

Working for Worthy Wages

A Lived History of the Child Care
Compensation Movement, 1970-2002



By Marcy Whitebook, Peggy Haack,
and Rosemarie Vardell

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Preface

Working for Worthy Wages tells the story of a unique period of activism in early childhood education from the 1970s through 2002. Although there had been activist movements in the field previous to this one, the movement that spanned these three decades was unique in that it was initiated and led by educators who were passionate about their everyday work with young children, yet recognized the need for better pay and working conditions in order to sustain their livelihoods and better meet the needs of children and families. These early educators were often in opposition to professional leaders and advocates in the field of early childhood education (ECE).

The original version of this historical record was published in 2002, when the compensation movement was undergoing a major transition. In response to requests, this update was created by Marcy Whitebook, the original author, along with colleagues Peggy Haack and Rosemarie Vardell. All three women are among the teachers who founded and played leadership roles in the compensation movement from its early phases in the 1970s through the Worthy Wage Campaign of the 1990s.

It is important to note that the authors of this paper are White women and the early movement was largely led by White women. This reflects White privilege and segregation by roles and settings.¹

Educators of color were over-represented in family child care and in lower-paying teacher assistant jobs in centers, largely as a consequence of systemic disparities that limited access of Black women and other women of color to better paying jobs. As family child care providers, many women of color found more job opportunities to serve children in their own communities, as well as greater autonomy and job satisfaction. However, these providers were not fully embraced by the compensation movement until the 1990s. As the movement gained momentum and racism was called out, dismantling White supremacy within the movement itself (including by diversifying the leadership) became an important focus.

The authors of this paper have remained involved in different roles in ECE over the ensuing two decades since 2002 and feel the importance of putting this research in its proper historical context. This endeavor includes acknowledging our own biases in the original paper, which quoted and relied heavily on White participants in the movement. We also developed this update as a learning tool for the teacher activists who will write the next chapters of ECE history.

¹ CSCCE is committed to eliminating oppressive language and using bias-free terms. Under this philosophy, for example, all terms used to describe race are capitalized, and gender neutral terms are used when appropriate.

While the original content remains largely unchanged to reflect the authors' lived history, the format has been improved for readability, and many footnotes have been integrated into the content as they provide relevant information. In addition, at times new information has been included, such as links to information on the ECHOES website, if they help to further contextualize or provide reference to our lived history.

The [Early Childhood History, Organizing, Ethos, and Strategy Project](#), ECHOES, launched in 2023, builds on the story told in this paper and includes a wealth of primary and secondary source materials. ECHOES tells the many histories of the ECE system, undoing the harmful distinctions between child care and early education that almost all ECE histories have reinforced. While the focus of most histories is most often on the perspectives of White women in formal leadership roles and White men with access to power and influence, ECHOES spotlights the untold stories of the women who did the actual teaching of and caring for young children. ECHOES explores the voices and visions of women of color, immigrant women, and working-class women who have made significant contributions but have been left out of most ECE histories. Their experiences, contributions, and activism demand our attention and are centered in ECHOES.

Marcy Whitebook, Peggy Haack, Rosemarie Vardell, 2023

Like other social change movements, the child care compensation movement began gradually in the 1970s with small groups of educators in different states and communities slowly and deliberately expanding their networks, finding one another, and unifying around common goals. This paper focuses primarily on the goal of improving wages, but other goals were equally important: recognizing and respecting the value of the work and those doing the work; and identifying immediate steps to improve working conditions. As the movement matured, the goal of identifying and disrupting racism emerged as a priority, as well. The call for “Rights, Raises, and Respect” endured throughout the movement and efforts to create better jobs began with the creation of model union contracts and model personnel policies, which in the late 1990s evolved into the still-relevant [Model Work Standards](#) of today.

The transition of these efforts to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in 2002 marked the end of an era. The ending, as described in this paper, was largely due to the challenge of funding the Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW) as a de facto “organizational home” and

the dramatic influx of many new players in the ECE field, which diminished the role of teachers and providers as leaders of the movement. At this same time, a new national concept was taking hold in the ECE field: quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). While teachers of the movement had come to learn that it was the entire system of early care and education that needed to be fixed, QRIS focused on fixing programs and the people in them. Teachers could not foresee how drastically this approach would impact their lives and change their jobs. The epilogue that follows offers an outline of the continued efforts for worthy wages, a history that is yet to be written.

Today, better compensation for early educators is solidly part of the public discourse and widely recognized as a problem demanding a solution—a legacy in no small measure due to these decades of teacher and provider activism and the strategies of the compensation movement. By learning the history of those who came before, today’s early educators can reclaim their integral role of shaping a transformed vision of the work of teaching and caring for young children and building collective agency to achieve it.

To learn more, delve into the archives of [ECHOES](#), an online project created by the [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment \(CSCCE\)](#).

Original Author's Note

The achievement of worthy wages for child care² teachers and providers³ has been the organizing principle of my work life for nearly 30 years. After graduating from college in 1970, I took a job as a child care assistant in a nonprofit parent cooperative, and for the next 10 years, I worked as a teacher of infants, preschoolers, and school-age children in a variety of child care programs. During the 1970s, I also began working with other teachers to improve the wages, working conditions, and status of child care workers, eventually co-founding the Child Care Employee Project (CCEP), which ultimately became the Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW). Throughout the 1980s up to the present, I have been on the “front lines” of research, public education, policy development, organizing, and advocacy efforts focused on the child care workforce.

The paper you are about to read therefore reflects the perspective of a deeply immersed player in the child care compensation movement. This involvement is both an asset and a liability. Not being a historian by training, I have consulted with many other colleagues in order to balance the limits of my memory and point of view. Specifically, I convened dialogues with other “insiders” around the issues of public awareness and education, union and community organizing, and public policy initiatives—all strategies that had been employed during this time period to improve child care jobs. I also conducted in-depth interviews with a number of individuals who were involved in the child care compensation movement or related movements. And as reviewers of earlier drafts have noted, there are even more stories to be told and important questions and themes that deserve greater exploration than I could accommodate here—for example, a comparative study of movements by nurses, public school teachers, and home healthcare workers for improved pay and status.

I acknowledge that there are many teachers, providers, and other activists with whom I was unable to consult due to time limitations. They would add much to this discussion, and without them, there would be no movement at all. While I have tried to be accurate in recounting the movement's highlights, I may have unintentionally overlooked or misconstrued important events or positions. I hope that readers will forgive any oversights and will understand that my assessment of the movement, while critical at times, stems from a deep sense of honor and gratitude for getting to spend my working life as a part of it. My primary intention has been to reflect upon our past efforts with an eye to informing the work that remains to be done—ensuring that child care teachers and providers receive the compensation, support, and respect that they, and the children and families in their care, deserve.

Marcy Whitebook, 2002

² While recognizing that terminology is a subject of considerable debate among those involved in and concerned about services for young children, I use “child care” in this paper as a generic term to encompass the many types of early childhood programs that vary with respect to their focus on education and caregiving and the ages of children served. Where appropriate, I distinguish among program types such as Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs. For more discussion of terminology, see Helburn and Bergmann (2002) and the Center for Early Childhood Leadership (2001).

³ In this paper, I use the term “teacher” when referring to those who work in center- or school-based settings and “provider” for those working in home-based programs, also known as “family child care.”

Introduction 2023

Working for Worthy Wages focuses on three distinct phases of the history of the child care compensation movement. During the first phase, between 1970 and 1985, signs of a movement surfaced as the problem of poverty-level wages was identified and publicly articulated, primarily by child care teachers of young children. In the next phase, between 1985 and 1995, researchers demonstrated the link between low wages and quality of services. Community and labor organizing, public awareness campaigns, and public policy initiatives chipped away at the wall of silence around the issue. Finally, between 1995 and 2001, the movement achieved greater visibility through sustained grassroots organizing efforts and creative public policy responses, driven largely by a growing child care staffing crisis, an overall economic boom in the United States, and the passage of national welfare reform legislation in 1996. This phase was also invigorated and inspired by other burgeoning economic justice movements. While not yet drawn into the mainstream of U.S. public policy debates, the issue of inadequate compensation became a staple of discourse and activity within the child care field.

Each of these three phases of the movement are explored with respect to:

- The **economic and policy setting** at the time, including the level of demand for services, public resources dedicated to child care, characteristics of the workforce, and larger social trends in employment;
- **Key players**, including their relations to others within the child care community, their links to other movements, and organizational structures and alliances;
- The primary **assumptions and key strategies** employed by activists, including short- and long-term goals and their organizing, policy, and public education approaches; and
- **Accomplishments, missteps, and challenges.**

These reflections have been synthesized from group dialogues and individual interviews with other knowledgeable activists and advocates, many of whom are quoted throughout the paper.⁴ Other sources include historical materials such as newsletters, pamphlets, and articles. A concerted effort has been made to show how each phase of the movement influenced the next, and how the various challenges facing the movement were resolved or have persisted.

⁴ Marcy Whitebook conducted dialogues through conference calls that lasted approximately 1.5 hours and included four to seven participants. The topics for the calls were organizing, public policy, and public awareness efforts. Other interviews were conducted over the phone or in person. Unless otherwise credited, all citations in this paper derive from these personal communications which took place between 1999 and 2002. Although people who provided information or perspective were listed in the 2002 version of this report, here we include their names along with their focus group conversations in the Addendum.

Organizational Name Changes

The “organizational home” for the compensation movement from the 1970s until 2002 underwent numerous name changes, reflecting the movement’s difficult search for a vocabulary and an identity, as well as the debate within the overall field about nomenclature. The changes in the name are described here in chronological order:

East Bay Workers in Child Care (EBWCC)

The original name of the small, community-based group in Berkeley, California, in the mid-1970s.

Child Care Staff Education Project (CCSEP)

A name change in the late 1970s as the word “worker” was not universally embraced and reach was beginning to go beyond the East Bay.

Child Care Employee Project (CCEP)

A name chosen when the group formally incorporated in 1980; this name denoted that the organization was primarily focused on employment issues (specifically wages and working conditions) of those working directly with young children, and it endured throughout the formative years of the national movement until 1994.

National Center for the Early Childhood Workforce (NCECW)

This name was chosen when operations moved from California to Washington, D.C., in 1994. It reflects growth in the movement and the organization’s aim to be inclusive of family child care providers, Head Start teachers, and early childhood teachers in public schools, as well as teachers working in child care centers.

Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW)

This name change in 1997 simplified the name and avoided any confusion that the organization was addressing issues of child labor; this name continued beyond the transition to the American Federation of Teachers in 2002.

Naming the Problem: 1970-1985



Working for Worthy Wages tells the story of a unique period of activism in early childhood education from the 1970s through 2002. This first part describes the birth of the compensation movement. The key players at this time were center-based child care teachers who experienced and were influenced by the contemporary movements for civil rights, women’s rights, and workers’ rights. They were motivated by a belief that what they did mattered and that their actions could create change not only in their jobs, but in the quality of their work and the funding of the child care system. It all began with naming the problem.

The Setting

The National Landscape

When President Richard Nixon (1969-1974) vetoed the 1971 Comprehensive Child Care and Development Act, child care advocates took up a defensive stance that has persisted to the present day. While President Nixon’s claim that such a program would “Sovietize” American children sounds strangely archaic in the post-Cold War era, at the time it resonated with many citizens who believed that young children should be cared for at home by their mothers. Advocates would wait nearly 20 years for federal child care legislation to pass, and what passed in 1990—the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG, also known as the Child Development Fund)—was far less ambitious than the earlier plan.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, discussion about child care was overwhelmingly disapproving. Child development researchers themselves were conflicted about the effects of out-of-home care on children, particularly for middle-class children. Echoes of this argument continued throughout the time periods addressed in this paper (Belsky & Steinberg, 1978; Belsky, 1984; National Institute for Child Health and Development, 2001).

Ellen Galinsky, a noted child care researcher with the [Families and Work Institute](#), recalled the predominant tone used when describing child care in those days:

When I first became involved in the issue, in the late Sixties and the Seventies, child care was seen as universally negative. That is, I always had the feeling that people thought that children were cordoned behind barbed-wire fences looking out at the world because their evil mothers had left them to have other people raise them. In the research, the typical phrase was “day-care-reared children.”

Status of the Child Care Workforce

During the 1970s and early 1980s, mothers of young children, along with women at all stages of life, entered the paid labor force in unprecedented [numbers](#) only to face a grossly inadequate supply of child care services. The child care workforce expanded rapidly during these years, particularly in the center-based sector, and then as now, the workforce was predominantly female. Nearly three quarters of center-based workers were White, in contrast to 2001, when women of color comprised nearly one half of this sector of the industry (Whitebook et al., 2001; Krajec et al., 2001). Center-based workers, on average, were slightly better educated in the 1970s than they were in 2001 (Ruopp et al., 1979).



Child Care Employee Project postcard by Jean Berlfein.

Home-based providers during this period were found to be exclusively female, but diverse with respect to licensing status, level of education and training, and number of children in their care. Limited data are available about the race of home-based providers in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵ Their educational levels were generally lower than those of center-based employees, due to lack of access and financial resources for education (Keyserling, 1972; Divine-Hawkins, 1981; Galinsky et al., 1994b).

In its landmark 1972 report, *Windows on Day Care*, the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) spoke to the inadequate supply and quality of child care services (Keyserling, 1972). The report found that large numbers of children in care were neglected; still larger numbers received care that, at best, could be called merely custodial and, at worst, deplorable. Only a relatively small proportion of children were benefiting from truly developmental-quality care.

The plight of child care workers was central to the NCJW report's analysis. Among other recommendations, the NCJW called for the investment of federal dollars in child care services, expanding training opportunities, the elimination of "substandard wage scales and excessively long hours of day care personnel," and the establishment of "professional salaries commensurate with

⁵ A 1994 study based on only three metropolitan areas (Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas; Charlotte, North Carolina; and San Fernando/Los Angeles, California) reported that women of color constituted 29 percent of regulated family child care providers, 41 percent of non-regulated family child care providers, and 72 percent of "relative care," which is described today as family, friend, and neighbor care (Galinsky et al., 1994a).

those in elementary education” (Keyserling, 1972). Anticipating criticism of such recommendations, the report argued:

Those interested in children must face the reality that good care is expensive, because good care requires people of ability and training who must be paid adequately if they are to be attracted to this field of work. The quality of day care depends on what we are willing to pay those who are responsible for it. We are shortchanging children when pay scales such as those reported by survey participants were found characteristic of so large a proportion of centers, both nonprofit and proprietary.

Clearly, when wage scales such as those reported occur so widely and on so large a scale, we are asking thousands of nonprofessional workers to subsidize the care of children of other women. We are also excluding from the day care field many women of intelligence and competence who cannot afford to accept salaries as low as some of those described, no matter how rewarding [it] is [to] work with youngsters in human terms. (Keyserling, 1972)

The NCJW report did not directly address whether wage increases should be related to specific levels of education and training, whether professional preparation should be similar to that of elementary school teachers, or whether increases should extend to all who work in “day care” settings, including both “nonprofessional workers” and those who are called “women of competence and intelligence” (Keyserling, 1972). Debate on these issues continued well beyond this time period.

