3. **Relevant** work dedicated to “improving the lives of children around the world.”

Congressman Elijah E. Cummings (D-Maryland) was an inspiring guest speaker, with a standing-room-only crowd. He spoke about the importance of providing a good education to all children, lauding researchers for being both smart and passionate about their topics. Then he issued a call to action, telling the audience to contact their legislators, introduce themselves, and share their expertise. In addition to getting exposure for their research, Cummings said that creating connections with government representatives would enable the researchers to position themselves to help provide enlightened formation of policy.

## Economics and Child Development

When talking about the benefits that positive early childhood experiences have on the amount of vocabulary words a child knows when entering kindergarten, on graduation rates from high school, on success at long-term relationships, and on lower rates of incarceration, the

first published research study on this, The HighScope Perry Preschool Project, is usually mentioned.

In the early 1960s (before Head Start), in a poverty-stricken, crime-ridden neighborhood of Ypsilanti, Michigan, a group of educators set up a HighScope Preschool in the Perry Elementary School. This special preschool had low student/teacher ratios, included home visits to families, and followed a creative curriculum that took students' interests into account. Half of the children in this neighborhood were invited to attend the preschool for the two years before kindergarten. This often-quoted study followed both sets of children, the ones who attended preschool and those who did not, throughout their lives.

The evidence from the HighScope Perry Preschool Project is widely cited to support the economic argument for investing in early childhood programs, since it showed the positive effects that high-quality early childhood experiences had on lifelong health, economics, and social outcomes for individuals and society as a whole.

James J. Heckman, a Nobel Prize winner in economics who is currently at the Center for the Economics of Human Development at the University of Chicago, presented a session entitled "Perry Preschoolers at Late Midlife," focusing on interdisciplinary research. The original group of children who attended the preschool are now in their mid-50s and they are still being followed by researchers (as are other local children who did not attend the preschool).

Heckman is an expert in the economics of human development, and the room in which his presentation was scheduled was packed. He said the positive results from the original study are still relevant today, and then told us about findings based on new research he had just completed with Ganesh Karapukula.

The new research looked at the impact attending the HighScope Perry Preschool had on the original study participants as well as the significant gains in personal and family life outcomes that provided their children with positive second-generation effects on education, health, employment, and civic life.

The results showed that early childhood education resulted in stronger families and significantly contributed to upward mobility in the next generation. Heckman concluded that high-quality early childhood education is an effective tool for lifting families out of poverty and breaking cycles of poverty. To read more about the study, visit <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/perry-preschool-midlife-toolkit>.

## Resources

The National Center for Education Statistics ([nces.ed.gov/training/datauser](https://nces.ed.gov/training/datauser)) was an exhibitor promoting their free resources. If you are writing a report, a grant proposal, an

## Poster Sessions Dive Deep

Many poster sessions were held throughout the three-day conference, describing recent and ongoing research. Each poster session lasted for seventy-five minutes, and at least one member of each research team described the research. The minimum number of posters displayed during a session was 232 and a total of 3,114 posters and 14 federal agency posters were displayed, so browsers had to be selective with their time.

While the broader shared topic of the poster sessions was child development, the clusters covered the following:

- attention, learning, and memory
- biology processes; neuroscience and genetics
- biology processes: psychophysiology
- cognitive processes
- developmental disabilities
- developmental psychopathology
- diversity, equity, and social justice
- education and schooling
- family context and processes
- health, growth, injury
- language, communication
- methods, history, theory
- moral development
- parenting and parent-child relationships
- perceptual, sensory, motor
- prevention and interventions
- race, ethnicity, culture, context
- school readiness/childcare
- sex, gender
- social cognition
- social policy
- social relationships
- social, emotional, personality
- technology, media, and child development

article, or a blog and you want some statistics to put your comments into perspective, this federal entity that collects and analyzes education-related data in the United States is a great place to go.

One of their cool resources is DataLab, an online tool for making tables and charts using federal education datasets. QuickStats allows users to create simple charts and tables, PowerStats allows users to create complex tables, and TrendStats allows users to create complex tables using data

from multiple collection years. This can be accessed at [nces.ed.gov/datalab](https://nces.ed.gov/datalab). &

*The next SRCD conference will be held in Minneapolis April 8–10, 2021.*

*Congressman Elijah Cummings died in October, while this issue was in production. I join many others in mourning his passing. He was a library champion, a fellow Baltimorean, and a wonderful human being.*

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## Index to Advertisers

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ALA Graphics .....22  
ALSC..... 22, cover 3

Loyola Press ..... cover 4  
University of Southern Mississippi..... cover 2