Then as now, concerns about the inadequate salaries of child care workers competed with concerns about the cost of child care services for parents. The National Day Care Study conducted by Abt Associates noted:

While the great majority of these staff earn more than the minimum wage, day care classroom staff are paid far less than the average annual salary of public school teachers. Even those staff whose salaries are at the upper end of the average salary range are earning barely enough to support a family. (Ruopp et al., 1979)

Gwen Morgan, a nationally recognized child care expert at Wheelock College in Boston, Massachusetts, recounted her experiences as an advisor to the Abt Associates study:

Their first draft report suggested that there might be savings in larger group size and slightly lower ratios and that the savings could be used to reduce the price. Two of us in the advisory group objected because if there were savings through the staffing pattern, surely the savings should go to paying more to the staff. To his credit, Dick Ruopp [the study’s director] responded to those comments, and the study did analyze

the interrelationship between three factors: ratios, price, and salaries. It was their chart, showing how these factors affect each other, that led to a much better understanding of the systems issue, which later we began to call the “trilemma.”

The child care “trilemma” to which Morgan refers is the interrelationship among salaries, affordability, and supply, particularly in subsidized care. If salaries remained low, the Abt Associates study found, then more children could be served with the same amount of public dollars.

From the very earliest discussion of child care wages, the issue was overshadowed by other financial concerns that were considered more compelling by policymakers and even by advocates.

A Movement Among Movements

In many ways, the child care compensation movement emerged within the larger movement for affordable, high-quality child care, which itself was weakened and directionless for most of the 1970s and early 1980s. The veto of the Comprehensive Child Care Act in 1971 dispersed the broad-based coalition of groups that had worked for its passage, and no new solutions to the issues of affordability and quality readily replaced the vision of a comprehensive national program. Meanwhile, the debate about the role of women and the most appropriate environment for young children raged on.

Though prominent in the day, by and large, neither the labor movement nor the women’s movement actively pursued child care policy and organizing strategies during this period. Union organizing focused solely on workers in publicly contracted programs in Massachusetts, California, and New York. Elsewhere, there was minimal union interest in organizing the child care workforce, particularly in small programs that did not receive public dollars. According to Barbara Reisman, the former Executive Director of the Child Care Action Campaign and a trade union activist in the 1970s:

Women were just becoming more active and more accepted in leadership roles in the trade union movement. And child care [as a job benefit for union members with young children] was certainly brought up as a bargaining issue, but then it was one of those things that easily slid off the table in favor of straight wage increases.

The organized women’s movement was deeply ambivalent about taking a leading role around child care. In some ways, feminist activists wanted to get as far away from traditional women’s work as they possibly could (Maclean, 1999).

Demands for universal 24-hour child care notwithstanding, there was no focus on the working women who were actually providing care or on the issues of child care quality and children’s developmental needs. Child care problems also tended to highlight class distinctions among women, which at that time were not often openly discussed. Reisman commented on the problematic role of the women’s movement in moving these issues forward on a broader scale:

I’m not a historian of the feminist movement, so this is a personal view, but I think that the women’s movement, in its rebirth in the late 1960s, always put child care on the agenda—but it wasn’t up very high. That was partly because, to the extent that the women’s movement took up child care as an issue, there was a sense that it was reinforcing women’s traditional roles, so it was better to talk about other issues. At the same time, at the Child Care Action Campaign, one of the things that the leadership always said was, “Child care is not just a women’s issue.” So we worked hard to get more men involved. But in many ways, [the women’s movement] traded away the potential power of the people who are most passionate about the issue, which is mothers [parents].

The movement to organize clerical workers in the 1970s intersected both the labor movement and the women’s movement and serves as a useful comparison to the child care compensation movement. As noted in the documentary, *9to5: The Story of a Movement*, secretaries also felt invisible in the women’s movement (Bognar & Reichert, 2021). Like child care workers, their demands for better wages and working conditions were further fueled by their insistence on respect for their work, despite it being traditional women’s work. The secretaries put it this way, “We are referred to as ‘girls’ until we retire without pensions.” Similarly, [child care workers](#) decried the moniker of “babysitter,” as they called for “rights, raises, and respect.”

Traditional ECE Leaders Fail to Take a Stand on Compensation

Advocates focused on the needs of young children also ignored the compensation problem. Their energies were drawn into the massive transformations occurring within the ECE field during this period. In addition to an influx of teachers and providers resulting from the increasing demand for services, many new positions emerged for directors, trainers, resource and referral agency staff, owners of for-profit centers, and entrepreneurs of companies supplying materials to child care programs. Also at this time, for-profit child care business owners, whose success rested in large part on low wages for teaching staff, became organized into their own associations, creating new debates within the field about regulations, training, personnel management, and other business practices.

In particular, the child care workforce sought support from the prominent professional association in their field: the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#).⁶ Their efforts, however, went unrewarded. While the ranks of NAEYC swelled several-fold during this period, NAEYC leadership was composed primarily of academics and other highly educated, predominantly White professionals, only some of whom had direct experience working with children on a daily basis. Among those leaders, many had little familiarity with full-day child care, as the organization itself had its roots in the nursery school and part-day program tradition.

Profession or Occupation?

“Professionalism” became a watchword in the field. While the National Council of Jewish Women had distinguished between “nonprofessional aides” and “professional teachers” in its 1972 report, the notion that anyone working in child care was or could become a “professional” held tremendous sway by the end of the decade, particularly within NAEYC. **Child care advocates and leaders within NAEYC, however, often used the term “professionalism” to specifically exclude discussion of one’s economic needs as a worker, claiming that such a focus would “deflect our energies away from the quality of life we provide for children” (Katz, 1994).** Demands for better pay were subsequently set in opposition to professional behavior, despite the fact that sociologists identified increasing the economic well-being of its members among the benchmarks for the development of an “occupation” into a “profession” (Goode, 1960; Larson, 1997).

Adding to the tension among those promoting early childhood education as a profession was the use of the term “worker” by some child care teacher groups. These teacher activists believed that change would only occur through organizing. Despite the fact that most of these teachers were well educated, they believed that education and training had to be inextricably linked to better wages. **Leaders in the field, on the other hand, promoted the idea that achieving better education and training would automatically lead to higher pay.** This idea persists despite its failure to ensure salaries commensurate with education.

Key Players

Against this backdrop, small groups of child care teachers in a number of communities across the country—Ann Arbor, Michigan; Berkeley and San Francisco, California; Boston, Massachusetts; Madison, Wisconsin; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and New Haven, Connecticut—began to talk about child care wages and working conditions. While these groups emerged separately from one another, their members shared many characteristics. Predominantly White, young, and college educated (often in the field of early childhood education), they were veterans of the women’s,

⁶ Founded in 1926 as the National Association of Nursery Education (NANE), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) nearly tripled its membership between 1975 and 1995. By 2001, more than 100,000 members were organized into more than 450 affiliate groups throughout the country. For a discussion of the organization’s history, see Hewes, 1996; NAEYC, 2001; and Urban Institute, 2001.

civil rights, and anti-war movements of the late 1960s. They were also predominantly female, although a significant number of men working in centers were also drawn to these groups—well out of proportion to their overall numbers in the child care workforce.

Most of these teachers described their work with young children in political terms, as being central to women’s liberation, racial equality, and economic equity. As a result, they found deeply disturbing the contrast between their idealistic view of the high potential of child care work and the low value placed on it not only by society, but by ECE leaders, the women’s movement, and labor unions. Given the orientation of the times, it was an easy step to view improving child care jobs as a political cause.

Coauthor Peggy Haack, a child care teacher, later family child care provider, in Madison, Wisconsin, was active in MACWU, the Madison Area Child Care Workers United. Nancy deProse was a Boston-area teacher activist and a founding member of BADWU (Boston Area Day Care Workers United), the precursor of a statewide union movement in Massachusetts. Both women voiced similar perspectives during our conversations about the early phases of the movement:

Haack: My first child care experience was a very, very oppressive work environment that put me on the path to activism as soon as I got out of college. I thought, “Oh my God, what is happening here?” I got involved with several people who formed a support group and met for Sunday brunch. We were bonded by the fact that we knew that what was happening in child care was wrong. We were largely White and well educated. We were really idealistic, and we considered our child care work as political activity because we had been engaged in other social change movements and realized how those experiences had transformed us. We were all poor, but there was a strong sense of purpose and self-satisfaction in working for a cause we believed in so strongly. I think that is the interesting thing: I look back, and it was a really good time in my life. We were going to change the world! The people who were gathered together were all from small nonprofits, all taking care of poor children, engaged with families, and really wanting to make a change in society. We realized early on that we had to support each other because life was unfair. So at the same time that we were trying to change things, we were initially quite a cohesive group that enjoyed being together and working together.

deProse: I have always thought my education at Wheelock College [a private teacher education college in Boston, Massachusetts from 1888 to 2018] was somewhat responsible for my decision to organize. They did everything they could to convince me not to go into child care. They thought that it was not a professional field. I had received that good education from them and had been taught about quality early care and education programming. So, when I got to my first day care center, I realized

that the actual situation going on was nothing like they said early care and education should be.

Teachers in these groups were aware of the challenges facing the larger child care movement, as deProse explained:

The other thing that was going on was that people still were thinking women should be working at home, and so child care was totally not accepted as an industry that should even exist. Women were organizing around just being able to demand more child care. There really was not a provider movement or an advocacy movement or anything at that point. There were just women demanding child care, and child care workers trying to figure out what they were going to do to make it better. That was the scene in Massachusetts.... **During this period, people didn't want anyone to say anything bad about child care, because they thought it would keep society from supporting it. So, if we admitted that quality wasn't good or that pay was inadequate, it would just be fuel for those who thought that women should stay at home.**

In addition to their commitments to economic justice and racial equality, these teacher activists were, by and large, steeped in child development practice and theory and proud of that knowledge base. They believed their professionalism was melded with sensitivity to issues of economic justice, racial equality, and cultural diversity and felt stung by an emerging feminist critique of efforts to professionalize caregiving, which were believed to undermine low-income communities and cultures (Joffe, 1977). It often appeared as if feminist leaders only called upon child care workers when it came to caring for their own children or to provide child care during women's movement meetings and events.

Collaborations and Conflicts

During this period, collaborations began to develop between members of these fledgling child care worker groups and organized labor. There were numerous attempts to unionize, with varying degrees of success. While they did not necessarily agree on how to conduct a union campaign, these activists shared a central commitment to improving the wages and status of child care workers.

Simultaneously, many of these teacher activists experienced highly strained relationships within the ECE field, facing resistance both from co-workers and leaders as they sought to make compensation an issue. Joan Lombardi, who began her career as a Head Start teacher and then a center director, shared the following reflection when she was Director of the Child Care Bureau, under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, during the administration of President Bill Clinton (1993-2001):

In 1978 or '79, compensation was not an issue. People didn't talk about it. It was a time where people really felt like they should just do this work for "the love of kids," and that was it. Most of the work in the beginning was just documenting that [low pay] was a problem.

The notion that women worked for "pin money,"⁷ rather than to support themselves and their families, was only beginning to be displaced. Discomfort with talking about financial matters, coupled with a dominant ethos in the field that one worked with children out of love rather than financial need, squelched open discussion about poor compensation. Politics, age, and style also came into play. The child care teacher advocates were progressive activists, comfortable with challenging the status quo. Typically, they were a decade or two younger than much of the ECE leadership, and generational tensions of the time spilled over into these relationships. These teachers saw the leadership (or "Establishment") as stodgy, conservative, and out of date. The leadership saw them as unladylike, unprofessional, and self-involved. On more than one occasion, various teacher activists were pulled aside by leaders and mentors in the field and urged to "let the compensation issue go" and to focus instead on the real issues of classroom practice and the needs of children. To those who came of age in the "personal is political" era, this "guidance" seemed insulting and downright wrong.

Teachers Leading the Way

The organizational structures first adopted by various teacher groups around the country resembled consciousness-raising or support groups. Typically, they were small collectives that operated on consensus decision making. They created support networks, developed local newsletters, and did outreach in their communities.

The Berkeley group, which would ultimately evolve as the "organizational home" of the compensation movement, was an outgrowth of a class offered by a community adult school run by local progressive activists. It first called itself East Bay Workers in Child Care, offering drop-in support sessions for child care teachers and developing handouts addressing specific problems such as breaks, inadequate materials, unpaid overtime, and lack of input into decision making at their centers.

The Boston Area Day Care Workers United (BADWU) was the first teacher group to affiliate with a union. In the mid 1970s, BADWU affiliated with the largely healthcare-oriented Union 1199 but found that, at least in that area of the country, the union was not prepared to deal with small child care workplaces. They next affiliated with District 65, United Auto Workers (UAW), which had a progressive and democratic tradition as well as extensive experience in organizing both small and large workplaces. The Madison Area Child Care Workers United (MACWU), which modeled its name after the Boston group, followed in their footsteps in the early 1980s after a failed

⁷ "Pin money" means a small amount of money used for nonessentials. The term originally referred to the budget a husband would allocate his wife for clothing and other personal expenses. The phrase was used to belittle women's wages.

effort to unionize with a small independent union of restaurant workers. Although not pursuing unionization, groups in Ann Arbor, Minneapolis, and elsewhere shared the collective structure. While initially formed by teachers, some expanded to include home-based providers, directors, and others who were committed to improving child care compensation.

In many ways, these early activists saw themselves as isolated warriors, because the other constituencies from which they had emerged or with whom they identified—the women’s movement, the early education field, and/or the labor movement—had little interest in dealing with the economic needs of child care workers. This isolation made their connections with one another all the more important.

In 1979, at the annual NAEYC conference in Atlanta, members of the Berkeley group made a presentation about working conditions and status, which they described in the *Child Care Employee News* as “raising more eyebrows than support” (Child Care Employee Project [CCEP], 1982c). At the 1980 NAEYC conference in San Francisco, activists from throughout California, as well as Madison, Ann Arbor, Boston, and Minneapolis, found each other and agreed to plan a session on employee issues for the following year in Detroit. Those who were present at the 1981 session recalled the irony and symbolism of having more people on the panel than in the audience for this daylong event.

The following year, at the association’s conference in Washington, D.C., these same groups formed the Child Care Employee Caucus within NAEYC. Later known as the Worthy Wage Caucus (hereafter, the Caucus), this coalition articulated specific demands to make NAEYC more responsive to the needs of those who work directly with young children. With a primary focus on issues of professional development, NAEYC was highly resistant to most of the Caucus’s demands at the time. Despite the largely negative response, NAEYC had the benefit of solidifying the Caucus as an opposition force and further fortifying the growing ties among its members.

Over the next two decades, the Caucus would serve as a vehicle for sharing information and raising awareness (some might say, a ruckus) within the larger professional community. In 1981, the California-based Child Care Employee Project (CCEP), formerly called East Bay Workers in Child Care, received funding from the Rosenberg Foundation to produce a national newsletter for the movement, and the following year, CCEP agreed to take on the coordination of the Caucus. During this initial phase, there was a high level of agreement among the member groups, even though they were pursuing somewhat different strategies, as discussed below. They all shared a loosely defined expectation that NAEYC would eventually carry the mantle of child care workers’ needs, as had occurred for public school teachers within such organizations as the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. But enlisting official NAEYC support for the cause proved to be a much more formidable challenge than activists anticipated.

Initial Demands of the Child Care Employee Caucus to NAEYC Leadership

These were the very first demands made by the newly formed Caucus in 1983:

- Establish a regular column in the NAEYC journal *Young Children* dealing with working conditions;
- Earmark some NAEYC membership action grants for projects that support worker concerns;*
- Increase NAEYC members' involvement in selecting conference topics;
- Increase employee-related conference sessions;*
- Create a sliding fee scale for conference registration based on salary; and
- Arrange accommodations at the conference that child care workers can afford.

Throughout the 1980s until the mid-1990s, when NAEYC Leadership eliminated it, Caucus members used the **Membership Expression of Opinion** before the NAEYC Governing Board at the annual conference as the main vehicle for publicizing its concerns. Along with other progressive activists within the organization who were focused on issues of anti-bias education, gay and lesbian rights, and anti-violence issues, Caucus members staged creative and elaborate displays and demonstrations. This “guerrilla theater” served to draw many new supporters to the various causes and also greatly increased the rancor between the activists and the NAEYC leadership. Those who had come to child care through their progressive politics saw nothing wrong with this mode of protest, whereas many in the organization were surprised or put off by it.

* These were the only two demands that were met to some extent. Read more in [“NAEYC: Nap Time Over?”](#) (CCEP, 1982-1983).

Primary Assumptions and Key Strategies

Reflecting the influences of their previous political activities, teachers in activist groups understood that improving the wages, working conditions, and status of child care workers would require a variety of strategies. Traditional workplace organizing was viewed as an important tool for improving child care jobs, but it was also necessary to pursue a public policy strategy to leverage additional public resources beyond parent fees in order to create the necessary funding base for change. **From the onset, this movement was about more than improving the lot of child care workers: they directly connected the well-being of children and families with their own well-being.** Teacher advocates were explicit about the link between the quality of child care jobs and the quality of services. They wanted more respect and better pay for themselves, but they were just as deeply committed to upgrading the care and education of young children and to making child care affordable and accessible for all families. The earliest materials of the [Child Care Employee Project](#) carried the following statement, which was echoed in the writings of other groups:

CCEP believes that the quality of care children receive is directly linked to the working conditions of their caregivers. Low pay, unpaid overtime, lack of benefits, and little input into decision making create tension in programs and lead to high staff turnover. The exit of trained staff from the field gnaws away at the morale of those who remain and limits efforts to build consistent, responsive environments for children. (CCEP, 1982a)

While these groups shared a high level of agreement about the nature and consequences of the problems, various groups emphasized different strategies. For example, early on, CCEP focused on documenting the problem, while [BADWU](#) committed its energy to organizing and state policy work. But along with its union drive and its coalition work on state policy with other social service and trade union groups, BADWU also worked on a statewide salary and benefits survey in coordination with the Boston-area resource and referral agency. Likewise, CCEP worked closely with District 65 members who were seeking to organize for-profit child care centers in Northern California, while they operated a child care worker support group, engaged in local political campaigns, and developed many training and educational materials for teachers and providers.

All of the groups attacked the problem from several directions, recognizing that no single strategy would work by itself and learning from each other's successes and failures. While they shared a belief in public support for an expanded, high-quality system for the education and care of young children, there were few specific demands or campaigns addressing financing and public resources at this point in time. Throughout this period, there were debates within and among the groups, but conflicts over strategy seldom surfaced very openly, perhaps because the ongoing conflicts with groups outside of the Caucus served to limit internal dissension.

The most active groups of the period—working in Madison, Boston, Minneapolis, Berkeley, and Ann Arbor—all articulated ambitious agendas for themselves. Serving as an example of these groups, the Boston group BADWU articulated a three-pronged mission, as recalled by Nancy deProse: 1) to organize workplaces; 2) to bring people together around discussions of how to improve quality of care in our centers; and 3) to bring people together around political action. Written materials from BADWU in this period identified the following specific goals:

- To acknowledge that child care is worthwhile work;
- To give workers input into their working conditions and the quality of care through a union contract;
- To make child care work a career that people can consider staying in by increasing pay and benefits, developing stable and secure funding sources, and offering free in-service training;
- To develop the attitude that child care is an economically essential program in this country and strengthen parental options for their children’s care; and
- To educate child care workers about the politics of day care and include them in policy formulation, advocacy, and lobbying (CCEP, 1982b).

CCEP recognized the importance of highlighting the problems faced by child care workers and enlisted the support of those who could help them conduct a credible study. Bob Fitzgerald of the National Jury Project helped train teacher volunteers in the San Francisco Bay Area to collect data. Emily Werner of UC Davis assisted in data analysis. Staff at BANANAS Resource and Referral (Oakland) and the San Francisco Children’s Council provided support in the development and execution of a survey. The entire study budget of \$200 was raised through events and donations, part of which went to help one of the teachers buy an appropriate outfit for visiting centers!

The CCEP study led to the article, “[Who’s Minding the Child Care Workers? A Look at Staff Burn-out](#)” (Whitebook et al., 1981), published in *Children Today* and based on a study in which 95 San Francisco child care teachers were surveyed. The study identified low pay as the major source of staff burn-out and turnover. Circulated among teachers and advocates throughout the country, this article laid out the following blueprint for change, including research, policy work, organizing, and training:

To meet the needs of child care staff for a decent income and of parents for affordable services, either government or industry will have to bear its share of the cost. Obtaining increased financial support will require changing the prevailing view that child care is unskilled work and enhancing public appreciation of it. As long as child care work is considered unskilled, this will be reflected in its pay and status.

Thus, already-overworked child care staff members must join together to inform the public about their work's value and the level of skill required. This involves informing legislators and policymakers of work conditions and defining the minimum employment standards that need to be included in future legislation and guides for establishing centers. It requires pressuring organizations that represent child care workers, like the National Association for the Education of Young Children, to focus more of their resources on working conditions. Finally, organizations might be created to help workers share ideas about break and substitute policies, contracts, and health insurance and to offer workers support.

Amelioration of the situation that leads to burn-out requires changes within centers and in the broader community. Tackling burn-out by reassessing a center's existing organization can be time-consuming and initially awkward. But such a process can also have the effect of energizing staff and improving work relations by helping workers see that they are not personally responsible for their unsatisfactory working conditions. It can be a valuable beginning in addressing the larger tasks that face the field: publicizing and legitimizing child care work and allocating to it the social and financial resources it needs and deserves. (Whitebook et al., 1981)



NorthStar Learning Center, New Bedford, Massachusetts. Photo courtesy Bob French.

worked with young children in child care settings. In part, this assertion may have reflected the feminist perspective held by teacher activists that emphasized the hidden competencies involved in traditional women's work. It may also have reflected the composition of the teacher activist groups that were largely women with high levels of formal education and specialized early childhood training.

This strategy blueprint from 1981 retains relevance in 2023, as the work of caring for young children remains undervalued and our politicians and industry leaders fail to allocate the social and financial resources the work needs and deserves. The skills required to do the work, however, are now more clearly articulated, and more training and education is required. In 1981, the assertion that child care was skilled work was contradicted by the fact that very little was required in the way of pre- or in-service training for those who

Accomplishments, Missteps, and Challenges

Despite the often-negative reception to their message, teacher activist groups accomplished an important shift within the ECE field.

Visibility

Simply put, child care teachers became visible in ways they rarely had before. Gwen Morgan emphasized that there was considerable discussion at the time about child care quality and looking at the “whole picture”:

What changed, I think, was that [...] you didn't just go away. You kept coming back with the facts and the figures and the organizing. So, I think that gave people a much broader sense that there's no way you can solve child care problems at the expense of the people who work in child care.

It became more and more difficult to ignore the organized groups of teachers at conferences and meetings, particularly in combination with reports that documented their low pay and inadequate benefits. While many of the issues raised had already been articulated by the National Council of Jewish Women in the early 1970s, there was something more compelling in the fact that teachers themselves were now raising them. These groups made the profession as a whole take notice of child care workers, whether they wanted to or not. Although their words and efforts did not quickly move the field as a whole to action, their messages resonated with many center staff, family child care providers, researchers, trainers, and other practitioners, many of whom would join the movement over the next decade.

Through their various activities, these groups were also developing much-needed language for discussing how staff working conditions influenced children's learning environments and the extent to which wages should be emphasized over other workplace issues. The initial writings and discussions among these groups jump-started a process of defining the new movement's most pressing issues.

The early studies conducted by CCEP, the Minnesota Child Care Workers' Alliance, University of Michigan in Ann Arbor researcher Kathy Modigliani (1986), and others also broke important ground in the arena of “action research.” Using their extensive knowledge of the child care world, they developed and piloted surveys of teachers and providers that remain the basis of much of the workforce research done today. Recognizing the limits of their own fledgling research skills, child care teachers enlisted the help of more established academics and activists and were able to produce credible breakthrough reports.

Perhaps most importantly, teacher activists were becoming increasingly aware of how these data could be used not only to advance, but also to hinder the cause. CCEP, in particular, began to develop information and share resources to help other teacher activists “make salary statistics work for, not against you” (CCEP, 1986).

Exploring Social Change Strategies

The other major contribution of these groups during this period was to explore the applicability of popular social change strategies—most notably, comparable worth and unionization—to the plight of child care teachers. Doing so revealed the particular challenges facing the child care workforce. In the early 1980s, comparable worth provided the theoretical basis for much of the organizing around pay equity and affirmative action for women in other industries, including clerical workers and others employed in hospitals and on college campuses (Maclean, 1999). But early on, child care activists realized that the structure of most of their industry—small jobs that typically did not employ other classifications of male workers—made comparable worth more useful as a public awareness strategy than as a specific method to remedy discrimination, which could not legally be proven in most child care settings (Whitebook & Ginsburg, 1985).

The active communities had widely varying experiences related to union organizing, shaped largely by different circumstances in their states with respect to prior organizing and the structure of public funding of child care for low-income families. As a result, a great deal of discussion in the early days of the movement focused on the applicability of unionization to the child care workforce. In California, for example, many of the publicly funded centers housed in the public schools had been unionized shortly after World War II, and many Head Start programs in Southern California were unionized in the 1960s. Due to cuts in the state budget, later attempts in the 1970s to unionize community-based, state-subsidized nonprofits in San Francisco were unsuccessful. In addition, many of the teachers who were active in CCEP were working in small independent nonprofits that were unable to attract the unions’ attention. In contrast, a wide network of state-contracted centers in Massachusetts lent itself more readily to the successful organizing drive begun by BADWU and District 65 in the late 1970s. Madison activists had only moderate success with unionizing city-funded centers serving low-income families on vouchers. Without some significant source of public funding or other source of funds, there was little to bargain over that didn’t lead to higher costs for parents.

As progressive activists, these teachers were generally pro-union in principle, whether they were engaged in a union-organizing drive or not. They understood that workers in other occupations had traditionally improved their jobs through collective-bargaining strategies and saw the need for an organization to protect and represent child care workers on the job as well as in the larger political arena.

They also saw that a union contract could ensure manageable teacher:child ratios, adequate break and classroom preparation time, and greater staff input into decision making, which would lead to improved care for children. Nancy deProsse recalled:

When we started the idea of a union in the Seventies, we did not think about anything else as a possible solution. We needed to have a worker's say in what was going on in child care, and that seemed to be the only way to go at it. So that is what started it here. We really believed unionization was going to be what worked for us because it had worked for other professions.

A 1983 article in the *Child Care Employee News* delineated the many positive reasons to unionize as one response to the run-of-the mill anti-unionism that was so prevalent at the time and frequently used by opponents to discredit Child Care Employee Caucus members, CCEP, and the movement as a whole. The article also outlined the following barriers to union organizing in child care:

- Small shops in child care deliver little in dues revenue to unions;
- Workers organizing in small workplaces are easily identified and vulnerable;
- Unions are resistant to organizing such a fragmented workforce, particularly given high levels of staff turnover; and
- Unions can be resistant to adapting their traditional strategies to the specific needs of child care worksites, particularly the close personal relationships between clients and workers and sometimes between management [directors] and staff (CCEP, 1983).

Teachers voiced concern about becoming lost within a larger organization, where many fellow union members might have stereotyped or negative views of child care and child care workers. In California, this concern was largely traceable to the experience of school-based child care center teachers, who had joined a public school teachers' union. Many felt they had become second-class citizens within the union. Some teacher activists also feared that by unionizing, they might become isolated from or "lost to" the larger compensation movement. According to Peggy Haack, some Madison teachers found it difficult to maintain a satisfying relationship with a union:

In Wisconsin, we were at a disadvantage because we did not have contracted centers. Wisconsin always had a voucher system, and so we did not have the leverage that others did to go after the big programs and organize them. Other types of child care programs didn't necessarily fit with the union. As much as it seemed like the right path, we did not know how to do it, people were not prepared to do it, it took so much time to accomplish, and it was not a very compassionate model. Key leadership roles in the fledgling union movement were held by men, and in a female-dominated field, that put off some people.

Developing Teacher Voices

The concept of “teacher voice” stood out as a unique feature of the child care movement from its inception. The on-the-job experiences of teachers were the cornerstone of the movement, and they were reflected in the framing of the issues and strategies, as well as in the development of resource materials. The groups that were not actively involved in union organizing at this point—such as CCEP, the Minneapolis Child Care Workers Alliance, some of the MACWU teachers, and the Ann Arbor group—nonetheless developed strategies to support community organizing and to build teacher skills as advocates and leaders. This emphasis on teacher voices reflected a synthesis of the consciousness-raising strategies many had learned in the women’s movement and the ECE field’s emphasis on the importance of making each individual feel nurtured and respected.

A Movement Lacking Resources

Accomplishments notwithstanding, the movement suffered from certain weaknesses. First and foremost, it was hampered by woefully inadequate financial resources with which to build a strong organization. Because it was outside the mainstream of early childhood groups, there was limited support available from charitable organizations. With the exception of the San Francisco-based Rosenberg Foundation, an early supporter of CCEP, philanthropic funding was scarce. And because the child care compensation issue had not yet been embraced by a larger progressive community, foundation dollars would not be forthcoming for several more years. Union resources provided some support for child care activism in Boston, Madison, and Northern California, but it was always tight.

Child care compensation was a “bake sale” movement, although the goods most commonly sold were buttons, bumper stickers, and t-shirts with such slogans as “Give a Child Care Worker a Break” and “Rights, Raises, Respect.” Individual donations and memberships provided some support, but given the limited resources of the core constituency, there was resistance to charging more than a nominal fee, if any, for most services.⁸

The issue of resources was not only a challenge on the organizational level: the early leaders of the movement also understood the need for a large investment of public funds in child care to adequately address the needs of parents, children, and ECE workers. But with the defeat of national child care legislation, a tight economy, and a growing critique of federal investment in human services, there was a reluctance to make a call for universal public funding the centerpiece of its strategy. A later “devolution” of federal funding to the states meant that local and statewide solutions would become ever more important, but as yet, there were no models for creative policy

⁸ NAEYC dues at the time were about \$30 per year. Although relatively low for a professional organization membership, this amount was beyond the reach of many who worked with children. In contrast, CCEP initially charged \$5 per year for its newsletter but would always make it available for free. This accessible fee, however, did not cover most of CCEP’s expenses.

initiatives. As Joan Lombardi noted, “In the Eighties, there was still a sense [at the policy level] of not knowing what to do about wages.”

By this time, publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs had been established in several states, and the movement was aware from salary studies that these programs paid higher salaries. However, public pre-kindergarten programs were not viewed as a viable strategy in the early years. Many of these programs operated only half day, and most movement activists were focused on expanding full-day child care services for working parents.

The Shifting Composition of Activist Groups

The composition of the early activist groups was also problematic in terms of building a movement that would represent the child care workforce as a whole. Most of the early teacher-leaders were White, under 35, and college educated at a time when women of color and workers with fewer years of education were increasingly entering the field. As the movement matured and diversified, there was a gap between the demographics of the founding leaders and many of their constituents. Furthermore, the roots of the movement lay in the center-based sector of the child care industry. None of the early groups anticipated the tremendous shift toward family child care in the coming decade. They would have to struggle to rethink their relationship to family child care providers, whom they often saw as business people rather than fellow child care practitioners with many common concerns.

There was also the problem of teacher-leaders in these groups moving out of the classroom and away from teaching to become center directors, resource and referral agency staff, or teacher educators or to assume other nonclassroom roles, often in order to support themselves and their families more adequately. Many of the early allies of the movement were also drawn from those who had left the classroom. Thus, while the groups represented child care teachers, they were not necessarily teacher-led. CCEP addressed this problem initially by ensuring that at least 50 percent of its board members would be teachers or providers and, frequently, by hiring part-time staff who also worked part time in the classroom. This issue of being representative of the workforce would call out for resolution as the movement grew.

Professionalism: An Internal Conflict

As addressed previously, the movement also experienced internal conflict around the issue of professionalism. On the one hand, many teacher activists resisted the focus on increasing training and education without addressing the economic realities of child care work. They firmly rejected the notion that increased levels of education would automatically deliver better pay and respect. Many teachers who had a background in the labor movement and the left felt uncomfortable with language around professionalism that they considered elitist.

On the other hand, many of these same teachers were well trained in child development. They considered themselves “professionals” and believed strongly that people working with young children should receive child-related training. While the early movement often emphasized the need for accessible, affordable training and for keeping child care affordable for parents, activists were often unable to counter the perception that they were interested only in wages to the exclusion of all other “professional” concerns.

Underestimating the Opposition

The early movement was fueled by its members’ firm belief in the righteousness of their cause, as well as their experiences from the 1960s that led them to believe they had the power to transform society. To this generation of activists who had witnessed the anti-war, civil rights, and women’s movements, exposing oppression and organizing around it were seen as the most important steps toward change. This worldview allowed these teachers to take on the formidable task of restructuring how society perceived the care of young children. **It also meant that these activist teachers underestimated their opposition, spread themselves too thin, and did not think strategically enough about organizing a power base**—in part, because of their emphasis on individual transformation and consciousness-raising. While they recognized the limitations of existing organizations such as labor unions and NAEYC, they did not pay enough attention to building their own organization, even as it became increasingly clear that not all child care workers would be able or willing to unionize and that NAEYC was unlikely to reinvent itself as a teacher and provider organization. The latter was particularly true given NAEYC’s growth in membership from other sectors of the field, including profit-making operations whose success rested largely on the low wages of teachers.

CCEP became the de facto national group after securing some limited funding to coordinate local efforts around the country. However, CCEP’s membership revenue was minimal, and it never figured out how to offer services (such as health insurance) that would attract a substantially larger membership base. CCEP was also continuing its local education and organizing work in Northern California. A continual reliance on philanthropic support would prove to be a very shaky foundation on which to build the lead organization in the movement.

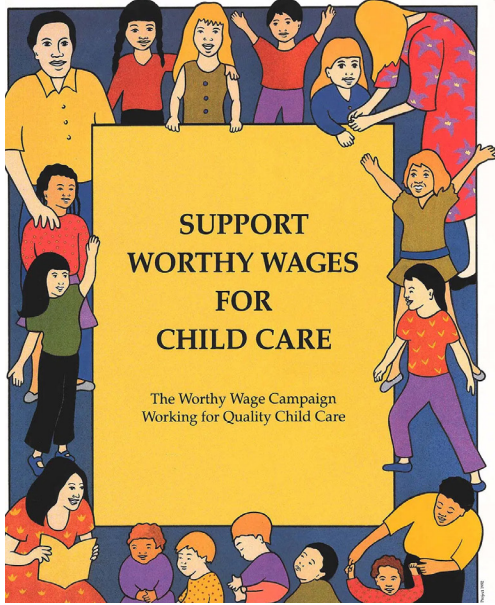
As this first phase of the child care compensation movement drew to a close, it faced significant internal and external challenges:

- How to build its ranks to reflect the changing child care workforce;
- How to develop a power base and an organization led by teachers and providers, given the limits of existing unions and professional organizations;
- How to legitimize the voices and needs of child care workers and how to build better alliances, within and beyond the established child care community;
- How to articulate goals that simultaneously embraced the commitment to education and training and to higher wages;
- How to design winnable policy reforms, given the diverse and under-resourced structure of the industry; and
- How to develop strategies that would draw public attention to the problems of child care workers.



Child Care Employee Project postcard by Jean Berlfein.

Worthy Wages as the Key to Better Child Care: 1985-1995



This second phase of the child care compensation movement began addressing the questions and challenges that emerged from the work of the first era: building individual and organizational power; creating alliances outside the child care community; articulating clear and specific goals; designing winnable policy solutions; and continuing to draw attention to the problems of child care workers.

But tremendous changes occurred during the decade spanning the late 1980s and early 1990s. Fueled by the ongoing influx of mothers with young children into the labor force, expansion in the industry gave rise to new institutions, strengthened previously ignored or weak sectors, and diversified the number and types of players

in the field. Resource and referral agencies proliferated, supported by corporate as well as state dollars. For-profit child care chains mushroomed and joined with conservatives to exert pressure on policymakers to limit standards, expand vouchers as the vehicle for subsidizing low-income families, and allow for-profit programs to access public subsidies.

The Setting

Major Changes in Child Care

Child care advocates and other stakeholders once again began to organize around federal child care policy, building a broad coalition around the Act for Better Child Care (ABC), which ultimately became the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)(Cohen, 2001).

Attention also focused on family child care as never before. Activists and service agency staff began to understand the large proportion of child care that this sector provided, and they grappled with how to offer training and other support services that meshed with the particular needs of home-based providers. As Arlyce Currie of BANANAS Child Care Resource and Referral based in Oakland, California, observed:

Family child care—at least in this state—was, for the most part, underground. Very few people were licensed, let alone doing that kind of care in any recognized way. In order to get the supply up, because of the burgeoning need at that point, a lot of us in resource and referral and in the teaching institutions started focusing on family child care.

Many child care supporters latched on to family child care as the best way to build the supply of services, particularly for children under the age of three. For some, the pull toward home-based care was economic, since it was seen as a cheaper vehicle than contracted centers for serving low-income families. Meanwhile, the ECE field was adjusting to the notion that the child care workforce included both center- and home-based providers and that public dollars would also be distributed to unlicensed care under the mantle of “parental choice.”

During this decade, awareness about child care infused society as never before. As Nancy deProse noted, “Child care was more accepted by the Eighties than it had been in the early Seventies,” which opened up new possibilities in policy and organizing. While policy discussion still focused primarily on the needs of low-income families, the renewed and broader interest in child care reflected its emergence as a middle-class phenomenon. Families across the economic spectrum were struggling to meet their child care needs, and employers of relatively affluent white-collar workers were beginning to feel more pressure around this and other work and family issues. **Driving the expanded demand for child care were the loss of earning power in real wages for most American workers, soaring divorce rates, and the rising feminization of poverty, all of which increased the number of dual-parent and single-parent working families.**

Public Policy Creates Challenges

Public policy moved in two contradictory directions during this period: on one hand, the lowest-paid sectors of the workforce expanded, making it harder to improve child care salaries, and on the other, new initiatives were developed that implied potential improvements for many, yet resulted in concrete gains for relatively few. The rapid expansion of the voucher system meant that contracted programs, which traditionally had negotiated better reimbursement rates and paid higher salaries, faced major new competition: for-profit and home-based care was often cheaper and tended to offer substantially lower worker earnings. Vouchers also led to market rate studies that, in an under-resourced market, placed the better-paying programs and providers at a disadvantage. Nancy deProse recalled the scene in Massachusetts:

There was less accountability as the market rates were put into place, but it has also really impacted the unionized workers’ ability to get wage increases and better benefits. Once you have a market rate, reimbursements are keyed to a certain level of those rates, and those at the top end [such as unionized centers] can’t increase their levels.

Shannah Kurland of Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE), a Rhode Island group that helped family child care providers organize for better pay and benefits, added:

The whole concept of using a market rate in an industry that is so artificially deflated just keeps rates low. It is a stupid policy for those of us trying to improve jobs, although it is smart for the state because it keeps costs down. But for a lot of our providers, [the voucher system] has actually been driving up their pay because they are at the very bottom tier of a low market. So it is a short-term gain, but it is not a long-term solution.

Helen Blank of the Children’s Defense Fund and Joan Lombardi recalled a similar phenomenon:

Blank: [With the advent of vouchers], now you couldn’t craft a salary strategy that affected the whole child care system. Vouchers were a major setback in terms of being able to tackle compensation.

Lombardi: I think that was the big policy shift that affected whether we would move forward with adequate salaries. If we had gotten the Comprehensive Child Development Act in 1971, it would have funded programs. We would have had a set number of programs, infusing them with program standards, including staffing requirements. **Although vouchers have given parents some flexibility—especially those who work on the weekends and at night, and that’s very important—on the salary side, they have become part of the challenge.**

Public Policy Creates Opportunities

During this same period, the two largest federally supported ECE systems demonstrated that public dollars could be used to dramatically improve salaries and reward professional development for child care teachers and providers. The 1990 Head Start Expansion and Quality Improvement Act (later renewed) led to the allocation of some \$470 million in salary increases for approximately 100,000 Head Start personnel: an average per-employee increase of about \$1,500 per year from 1991 through 1994. In military child care, the Caregiver Personnel Pay Plan was launched in 1989 to create an ongoing system-wide program linking training with increased compensation. As Helen Blank observed:

With the Head Start reauthorization [in 1990], we were able to put in the quality and salary set-aside provisions, and you had members of Congress on both sides avidly supporting it. **That was another turning point, because the issue of wages in this field was now recognized in federal law.**

Joan Lombardi was employed then as the liaison in Washington, D.C., for the Child Care Employee Project, and along with others, she advocated successfully to include improved compensation as a legitimate “quality enhancement activity” for states and communities to pursue with CCDBG funds. The availability of this federal funding stimulated a variety of creative experiments and models for improving compensation at the state level across all sectors of the ECE industry and led to new professional development opportunities for many center-based teachers and home-based providers (Montilla et al., 2001).

In California, for example, the Child Care Employee Project (CCEP), in conjunction with a local community college, led the effort to secure CCDBG funds to expand an Early Childhood Mentor Program that provided sizeable stipends to experienced, well-educated teachers who mentored novices in the field (CCEP, 1991). This initiative grew from a small pilot project to a statewide, state-supported project that ultimately reached thousands of teachers, directors, and family child care providers.

In North Carolina, the T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Program likewise emerged during this period. This model, which also offers bonuses or stipends for participants who advance in their level of education, expanded to other states around the country. T.E.A.C.H began with private funding and, by the second year, was supported through public funding, which continues to the present. Policy initiatives to improve salaries in Massachusetts and New York also raised new possibilities for the movement, as discussed in the next section.



Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Photo courtesy Rosemarie Vardell, photographer unknown.

With the expansion of child care services, the ranks of the child care workforce soared. While the workforce continued to be predominantly female, the proportion of women of color caring for and educating young children increased. Public dollars—once the exclusive domain of better-paying nonprofit or government-operated center programs—were now diffused across all sectors of the industry, fueling the expansion not only of child care services, but of lower-paying child care jobs (Tuominen, 2001). Center-based workers were still better educated than women in other parts of the child care field and the workforce as a whole, but the first signs emerged that formal educational levels were slipping in the ECE sector (Whitebook et al., 1993).

Turnover rates also began to soar, more than doubling in center-based care and reaching nearly 40 percent per year. During this period, wages for center-based child care workers, as for many other low-wage workers, failed to keep pace with inflation (CCEP, 1988).

Key Players

An Issue Becomes a Movement

From 1985 to 1995, the fledgling efforts of earlier years blossomed into a creative, identifiable movement. By demonstrating the link between low pay and poor-quality care, the widely publicized [National Child Care Staffing Study](#) (Whitebook et al., 1990) drew supporters into the movement who had previously been reluctant but now felt more comfortable talking about compensation as it related to the well-being of children. The study carried more legitimacy and drew more attention than previous research, partly because CCEP conducted it jointly with respected researchers Carollee Howes (University of California at Los Angeles) and Deborah Phillips (University of Virginia), but also because it broke new ground in linking the adult work environment with children’s learning environment, exposing the relationship between low wages and the widespread problem of poor-quality care. Several noted researchers also conducted a sub-study of parents and child care quality, which lent further credence to staffing issues and to the National Child Care Staffing Study itself (Howes et al., 1995).

Much of the transformation and growth of the movement during this period resulted from the explosion of grassroots activity embodied by the Worthy Wage Campaign, founded in 1991. During the second half of the 1980s, the original groups involved in the Child Care Employee Caucus continued to meet and strengthen their ties with one another. They also stepped up their local policy and organizing activities and began working nationally by providing input to the Act for Better Child Care (ABC) Coalition, focusing on gaining support for compensation efforts at the state level. At the 1989 NAEYC Conference immediately following the October release of the National Child Care Staffing Study, Caucus members sensed the groundswell of energy around staffing issues that the study had ignited.

Two of the active Caucus communities that were also National Child Care Staffing Study sites—Boston and Seattle—seized upon the phrase used by the authors to describe the plight of child care workers: “Worthy Work, Worthless Wages.”⁹ In the spring of 1990, Seattle’s annual child care parade took “worthy wages” as its theme, using the opportunity to publicize the study findings and to engage the public with the issue.

Also that spring, Massachusetts activists launched a statewide Campaign for Worthy Wages, organizing proactively to fight proposed cutbacks in child care and human services funding. They kicked off the campaign by hosting four regional forums, drawing more than 300 teachers and advocates. A convention of “child care workers for worthy wages” followed, aiming to empower teachers as a political force and to adopt a child care teachers’ “quality issues platform” to be used in the upcoming election campaign season.

⁹ This slogan was coined by John Lawrence, Staff Director for Congressman George Miller (D-California).

At the Fall 1990 NAEYC conference, hopes were high for the compensation movement as Caucus members joined with other child care advocates to celebrate the passage of the Child Care and Development Block Grant, especially its provision allowing federal dollars to be used for compensation enhancement activities in the states.

In the spring of 1991, the Seattle community galvanized child care worker advocates around the country by combining their annual spring child care parade, entitled “Child Care on the Move for Worthy Wages,” with a one-day walkout or closure by some 75 centers for part or all of the day. The goal was to get more parents involved in demonstrating the severity of the child care staffing crisis to their employers, the government, and the general public. The parade drew 1,800 teachers, parents, center directors, child care advocates, and children, along with the Mayor of Seattle, and earned widespread press coverage. Following the parade, a “child care summit” took place to design policy, teacher empowerment, and organizing strategies. The Seattle campaign—and teacher educators and authors Margie Carter and Deb Curtis, in particular—continued to develop many creative public displays, props, and videos to draw people into the movement (Carter & Curtis, 1993, 1996, 1997).

In the summer of 1991, members of the Child Care Employee Caucus began seriously discussing a coordinated national walkout or campaign, and the CCEP newsletter invited feedback on the effort. Planners wondered whether the Caucus or CCEP had the ability to lead such an effort and whether a significant segment of the field would actually support it. They also worried that a walkout might pit teachers against parents and directors. In the end, these concerns led activists to decide on a multi-year public awareness campaign as the appropriate next step (CCEP, 1992a, 1992b; Whitebook & Bellm, 1999).

The Worthy Wage Campaign

Meanwhile, activists became discouraged as the political process to implement the CCDBG unfolded, drastically limiting the percentage of funds that states could use to upgrade child care quality. In addition, it had become clear that few states were taking advantage of the compensation provision in their quality enhancement plans. This sobering information reinforced the need for a more visible national grassroots movement, and the Child Care Employee Caucus made plans to launch a national Worthy Wage Campaign (hereafter, the Campaign) at the 1991 NAEYC Conference in Denver. The leaders made several assumptions from the outset: the Campaign would be a multi-year effort (the original plan was for five years, although the Campaign continued beyond that), and it would be defined as a public awareness campaign (CCEP, 1992c).

Worthy Wage Campaign Principles

Whether we call ourselves child care workers, family child care providers, preschool or early childhood teachers, teacher assistants, or caregivers, we are working in a field where most employees are underpaid and undervalued—a field that is continually losing its best workers because of poor wages and benefits.

The Worthy Wage Campaign is a five-year grassroots effort to empower ourselves and mobilize to reverse this child care staffing crisis. It is organized around the following three principles:

- To create a unified voice for the concerns of the early care and education workforce at the national, state, and local levels;
- To increase the value and respect for those who provide early care and education through improving their wages, benefits, working conditions, and training opportunities;
- To promote the accessibility and affordability of high-quality early care and education options that meet the diverse needs of children and families.

Each year, the focal point to the Campaign is a nationwide Worthy Wage Day. (CCEP, 1992d)

The organizers flooded the conference with stickers announcing the first annual Worthy Wage Day, to be held the following April during NAEYC’s annual Week of the Young Child. They also filled the convention and hotel hallways with child-size “worthy wage babies” made by the Seattle activists, holding signs with facts about the staffing crisis, the plight of child care workers, and the connection between poor jobs and poor-quality care. As conference attendees filed in for the opening keynote session, Caucus members handed out stickers and staged a mock funeral procession,¹⁰ carrying a coffin and using slogans such as “Bury dead-end jobs” and “Don’t let our profession die.” Nearly the entire crowd applauded, stood, and joined the chant, “Stand up for worthy wages.” As recounted in the Winter 1992 *Child Care Employee News*:

The most dramatic story thus far is surely the campaign waged by NAEYC members to gain their organization’s endorsement at the annual conference. The next day (after the keynote), when NAEYC’s Quality, Compensation and Affordability Committee failed to endorse the Worthy Wage Campaign, conference attendees hit the ceiling. At

¹⁰ The tension between Caucus members and some of the NAEYC leadership became intense. The latter considered the “mock funeral” to be in extreme bad taste and asked for an apology, while Caucus members felt that such guerrilla theater was a legitimate vehicle for drawing people to their cause. More than any other, this moment captured the generational and political differences between the two groups.

the Members' Expression of Opinion session on Saturday night, dozens of teachers, AEYC affiliate reps, family day care providers, and others came forward to insist that the national body take a more aggressive stand now on compensation issues. Seattle activists moved the crowd to cheers and a standing ovation with a dramatic reading of *The ABC Story*¹¹ that they had written about the staffing crisis. On Sunday, as a result, the Governing Board voted unanimously to endorse the Campaign and join the newly formed Worthy Wage Coalition—truly a breakthrough event that would never have occurred without the activism of so many NAEYC members. (CCEP, 1992a)

A Worthy Wage Coalition Steering Committee was established with representatives from national organizations and local groups that supported the Campaign. Among the Campaign endorsers, besides NAEYC, were the Children's Defense Fund, the Child Care Action Campaign, the National Association for Family Child Care, the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and many statewide and regional AEYC affiliates, unions, and other women's and economic justice groups.

Following the conference, Worthy Wage Campaign groups sprang up in at least 30 states and in more than 100 communities. Some of these local campaigns were composed of no more than a few teachers and providers, but everyone was electrified by the idea of a national movement. On the first Worthy Wage Day, parades, walkouts, and demonstrations in cities across the country culminated in a *CBS Evening News* report, featuring Dan Rather telling a Worthy Wage joke: "Why did the child care worker cross the road? To get to her second job."

The ability of the Caucus to launch an effort with so much energy and resonance in the child care community—and to leverage so much national publicity—surprised not only the leaders of mainstream child care organizations, but the Caucus members themselves. While some in the child care field were displeased by the organizers' style, the Campaign's creativity and passion could not be ignored. As Helen Blank recalled, "The Worthy Wage movement underscored that compensation and teacher qualification issues are the core of what happens to children in child care."

Several other notable shifts in the composition of the movement occurred during this time. First, it drew a new generation of activists. Many "Worthy Wagers," particularly in Seattle and California, were in their twenties, while the Caucus leaders were now in their late thirties and early forties and were considered, much to their surprise, to be the "mothers" or even the "grandmothers" of the movement. Many of the younger participants were teachers, while many of the original leaders were now directors or held other nonteaching positions. Barb Wiley, one of the self-described "Nineties kids," said:

¹¹ *The ABC Story* tells the all-too-real saga of teachers leaving to become parking lot attendants and demonstrates the negative effect on children, parents, co-workers, and the center director. It was written by Margie Carter and Deb Curtis of Harvest Resources in Seattle and illustrated by Joan Newcomb.

When I entered the scene, the National Child Care Staffing Study had just come out. The annual parades were looking more like rallies, and the rallying cry was around the low wages in the field. There was a growing contingent of teachers taking leadership on the issue. Most of the leadership up to that point had been White directors from North End centers that served middle- to upper-income families, and that was reflected in the Worthy Wage Days and the movement here. That is starting to change, and LEAP has been an important factor in that.

The **Leadership Empowerment Action Project (LEAP)** was a leadership development training effort created by the Worthy Wage Campaign in the early 1990s. Its impact continued beyond the period described in this paper, and it continues to be used today in many communities. Offered in a variety of formats, from weekend workshops to semester-length college courses, LEAP training focuses on helping teachers and providers to develop a political understanding of the issues affecting their jobs and to increase their skills as organizers and leaders, with particular attention to building diversity in the movement.

The movement grew more diverse in other ways, as well. Many more family child care providers became involved, although the movement was still primarily composed of center-based teachers. Founding Caucus member Peggy Haack switched from being a teacher in a center to a family child care provider during this period, and she played an important role in legitimizing the Worthy Wage Campaign among family child care providers and bringing their concerns to the Campaign's attention. More women of color also joined the movement in this period, although in many communities the movement remained predominantly White. Local groups made concerted efforts to examine their own biases and exclusivity. And they made changes that were more welcoming not just to women of color, but also people from a broader range of cultural and political orientations. By the mid-1990s, compensation activists no longer all identified as Sixties progressives or even as feminists and many neither belonged to nor interfaced with the mainstream early childhood organizations.

New groups emerged on the scene with very different histories and backgrounds. The clearest example was [Direct Action for Rights and Equality \(DARE\)](#), a grassroots economic and racial justice organization in Rhode Island that became involved in representing low-income women of color who provided home-based child care for state-subsidized families. DARE—and an affiliated group that later became the Daycare Justice Coalition—emerged as a powerful model of activism

in the compensation movement, organizing for tangible changes in state child care policies, winning more reliable payment schedules, and initiating a fight for state-funded health coverage for teachers and providers, which they won in 1997 (DARE, 1998). DARE organizer Shannah Kurland shared these experiences:

In 1990, when we started at DARE, some people had been doing family child care for 20 and 30 years already. So, it had been around for a while, but it was kept hidden, marginal, completely cut off from the mainstream child care establishment. There was a family child care association in our state, and I know there are various organizations nationally, but they had no connection with the folks we represented, and the association did not look at [family child care] as a worker issue. We had to create a playing field because there wasn't one. Locally, the industry was pretty much dominated by the director association and the local AEYC chapter.

Nationally, we were searching for anybody who even hinted that they might have something to do with organizing child care workers. We were practically jumping on them saying, "Great, can we compare notes on how you do it?" When we heard about CCEP, we thought, okay, at least there are some other people in child care who are looking at compensation issues, and that was a big plus. **As the Nineties evolved, I saw some changes in terms of the presence of not just family child care providers, but in particular, women of color doing family child care. It shifted the mix within the child care compensation movement.**

Definitely, not coming at it from a child care background made a difference. Our framework to look at the issue was one of racial, economic, and gender justice, in that order, while the other players didn't generally express an ideology or set of values other than references to quality child care. That meant that DARE members often had some substantive differences, such as being more likely to want better policies for the parents, too, or being suspicious of the licensing agency, since their behavior as the child welfare agency makes them famous for institutional racism. Our providers themselves have been pretty isolated and marginalized from those who run things and shape things in the industry.

Other Child Care Advocates Get on Board

Other child care advocates—even those who did not necessarily embrace the teacher and provider empowerment philosophy of the Worthy Wage Campaign or its focus on compensation—began to pay greater attention to staffing issues during this period. Many within NAEYC and others associated with the Wheelock College Center for Career Development, Pacific Oaks College, and other academic and government institutions put their energies into building the infrastructure of a professional development system in early care and education. In some cases, these efforts

included mechanisms to improve compensation or to reduce the financial burden on child care teachers and providers pursuing training; in other cases, they did not. In contrast to the Worthy Wage Campaign, these efforts typically did not emerge from a grassroots effort, but rather were initiated and led by trainers, directors, or those with close ties to local or state government. As detailed below in the discussion of the years 1995-2001, such players were drawn increasingly to compensation issues and constituted a new wing of the movement.

Besides expanding and shifting in composition between 1985 and 1995, the movement also established or strengthened connections with other movements. Other groups began to notice compensation activists and seek them out, in part because the Worthy Wage Campaign became so visible in the early 1990s. While few new labor movement partners came on the scene during this time, the unions representing child care workers tested new strategies and were inspired by successes in Canada, where an organized child care workforce made significant policy gains. As concern about work and family issues received more attention in the labor movement, awareness grew of the interlocking problems of underpaid child care workers and poor-quality, unaffordable child care for union members. Some women's organizations began stepping back into the child care arena, and progressive funders began to notice and support the child care compensation movement.

Within the ECE field, compensation advocates took several steps from the outskirts to the center of activity. CCEP, as a representative of the Child Care Employee Caucus, managed for the first time to secure a seat at the table of national organizations discussing child care policy, assisted in large measure by the presence of Joan Lombardi, who was to become the first head of the federal Child Care Bureau. But child care staffing issues often remained ignored whenever CCEP staff weren't present, and even when they were, these issues were sometimes dismissed as being impossible to address. Helen Blank noted:

I remember the press conference for the National Child Care Staffing Study in '89 that got the issue going. I also remember long discussions on salaries for the ABC bill. We found out that Canada was doing something tangible, but [...] part of our coalition said, "We want to do something, but you're asking us to do something that will cost billions of dollars. This is just going to kill us. We can't do it."

Toward the end of this period, in 1994, the Child Care Employee Project underwent a major transformation by formally becoming a national organization, moving its offices from Oakland, California, to Washington, D.C., under a new name, the National Center for the Early Childhood Workforce (NCECW, which then became the Center for the Child Care Workforce, CCW, in 1997). Although never a mass membership organization, the Child Care Employee Project had become the de facto representative of the loose coalition of local Worthy Wage Campaigns and of other individuals committed to the compensation movement. By becoming an organization based in the

nation's capital and by securing Claudia Wayne (former Director of the National Committee on Pay Equity and Associate Director of Women's Affairs at the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, AFSCME) to serve as its Executive Director, the new incarnation of CCEP symbolized a broadening and maturing of the compensation movement.

Primary Assumptions and Key Strategies

At this stage, the movement's energy was focused on getting the compensation issue onto the mainstream child care agenda. Activists recognized that the responsibility for this task rested in their hands for a number of reasons. Although child care increasingly captured the attention of policymakers, business leaders, and other stakeholders outside the field, the leadership of the major child care organizations—including NAEYC, the Children's Defense Fund, the Child Care Action Campaign, and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies—could not be counted on to raise the issue of wages, which still ranked lower on their list of concerns than quality, affordability, and supply.

Additionally, the workforce itself was overwhelmingly unorganized, typically apathetic, and largely protested low pay by "voting with their feet": walking out of child care employment toward more lucrative occupations. This fledgling movement thus faced a formidable task: trying to raise awareness among consumers and the general public, while simultaneously galvanizing the field—traditional leaders as well as child care workers—to speak out and act on their own behalf.

Recognizing that no single strategy would be likely to deliver the goods, activists continued to pursue several strategies at once. Although this effort drained energy and often spread meager resources too thin, the various approaches helped to bolster and strengthen one another. Releasing the National Child Care Staffing Study to the general public, for example, helped draw attention from the mainstream press and policymakers, which in turn put many of the more reluctant leaders of the child care field "on notice" with respect to staffing issues. Similarly, the Worthy Wage Campaign gave those within the field a vehicle to engage around pay issues while helping to raise public awareness, particularly regarding the need for a better-financed system for parents.

The Worthy Wage jingle, "Parents can't afford to pay, teachers and providers can't afford to stay, " was a shorthand tutorial in the inefficient economics of child care.

Major Strategies

Four major strategies were dominant during this phase of the movement: documentation or research; public policy; community organizing; and public awareness activities. The latter ran as a thread through all the other efforts, with activists using the media and a variety of public events

to draw attention to their issues. Documenting the conditions of child care workers and linking them to children’s development and the quality of care proved to be pivotal for the movement. Gwen Morgan recalled, “The data was carefully crafted, and it has been invaluable in increasing the awareness of what the issues are.”

The studies of child care workers were done by researchers who were also teachers and child care providers and activists so they, too, were impacted by their studies. Through her association with the Child Care Employee Project, Deborah Phillips, a developmental psychologist at Georgetown University and one of the principal investigators for the National Child Care Staffing Study, observed:

I became sensitized to the fact that the women who provide child care are people in their own right who need to be studied. And to the fact that the adult work environment of child care is absolutely essential to the child’s development. But people in my field had really not been studying child care in that way. [The National Child Care Staffing Study] was the first official documentation of how lousy things are out there, even restricting ourselves to the center-based market. This was the first time we were able to link the adult work environment—specifically turnover, salaries, and benefits—to child development outcomes. So, in terms of the intellectual history of the field, that was actually a huge leap.

Because this strand of research did not emerge from within academia, but rather was field- or movement-driven, it was understood from the outset that its ultimate potential to influence the child care discourse lay with a bold and creative dissemination strategy. While adhering to rigorous standards for conducting research, the researchers also understood that the National Child Care Staffing Study’s major value would be as a public awareness tool. CCEP published a booklet for activists and researchers outlining the methodological issues in the study of the center-based workforce, as well as dissemination strategies to ensure that data would bolster local efforts to improve conditions for child care workers (Whitebook & Bellm, 1995). During this period, Kathy Modigliani, working first in Ann Arbor and later through Wheelock College, also developed an instrument with strategies for collecting and analyzing data on family child care providers (Modigliani et al., 1994).

In addition to the National Child Care Staffing Study and the other major studies (Helburn, 1995; Kontos et al., 1995), numerous workforce studies in communities around the country were conducted during this decade. CCEP—and later, the other worker-based groups engaging in action research—recognized that they were vulnerable to criticisms of bias and had to be above reproach, always selecting highly respected research partners and subjecting their studies to rigorous review.

Compensation Initiatives

The pursuit of local public policy initiatives blossomed as a strategy during this period, proceeding according to different timetables in different states, depending on their socioeconomic and political circumstances. When unionized child care workers in Toronto, Canada, won substantial pay increases from the Ontario provincial government, their victory inspired union activists in Massachusetts who, in coalition with other early childhood and labor groups, won more than \$4 million in state salary enhancement funds in 1986 (and during the next two years) for workers in subsidized centers and Head Start. They also gained “affordability funds” to ensure that the increased costs of better pay would not be passed on to low-income families using child care services. According to longtime compensation advocate and center program director Bob French:

A strong state economy, coupled with extremely low unemployment, raised the administration’s concern that a child care teacher shortage would constrict the capacity of the state child care delivery system and thereby undercut the governor’s welfare reform programs. While advocates saw salary upgrading as a moral victory in which we persuaded politicians to do the right thing, Governor [George] Dukakis supported salary upgrading, mainly to ensure the availability of child care to help carry out his welfare reform plan.

A variety of strategies were explored in other states during this period, with varying degrees of success. In 1987, the Minneapolis-based Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals (formerly the Child Care Workers’ Alliance), which had worked for eight years on various public awareness and research efforts, decided to refocus compensation efforts toward systematic change of the Minnesota child care delivery system. In 1991, the Alliance released a pay equity report (Alliance of Childhood Professionals [AECP], 1991) that led to increased wages in school-age child care programs in public schools. Following the report, AECP organized a series of statewide Economic Summits (AECP, 1994), spearheaded a task force to increase reimbursement rates to child care programs, and provided national leadership on developing financing models for a fully funded affordable child care system (Sherman, 1996; Vast, 1998).

In California, advocates won “whistleblowing” protection for child care workers who reported licensing abuses in their programs, secured public dollars for a college loan assumption program for teachers and providers and to fund the Early Childhood Mentor Program, and won cost-of-living increases for teachers in state-funded centers. These many gains were partly a result of their “playdough” campaign, in which several hundred teachers mixed an enormous batch of playdough on the Capitol steps in Sacramento and delivered it to legislators with the message, “We need real dough.”

In New York State, advocates won \$12 million in statewide salary enhancements, but the program lasted little over a year, undercutting its effectiveness. In New York City, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) was able to gain parity with public school teachers for child care workers with equivalent education. In North Carolina, the T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Program began in the early 1990s. In Minnesota, advocates pursued the strategy of differential public reimbursement rates for child care programs paying higher salaries and articulating standards for working conditions, benefits, and pay for child care workers.

There was little substantive debate about compensation enhancement strategies at this point, although the one-year span of the New York program did alert advocates to the pitfalls of short-term funding. There was also recognition of the trade-offs involved in winning increases for only certain members of the workforce—typically public-sector workers because their wages were linked more directly to policies that could be influenced. **Throughout this period, however, any attempt to achieve a policy change, no matter how temporary or small, helped chip away at the widespread belief that the compensation problem was simply too large to address.**



Los Angeles, California. Photo courtesy Jean Berlfein.

Community and Union Organizing Strategies

As noted earlier, community and union organizing efforts increased both in type and number during this phase of the movement. As the Worthy Wage Campaign drew greater numbers and more visibility, several union organizing efforts also expanded or developed, with varying degrees of success. Massachusetts activists, who had been organizing one center at a time largely in the Boston area until the mid-1980s, were able to bring hundreds more workers into the UAW's newly created Day Care and Human Services Local by mounting a statewide campaign. In Northern California, District 65, UAW, launched a multi-year organizing drive for child care teachers in two of the

large for-profit chains, La Petite Academy and KinderCare. In large part, the drive failed because of union-busting efforts by the companies and very high worker turnover. Child care workers in Wisconsin and Minnesota also engaged in organizing but found it difficult to develop a relationship with a union that would be a satisfactory match for very many workers. Peggy Haack recalled that in Madison, the union went from being UAW (1984-1989) to being independent because members felt they were not getting the support they needed. They eventually affiliated with AFSCME Council 40 in 1999, but even after years of effort, only seven Madison centers were unionized. As Nancy deProse explained, “There were certain programs where winning a union contract just was not an option, and they didn’t see another way to go. There was a need for another place for people to stay active and ‘in the loop,’ and that was the Worthy Wage Campaign.”

The fit between traditional organizing approaches and the child care industry was complicated by the particular structure and sensibilities of this workforce. Diversity of workers and settings, complicated funding streams, and high turnover—in addition to anti-unionism—all worked heavily against collective bargaining approaches, with few exceptions. Furthermore, there was a strong desire among many child care teachers to have an organizational home that was part of their own community; they were less likely to join a union with “auto workers” in its name, for example, than an organization created by and for child care workers. Therein lay much of the attraction of the Worthy Wage Campaign.

At least initially, the Worthy Wage Campaign served as the vehicle to draw anyone who wanted to improve child care jobs, regardless of the setting in which they worked. Thus, the Campaign was able to engage people in the movement in a much less labor-intensive way than traditional union organizing. The initiators of the Campaign were intentional about swelling the ranks of the movement but also understood the limitations of such an informal configuration in terms of staying power, the ability to deliver concrete gains and protections to workers on the job, and the absence of the labor movement’s kind of clout. As such, some early organizers viewed the Campaign as a “pre-union” formation, but with the exception of Seattle and Philadelphia (as described in the following section), a next phase of organizing failed to materialize.

In its focus on helping child care teachers and providers find their voices and become advocates on their own behalf, the Worthy Wage Campaign drew more heavily on the women’s movement and community organizing strategies than on the traditional union model. Even prior to the Worthy Wage Campaign, as early as the mid-1980s, many local groups had been engaging in empowerment and community-building work and providing leadership training for child care teachers and providers. Community events such as the Seattle parades, an annual child care workers’ day in Madison and Minneapolis, and a series of events in Berkeley called “In Praise of Providers” were geared to appreciating and politicizing child care teachers and providers. This approach was “culturally consistent” with the ethos of how teachers and providers were accustomed to treating children and families in their programs.

Accomplishments, Missteps, and Challenges

The compensation movement, particularly the Worthy Wage Campaign, made great strides during this period as it sought to raise public awareness and put the issue of wages on the nation's child care agenda. Yet, resistance to talking about the wage issue persisted within the major child care organizations and among many who worked on a daily basis with young children, as Claudia Wayne recounted:

When I came to [the Center for the Child Care Workforce, then NCECW and originally CCEP] in 1994, I saw that many of the national leaders in the field still felt that it was unprofessional to talk about wages. Earlier, too, I think the situation was similar in other fields such as nursing. You were only [supposed] to talk about the children and not about yourself or your wage, and it's really only in the last couple of years that this has shifted a lot.

Still, a profound change had occurred; the silence about the compensation problem was permanently shattered. The phrase “worthy wages” was appropriated into the vocabulary throughout the field, and some ECE leaders sought to showcase their support for better compensation. Some NAEYC Governing Board candidates, for example, began actively seeking endorsements from the Child Care Employee Caucus (now the Worthy Wage Caucus) and the Worthy Wage Campaign. In the early years, the boldness of compensation activists stood out above all else, but in this period, their skill and creativity in advancing the discussion came more to the fore as they linked pay to the quality of services, attracted much more media attention, and built public awareness of the issue. **It was becoming clear that, despite any lingering resistance to the “worthy wage” message, shining a spotlight on the staffing crisis also highlighted the larger need for an improved and fully funded system of child care in the United States. Advocates began in this period to be less sheepish about stating the true costs of quality child care; they publicly challenged the notion of good, cheap services but stopped short of a call for publicly funded universal pre-kindergarten or child care.**

Nonetheless, if wages were on the agenda, teachers and providers still rarely had “a seat at the table” when child care policy decisions were made. The Caucus began running NAEYC Board candidates in the mid-1980s—Jim Morin and Walter Draude were the first teachers ever elected to this governing body—and CCEP staff began to be invited to represent child care workers at national meetings. This inclusion of teachers and providers or CCEP members was often a token effort, although less so at the local level in communities with active Worthy Wage groups or unions.

Most of the local campaign groups that formed the original Employee Caucus held dear the priority of empowering teachers and providers as their organizational leaders and dedicated a substantial

portion of their meager resources to that end. **But even as the wage issue was embraced by many in the ECE field, there was seldom an understanding or acceptance of the principle that teachers and providers should be empowered as leaders in their own right.** This gap resulted in continued discontent among Caucus and Campaign members that was often misunderstood by others who identified as “worthy wage” supporters. Peggy Haack captured this conflict in one story:

I believe that our efforts over the past 20 years, whether organizing in our communities to build public awareness and get teachers and providers invested in change or organizing unions, have in some way shaped all the policy interventions. Yet, the initiatives in themselves don’t necessarily galvanize organizing efforts. Whether they do or not, I think, depends on whether the child care workforce itself was truly engaged as stakeholders in the planning and implementation of any given initiative. I recall a statement that was relayed to me that accentuates this point: “We gave you T.E.A.C.H. [a scholarship program]. What more do you want?”

The issue of professionalism continued to be an unresolved subject between the Campaign and the ECE field as a whole as well as within the Campaign itself. The tension ran in two directions. On the one hand, by focusing on wages, the movement was always on the defensive about the importance of formal education and specialized college-level training. The Campaign was frequently pigeonholed as caring only about wages, despite the fact that the National Child Care Staffing Study—so heavily promoted by the Campaign—documented the interrelationship of formal education, specialized training, pay, and quality.

This tension also revolved around strategy. Many of the more-established field leaders, NAEYC and Wheelock College’s Center for Career Development among them, favored quality enhancement initiatives—such as program accreditation or the creation of professional development systems—that more often than not ignored compensation. Movement activists were actively promoting strategies that linked compensation and training, but whenever they criticized plans to spend more and more dollars on training with no attention to financial reward or to improve centers’ quality without addressing pay issues, they tended to be painted into the corner of “only wanting money.”

On the other hand, as the movement diversified to include new teachers and providers—many of whom had less formal education and child-related training and/or approached the issue from an economic justice orientation—there was new criticism within the movement of linking compensation and training and, particularly, of any emphasis on financial reward for obtaining college degrees. People were not opposed to education and training per se, but felt that new requirements would discount the experience of many seasoned teachers and providers and ran the danger of displacing people who had less access to formal educational experiences because of their racial, ethnic, and/or class backgrounds.

Since many of the first wave of movement activists also believed in a living wage for all workers and were trying to build a representative, diverse movement, they found it difficult to negotiate the conflict. At one Worthy Wage retreat during this time, there was serious debate over whether all teachers or only those with advanced training should receive the base salary of \$10.00 an hour recommended by the Campaign at the time. Some of those with more education were insulted by the notion of less-experienced or less-educated colleagues earning the same pay, while others felt that all should earn a basic self-sufficiency wage before some were rewarded for their education. Such debates broke down along racial and class lines to some extent, but also reflected differences among sectors of the industry (family child care versus centers), stringency of regulations in different states, and pathways through which people had entered the field. The Campaign did articulate recommendations about accessible training as one of its core demands but left unresolved the strategic question of whether the ultimate way to raise wages was to establish more rigorous staffing standards.

This inability to tolerate much internal conflict squelched other strategic debates about whether child care workers' compensation should be tied to public education salaries and, if so, what such a move implied for education and training. Bob French noted:

In the past 20 years of public policy advocacy work in Massachusetts, we have failed to sustain wage and salary gains under the rubric of child care. Notwithstanding the wide variations in pay scales across the country, across states, and even between adjacent municipalities, public school salary scales look like a system and thereby offer a standard to shoot for—a sort of moving target. Secondly, there is a compelling case to define “early education and care” as part of the educational continuum, as we hopefully join in the educational reform efforts to re-create education.



Los Angeles, California. Photo courtesy Jean Berfein.

Organizational Structure of the Movement

While the emergence of the Worthy Wage Campaign might be called the strength of this period, therein also lay a serious weakness in the movement. The Campaign succeeded at drawing people into its ranks, but it did not create an organizational structure with enough membership and activism to solidify its strength into an ongoing power base. The founders were taken by surprise by the proliferation of local campaign groups and did not have a strategy or plan to unify and mobilize them. They had founded the Campaign as a five-year effort, not as a lasting organization or institution.

Many compensation activists believed this issue should be incorporated into the work of NAEYC. As an organization of 100,000 or more members, NAEYC appeared to be the logical group for moving the cause forward. Other Caucus activists saw a union as the ultimate vehicle for representing the child care workforce, but this alternative was difficult to envision, since several unions rather than a single one were already representing child care workers and considerable anti-unionism persisted in the child care workforce. In the early 1990s, when the UAW was active in child care organizing in Massachusetts, California, Wisconsin, and Illinois, there was talk of a coordinated multi-state drive, but other demands captured the union's interest and resources.

The question of organizational structure surfaced again and again, most typically at the annual Caucus meetings at NAEYC and during summer Worthy Wage Campaign retreats hosted each year by different communities. The annual retreats later transformed into the Summer Leadership Institutes of the Child Care Workforce (formerly the Child Care Employee Project, as explained further on) and became the vehicle for the most sustained discussion of these questions and the main opportunity for Campaign members in different parts of the country to learn from one another face to face.

It has been suggested that these organizational questions were particularly daunting to the leaders of the Campaign who, to some extent on principle, were wary of becoming "institutional." Many Campaign leaders had experiences in collectives and other small personal groupings and were not particularly knowledgeable or savvy about larger organizational structures. These leaders generally considered union structure to be too rigid and hierarchical, so unions served as a negative model, as did NAEYC, which was viewed as unrepresentative and undemocratic. ECE culture reinforced the focus on individual well-being, providing little guidance about group structure for adults.

As the Campaign grew, Caucus members struggled with how to harness its energy and build an effective and responsive container. A coalition was formed of organizations that had joined the Campaign, but there was confusion about types of organizational memberships and what to do about individual members. Should there be a distinction, for example, among large established groups such as the Children's Defense Fund or NAEYC that had endorsed the Campaign, local Worthy Wage formations, and AEYC affiliates or child care centers engaging in Worthy Wage

activities that wanted to be counted in the Worthy Wage Coalition? Some individuals who were not active in their local communities wanted to join the national arm of the Campaign, but local campaigns wanted these individuals to join their own ranks. Further complicating the situation was the old Child Care Employee Project organizational and individual membership structure, which had developed over the years, drawing members mostly from California but also nationally as it assumed a coordinating role in the Campaign. Uneven access to resources also fueled the discussions, as some members drawn to the Campaign were capable of contributing \$50-\$100 a year or more, while others considered this beyond their means. The Caucus, the Coalition, and the Board of Child Care Employee Project (under several new names) would return to these issues again and again, without settling on a solution that worked well for everyone or for any length of time.

Questions of campaign governance also surfaced. Who made decisions for the Campaign: CCEP? the Caucus? the Coalition? For the most part, there was a high degree of consensus that allowed this issue to remain unresolved, but conflict occasionally emerged. A Campaign Steering Committee was formed and for a couple of years held regular conference calls for decision making. However, the Campaign Steering Committee was not necessarily representative of the membership as a whole, and there was concern that the national groups would dominate the decision making. Eventually, the national groups became less engaged in the Steering Committee, and it became more representative of the local campaign groups. Yet, questions remained about the direct representation of teachers and providers, the role of directors and others concerned about worthy wage issues, and the question of leadership. Although the Steering Committee and CCEP carefully stated that the Campaign did not “belong to” CCEP, which was meant to hold only a coordinating role, this distinction was not always clear within or beyond the Campaign.

The CCEP Board grappled with this dilemma prior to relocating to Washington, D.C., in 1994, seriously considering whether to become a national membership organization or a union. Both options appeared unfeasible at the time of the move. CCEP and the movement were trying to build relationships with the unions, several of which had representatives on the CCEP Board, and there was little support at that time for creating a new union or discussing affiliate memberships or other strategies under consideration in the labor movement today. With respect to a professional organization, there was obvious value to continuing an outsider strategy in NAEYC, and some members of the Campaign or Board were still convinced that NAEYC would eventually take leadership on compensation issues. With respect to either a union or a membership organization, there was simply not enough funding to pursue either approach nor was there likely to be.

By transitioning to the District of Columbia as the National Center for the Early Childhood Workforce (NCECW)—later renamed the Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW)—CCEP solidified its role as the identifiable voice of the movement. But within the movement itself, the organization’s role was less clear. On the one hand, NCECW was the only national organization focused solely on compensation issues for the ECE workforce, it coordinated the Worthy Wage

Campaign, and it served as an information clearinghouse for local campaigns, unions, other national and professional organizations, policymakers, and the media. On the other hand, NCECW was not truly a membership organization with a democratically elected leadership, nor could it represent child care workers on the job as a union would.

Furthermore, the boundaries or distinctions between the organization and the movement became increasingly murky. Local groups looked to NCECW to provide services and to represent them, but also often perceived NCECW as resource-rich and as not doing enough to assist their community efforts. While it was definitely better resourced than the local campaigns, NCECW faced continual financial struggles, with its survival on the line several times even amid all its success. Because of the central value it placed on teacher and provider empowerment, the organization sought to underwrite and support grassroots activities as best it could but found it much easier to attract financial resources for its public policy and research activities.

Initially, focusing the Worthy Wage Campaign on public awareness helped to draw many supporters. Given the diversity of opinion within the child care community, the Campaign might have been less successful had it led off with very specific objectives and strategies. But to the extent that its demands remained general, criticism and impatience ensued—much of it directed toward NCECW. As it tried to maintain the coalition of groups in the Campaign and in deference to its role as coordinator, NCECW tended to share information about many strategies and options but not to direct the Campaign per se.

Also, since it was not a labor organization from a legal perspective, NCECW was vulnerable to charges of price fixing for even recommending a \$10.00 base wage in the field, let alone trying to spearhead a walkout or strike. With respect to policy approaches, the movement had cast a wide net, hoping to address child care workers in all sectors, but in reality, it was much easier to conceptualize programs that would reach workers in publicly funded settings. As with the issue of “professionalizing” the child care field, the movement sought to include everyone—or perhaps, more accurately, was reluctant to exclude anyone—and, as a result, it had a hard time prioritizing strategies. The value the movement placed on inclusiveness and differing points of view—so important to success when working with children and families and when building grassroots movements—had less currency in the realm where decisions about policy and resources were made and where leaders needed ideas about what to do.

Many in the movement understood how the structural constraints of the child care delivery system impeded true progress toward better compensation in the policy and organizing arenas. This realization did not dampen their efforts, which persisted with enormous energy and enthusiasm, but did perhaps lead the movement to be somewhat internally focused and inclined to emphasize the uniqueness of their struggle. This attitude, in turn, isolated the movement from other groups with related struggles and reinforced a sense that there was no right solution or that it was theirs alone to generate, which of course carried its own consequences.

As this period drew to a close, the movement continued to face formidable external and internal challenges, many of which carried over from its initial phase. These included:

- How to organize and harness the energy generated by the Worthy Wage Campaign into a solid power base and a sustainable organizational voice for child care teachers and providers, given the limits of existing unions and professional organizations;
- How to continue to expand its ranks to reflect the rapidly changing composition of the child care workforce;
- How to support local organizing while simultaneously establishing a national presence among organizations in the broader child care community;
- How to articulate goals that simultaneously embraced its commitment to education, training, and higher wages, as well as to improving child care jobs and services; and
- How to design winnable policy reforms, given the diverse and under-resourced structure of the industry.



Child Care Employee Project, circa 1985. Photographer unknown.

The Compensation Issue Goes Mainstream: 1995-2001



The convergence of welfare and educational reform, the economic boom and labor shortages, and the labor movement's awakening interest in child care workers all signaled new opportunities to win reforms to improve child care pay. Many advocates took advantage of this climate by designing and advocating for new initiatives to recruit and retain teachers and providers. Many states also expanded pre-kindergarten programs that, while not an explicit strategy of the compensation movement, held out the promise of expanding the pool of better-paying work with young children in some communities. However, work with younger children was still paid less

than work with older children. And at the same time, this period was one in which the inadequate, low-paying, and poor-quality child care system in the United States grew larger rather than better.

The Setting

Changes in Welfare Policy

Economic and political forces beyond the child care field dramatically increased awareness of the compensation movement after 1995. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, popularly referred to as national “welfare reform,” ended the New Deal’s Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which had provided cash aid to families in need. New welfare policy included time limits and employment expectations for recipients to receive financial support, which resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of welfare recipients but did nothing to alleviate poverty per se. It increased [the criminalization of poverty](#), especially among Black and other women of color. It also created a soaring demand for child care and necessarily focused attention on who might provide services for the many children whose mothers were now required to enter the labor force.

Some states and communities looked to these mothers to become child care workers themselves, but a heightened social awareness around low-wage jobs—brought on by welfare reform itself—tended to dampen enthusiasm for such schemes.



Most child care jobs offered meager hope for economic advancement or self-sufficiency. Deborah Stone, a journalist covering issues relating to women and employment, reflected:

That's how policymakers look at it: lack of child care is an obstacle to women getting off the welfare rolls. And that awareness has also raised the visibility of the problem of the cost of child care—that as low as pay is in child care, the cost is often still too high for very low-income women to afford. And I think that has brought this clash to the fore. [...] Many women who are child care providers end up qualifying for welfare themselves because the compensation is so low.

In reality, massive increases in child care funding resulting from the new welfare law—in a program now called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)—permitted states to use TANF dollars for child care as recipients transitioned off of welfare. The number of family members and friends of former welfare recipients who received public dollars to care for children greatly expanded. **In most states, the “informal” or license-exempt child care market quickly became a larger proportion of the industry, further diversifying the existing child care workforce with respect to race and ethnicity, language, formal education, and occupational identity** (Whitebook & Phillips, 1999).

A few states managed to use new funds to build the regulated system or to support salary enhancement strategies, as in Wisconsin and Washington (Whitebook & Eichberg, 2002). Mary Tuominen, a sociologist who at that time studied child care workers, noted:

It's the other side of the coin on welfare reform, but in Washington State, our Early Childhood Education Wage and Career Ladder is funded with welfare reform “savings.” We were one of the states that initially targeted child care as a desirable occupation for women coming off welfare. And the argument was made that because child care was a low-income occupation in which people were likely to go on assistance, these TANF “savings” should be used for the child care wage enhancement. There are certainly elements of “robbing Peter to pay Paul,” but it has been a resource that has enabled us to move ahead with implementing some of these [compensation] strategies.

A Severe Staffing Shortage

Adding to the pressures caused by welfare reform were efforts by many states to reduce class size in the early elementary school grades, supported in part though the federal [Class-Size Reduction \(CSR\) Program](#). These policies, in combination with an economic boom in most sectors of the economy, led to severe shortages of teachers in many community-based child care centers, since newly created public school jobs siphoned off many child care workers by paying much higher wages. Access to these better paying jobs in public schools most often depended on meeting higher

educational qualifications, yet many early educators did not have the resources or encouragement to pursue higher credentials. This was particularly true for women of color, who were in the lowest-paid positions and faced systemic racial barriers.

Jobs in other fields also offered more alluring financial opportunities. Between 1996 and 2000, for example, nearly one half the teaching staff who left a group of centers in California earned on average \$4.00 more per hour in positions unrelated to working with young children (Whitebook et al., 2001). The exodus of many of the better-educated teachers, providers, and administrators made it difficult to meet rising demand or even to maintain existing levels of service. Child care centers found it impossible to fully staff their classrooms, often reporting staff vacancies that lasted for months on end, and directors complained that the skill and training levels of new recruits was sinking lower and lower (Whitebook et al., 2001).

Similarly, in many communities, the already-challenging search for child care grew more difficult, public dollars went unspent, and contracts were returned, all due to the effects of the staffing shortage on child care programs' capacity. As a result, advocates who had been lukewarm to the compensation movement or the Worthy Wage Campaign now jumped on the bandwagon to support policies that would retain and recruit people to the field (Whitebook & Eichberg, 2002). Michelle Rutherford, who led the Child Care Division at the San Francisco Department of Human Services and administered the Wages Plus program that offered ongoing salary supplements to center-based workers, described the experience in her community:

This phenomenon of empty classrooms certainly was one of the things that led us to do the Wages Plus initiative, and it made the case to the policymakers that something needed to be done. In California, our requirements are high. We've got state-contracted centers that couldn't meet their standards for contracting, and there are so many of them, and their voice was loud and clear. We had been helping them expand, and the city was investing in their classrooms, and then the classrooms were standing empty because we were right in the middle of the "dot.com" surge between 1995 and 2000 [marked by the proliferation of new Internet start-ups] where anybody could go get a job with benefits somewhere else.

Alongside these trends, new research on brain development focused massive public attention on the importance of the early years for children's optimal development (Shore, 1997; Carnegie Task Force, 1994), and good-quality child care was also identified as essential to school readiness (Stone & Mitchell, 2001). Media personalities and government leaders who cared about early childhood development—such as actor and film director Rob Reiner and the governors of Colorado, Georgia, and North Carolina—commandeered financial resources for several new approaches to early childhood services, including provisions or initiatives that supported financial reward and more training for child care providers (Askew & Wallace, 2001). When he hosted the first White

House Conference on Child Care in the fall of 1997, President Clinton highlighted the need for better training and pay as part of federal initiatives and appointed the Center for the Child Care Workforce as the only child care organization to his Presidential U.S. Department of the Treasury Child Care Work Group in 1998.

Also during this period, a decline in union membership prompted renewed interest by the labor movement in unionizing the least-organized (or unorganized) sectors of the workforce, including child care. Labor and community activists became more interested in new collaborative approaches to organizing low-wage workers, such as Janitors for Justice and home healthcare workers. Organizing was also spurred by living wage campaigns,¹² which were predicated on the assumption that anybody working full-time should be able to afford basic necessities and that the federal and state minimum wage, commonly paid to child care workers, fell far short of an adequate wage. Even where living wage ordinances were adopted by local governments, however, child care workers were often excluded.

Key Players

Responding to the rising demand for child care, the severe shortage of trained personnel, and general concern about low-wage workers, many new players entered the ring to address compensation during these years. They came from the labor movement, academia, policy circles, program administration, and state and local government, as well as from the ranks of the workforce itself, and brought with them new influences and approaches to child care compensation. This influx was very different from the first two phases of the movement, when virtually all the players were known to each other. Although the movement had been unwieldy at times, most compensation activists had been linked to one another through CCEP newsletters, Worthy Wage retreats, and annual Caucus meetings at the NAEYC conference. Now, this expansion of groups and players meant that it became harder to identify who constituted “the compensation movement.”

Organizing initiatives among teacher and provider groups continued to expand and engage in policy advocacy in these years. DARE continued its efforts in Rhode Island, creating a Day Care Justice Co-op for providers and winning state-funded health insurance for teachers and providers serving subsidized families. Elsewhere, more family child care associations were drawn into local Worthy Wage Campaigns, notably in Seattle and Philadelphia, and into other community coalitions focused on workforce initiatives. Local Worthy Wage groups grew or newly appeared in many states, including Oregon, Colorado, Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida, and Vermont.

¹² During this period and the following decade, more than 125 city and county ordinances were designed to establish a living wage for some industries.

Organized Labor and Grassroots Organizing Groups

There was an upswing in new approaches to union organizing among child care workers. In the late 1990s, the Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW, formerly CCEP) engaged in serious discussion with two unions about the possibility of creating a national child care union. This idea never came to fruition, however, partly because of the lack of resources and partly because the unions wanted to secure some local experience and success before launching such a large-scale effort.

Center-based union organizing drives in Seattle and Philadelphia sought to work with employers in new ways and to link their workplace organizing to public policy campaigns. In Seattle, the Worthy Wage Campaign joined with Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 925, to create the Child Care Union Project (CUP). In Philadelphia, spearheaded by staff at the worker cooperative center Childspace, many activists chose to affiliate with AFSCME Local 1199, which had largely organized healthcare workers. New groups of Head Start workers were also organized in several states.

Organized labor also turned its attention to home-based child care workers during this period. SEIU and other unions became willing to entertain new approaches, such as working legislatively to establish a public authority as an “employer of record” with which to negotiate. Organized labor also joined coalitions with community organizing groups in ways that benefited child care workers. In Southern California, for example, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and SEIU began working together on an organizing campaign among home-based providers and after-school recreational program staff. While the Seattle and Philadelphia union drives were closely linked to the Worthy Wage Campaign, and thus to the earlier compensation movement, a number of the latter efforts have arisen among labor groups with much less connection to the established early childhood field.

Organized labor’s involvement in the child care compensation movement also moved beyond worksite organizing. The California State Labor Federation, for example, became an active co-sponsor of the legislation that teachers had drafted to establish California Compensation and Recognition Encourages Stability (CARES), a program that initially offered stipends from \$500 to \$6,000 per year for teachers and providers based on their education and training (described in more detail further on). First brokered by the Oakland-based Labor Project for Working Families, the Labor Federation’s involvement in the CARES campaign led to an ongoing engagement with child care activists around organizing and policy strategies for California. A similar coalition in New York became involved in child care policy, and in several states, living wage or jobs with justice coalitions developed ties with local Worthy Wage campaigns.

ACORN and other grassroots community organizing groups, such as Coleman Advocates in San Francisco and Stand for Children in Oregon, assumed local leadership of the compensation

movement. These new movement players varied in the extent to which they saw themselves as part of the Worthy Wage or CCW tradition or as creators of something new and unique.

New Players: Directors, Program Developers, Academia, National Organizations

In the first years of the Worthy Wage Campaign, child care center directors were often threatened by the discussion of wages and the possibility of organizing. Although some directors were engaged in the Campaign, notably in Seattle and Philadelphia, it took the severe staff shortages of this period to engage a sizable group of administrators in advocacy around child care compensation issues. On the national level, and in states such as Massachusetts and California, program administrators relying on state reimbursements began pushing hard for rate increases and/or differential reimbursement rates for higher quality as the solution to the staffing crisis. Unfortunately, this strategy did not guarantee that increased rates would be targeted to salaries. Colorado's Educare program was a notable exception, linking rate increases to higher salary levels (Whitebook & Eichberg, 2002).

In many states, the establishment of child care compensation, retention, and training initiatives also generated a new group of program developers and/or operators who became important players in the compensation movement. Whether or not they viewed themselves as activists, they often became the public spokespeople about issues affecting the workforce. The [T.E.A.C.H.](#) scholarship program, for example, expanded into 25 states, and nearly every California county had a local office administering a California CARES stipend program. During the Clinton administration, the National Child Care Information Center, supported through federal dollars, also began hosting informational sessions and sharing information about compensation strategies.

The child care workforce became a hot research topic, as well. Initially, the impetus for research on the workforce came from teacher and provider activists who conducted many of the first salary surveys and the landmark [National Child Care Staffing Study](#). But by the mid-1990s, state government agencies increasingly began initiating and supporting statewide salary studies. Several states routinely conducted county or state studies to jumpstart policymaker interest and/or to measure the progress of efforts to stabilize the workforce. In addition, more in-depth research examining the relationship among teacher and provider compensation, training, and quality received funding from public and private sources. In 2000, for example, the federal Child Care Bureau funded a dozen research projects focused on the workforce. Furthermore, the effort to evaluate a variety of compensation policy initiatives enlisted a new crop of researchers to this area of study. Within academia, a growing interest in caregiving and in the economics of low-wage work has drawn women's studies scholars, sociologists, and economists to examine child care workers in greater depth (Cancian & Oliker, 2000).

In Massachusetts, progressive academics joined with labor and compensation movement activists in 2000 to discuss long-term organizing strategies through a Scholars and Writers for Social Justice conference. In Seattle, the Economic Policy Institute worked closely with the Child Care

Union Project to develop and pilot the Washington State Early Childhood Education Wage and Career Ladder. Many state level administrators and advocates joined together in North Carolina for a 1999 conference on compensation strategies called “[Making Gains](#),” co-sponsored by CCW, several North Carolina organizations, and the National Center for Early Development and Learning.

At the national level, the [Urban Institute](#), the [Women’s Policy Research Institute](#), and [Child Trends](#), to name a few, were funded during this period to focus on child care compensation-related projects. The more established national child care organizations—such as the [Children’s Defense Fund](#), the Wheelock College Center for Career Development, the Child Care Action Campaign, the [National Black Child Development Institute](#), [Zero to Three](#), and [NAEYC](#)—now routinely began to acknowledge compensation issues, if not always making them a central part of their organizational agendas. Women’s groups such as the Ms. Foundation for Women (through its New Voices project) and the [National Women’s Law Center](#) also became involved once again in child care policy and organizing.

The involvement of many new players diminished the sense of marginalization that characterized the movement’s earlier phases. It was questionable even at the time, however, whether this expanded group of players would signal an advance in the child care compensation movement’s ability to overcome the internal and external structural barriers that had plagued it. Certainly, the arrival of new players called upon the “old-timers” to adjust to a more crowded playing field, bringing with it a decrease in intimacy and support from the early days of the Caucus and the Worthy Wage Campaign. In some cases, differences in gender, race, class, and status came to the fore among players.

For those deeply committed to a movement led by teachers and providers, the influx of more prestigious or powerful groups raised concerns that the voice of those working directly with children would be muted or overwhelmed. Many in the Worthy Wage Campaign believed that policy initiatives should always be developed with input from practitioners, yet proposals were increasingly designed with little say from those most affected by them. Even among players who shared a belief in worker empowerment, such as unions and Worthy Wage groups, there have sometimes been tensions related to different organizational cultures around group process, power, and individual autonomy (Tuominen, 2001). Some of the newer players favored the improvement of child care compensation via public policy as a way to upgrade and expand services, but they were not necessarily pro-worker or pro-union in a traditional sense and did not place the same value on teacher and provider leadership or working conditions that the early movement had.

The [Center for the Child Care Workforce](#) recognized that this shift was having a significant impact on its role in the movement, perhaps because it was the sole national organization focused exclusively on this workforce at the time. Since it had always played the roles of coordinator,

facilitator, and information clearinghouse for the movement, CCW was often called upon to assist new players in their projects but, in the process, often undermined its own standing and/or increased competition for the research and policy funding that had always been the mainstay of its budget. The proliferation of state and local projects related to compensation also made CCW's clearinghouse role more challenging, partly because it no longer had established relationships or links with every group involved in this issue.

Deborah Stone noted that since the child care system itself is very fragmented and decentralized, the efforts to reform it are bound to reflect this quality: "So my sense is that, when there are multiple 'tables' and not one, it's actually better to have multiple organizations go around to all those tables." Whether or not multiple organizations are the answer, they became the reality at this stage of the movement.

Primary Assumptions and Key Strategies

Garnering Public Attention



Madison, Wisconsin. Photo courtesy Peggy Haack, photographer unknown.

One characteristic of effective social movements is the ability to articulate a clear, specific message that draws and holds public attention. To a considerable degree, the child care compensation movement met these criteria during the years 1995-2001. Spearheaded at first by CCW's dissemination of research in conjunction with annual Worthy Wage Day events and followed by other media coverage of the child care staffing shortage, the public received repeated reminders about low pay and the resulting crisis in child care quality throughout this period. National and local press coverage during this period via newspapers, radio shows, and television appearances was notable.

Effective social movements among poor and disenfranchised groups have typically achieved success by disrupting "business as usual." Public actions in the child care field were creative but restricted to a few communities and seldom significantly disrupted the status quo. The reluctance to be disruptive was sometimes the result of ambivalence among participants within the child care worker groups or second thoughts about whether such actions violated their view of themselves as nurturers. In the absence of a union and with real legal impediments to such actions, the movement lacked a creative solution for a disruptive protest that did not negatively impact children and families.

With the exception of some child care program closures on Worthy Wage Day in Seattle, Madison, and a few other communities, the movement shied away from such efforts for legal and organizational reasons. Interestingly, at almost any gathering of child care teachers and providers, people moved quickly toward the idea of a walkout or strike but tended to back off just as fast. It may be said that most of the disruptive actions undertaken by the movement during its history were directed within the field, toward the leadership of NAEYC, to urge the organization to get more involved in public policy advocacy in general and compensation issues in particular. This strategy successfully shone the light on the wage issue in the field at large, though it ultimately did little to change NAEYC's direction as an organization.

Advocating for and Crafting Policy Solutions

Another characteristic of an effective movement is the capacity to articulate solutions that garner political will. In this respect, the compensation movement made less headway; public messages about how to solve the crisis were inconsistent and not always specific. Sometimes there was a call for a major overhaul of the child care system or a general call for increased pay, but with the exception of significant work on child care financing done by the Minneapolis-based Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals, there was limited attention to how such goals could be accomplished.

Still, in many states and communities, advocates developed and promoted a variety of specific compensation enhancement initiatives, even if they realized that these might be relatively piecemeal reforms, falling far short of a comprehensive restructuring of the child care system that would result in ongoing, substantial improvement in child care jobs (Montilla et al., 2001; Whitebook & Eichberg, 2002). As these reforms passed or were implemented, the sense of accomplishment was quickly joined with a recognition of their limitations. Two years into the CARES initiatives in California, advocates began to explore next steps for the compensation movement. In Massachusetts, home to many of the greatest successes in this arena, Bob French, a center director and a founding member of the Child Care Employee Caucus, critically assessed the movement's progress:

While we have won some important victories, our efforts seem rather like chasing the horizon: we never seem to get there. State reimbursement rates stagnated for seven years [after the wage enhancement in the 1980s], with workers losing considerable ground to inflation. In 1996, an intensive, inclusive campaign won \$25 million dollars for rate increases for contracted and voucher child care, again, to shore up a rapidly expanding system, not because it was morally the right thing to do for staff or children served. A more recent rate increase of approximately 8.5 percent fell short of the 11-percent inflation over the same period. A \$10 million rate increase, less than 3 percent, was cut from the state budget because of a precipitous drop in state revenues, especially in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks. We face a widening staffing crisis and find ourselves grappling with the same problems we contended with back in the 1980s.

Using Workforce Research

Although research helped advance the movement in these years, its strategic limitations also began to emerge. CCW's study of child care center accreditation, for example, helped point out the shortcomings of quality enhancement strategies that did not address staff compensation and identified how turnover prevented programs from improving their services (Whitebook et al., 1997). While these results were initially heeded in California amid the staffing shortage, they were largely ignored among those shaping policy on a national level or in other states. Longitudinal studies such as the *National Child Care Staffing Study Revisited* (Whitebook et al., 1993) and *Then and Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994-2000* (Whitebook et al., 2001) revealed that higher wages were key not only to retaining staff in the child care field, but also to a program's ability to remain in operation. These results, however, were set aside once the severe staffing crisis began to wane.

Several participants interviewed for this paper noted that this prevalent research focus on low wages in child care also had the unintended consequence of discouraging young people from entering the profession. As Bob French noted:

Every major Massachusetts child care plan that has appeared in the past two decades has spoken to the problem of low compensation in our field and attending staff turnover and quality erosion. With the notable exception of the wage enhancements included in the Dukakis Day Care Partnership Initiative in the late 1980s, however, the plans have been short on solutions. We have made our case to legislators by substantiating the compensation problem with facts culled from a variety of sources, including state-sponsored studies, statistics gathered by state agencies, and information from child care resource and referral agencies. While we have successfully made the argument that child care is a linchpin that makes welfare reform work, many policymakers are content to fund custodial care in which workers are poorly paid.

Exploring Nontraditional Organizing Approaches and Building Alliances

Organizing, public policy advocacy, and leadership training among teachers and providers continued to be the major strategies of the movement. But what distinguished this phase was a higher willingness to test new ideas, to interweave approaches, and to build wider and more powerful coalitions. Reflecting on the limited success of many previous unionizing drives in child care, Seattle organizers recognized the need for new approaches when they developed the Child Care Union Campaign (CUP), a new configuration of teachers involved in organizing. The group worked closely with the local Worthy Wage Campaign in identifying centers that were receptive to organizing, negotiated a master contract for 12 centers at one time to streamline the process, and worked with the Economic Opportunity Institute to win \$4 million dollars for the statewide pilot Early Childhood Education Wage and Career Ladder. The success of the effort rested on the

mixture of players and their different strengths, as Barb Wiley, a CUP organizer and Washington State Worthy Wage teacher activist, noted:

I think that it has always been important to have a Worthy Wage Campaign here and a place where people who do not feel that they fit into the union can speak up and develop their leadership. But there is a serious lack of power in Seattle Worthy Wages as an organization. We do not have a consolidated center. We do awesome things, but in terms of affecting the power system to get the changes we need, the union has been better able to do that. The union has resources, they have infrastructure, and they have access to power players within the system. That is why right now, people at the unionized centers and at approximately 120 other centers in the state are getting an increased paycheck from the wage ladder. I truly believe the union campaign would not have been successful without the pre-work that the Worthy Wage movement did here. But the Worthy Wage Campaign can't leverage power like the union can. So, I think you cannot have one without the other.

Certainly, in Seattle, the Wage and Career Ladder was the result of the CUP organizing campaign. The Economic Opportunity Institute did the crucial policy work, but the initiative for it and the grassroots pressure came from the union project. I don't know that it would have happened without the organizing. Ironically, some of these centers [now participating in the Wage and Career Ladder] were hostile to the union project in its early stages, not seeing then that it was about getting funds to help the whole industry. It's also interesting that, even with the incentive of a wage ladder, the union had difficulties organizing in parts of the Seattle area where there hadn't historically been a Worthy Wage movement, which is more evidence of needing a multipronged approach.

The Seattle union campaign was not without limitations: relatively few centers were organized, not all unionized centers benefited from the policy victory that delivered the Wage and Career Ladder, and the drive was not able to address family child care. Yet, the participants showed a willingness to try new approaches and take uncomfortable risks in order to break new ground (Tuominen, 2001).

In Massachusetts, activists also found new success by mixing traditional union and community organizing strategies, as Nancy deProse, union organizer and founding member of BADWU (the Massachusetts Worthy Wage Campaign) reflected:

We have been running a [LEAP \[Leadership Empowerment Action Project\]](#) program in Massachusetts for three years, and I think that came out of a recognition on our part that we were not reaching everybody who could be active in the child care community

by bringing them into the labor movement. In fact, in the Eighties, when we did that statewide campaign, we signed up hundreds and hundreds of workers. We had about 12 organizers going out to every center in the state that got a contract. Many of those centers never got the majority status that would have brought them into a union—there were people who wanted to be part of a movement, but because we were using the strict union model, there was no room for them. There was no support from the union for us to somehow bring them into what we were doing, and they fell by the wayside.

So I realized, from that point on, that there needed to be an additional or alternative way to deal with it—another sort of organization or group to bring other workers into the movement, because we were not going to get them all to the point where they were going to be a unionized workforce, worksite by worksite. [The LEAP course](#) opened up a door and allowed people to come and take a college-level course, get involved in advocacy, learn about unionization, learn about community organizing models, and then work in their own communities to try to make change. Where I have come to is that union organizing is important, but it cannot be the only way to do things.

Denise Dowell, then director of organizing for child care at AFSCME Local 1199, described similar issues in the Philadelphia-area campaign:

We have evolved our strategy out of some of the limitations that we encountered along the way. The Worthy Wage Campaign enabled us to pull people together, [but] here in Philadelphia, it was always more effective when it was director-driven; it was never terribly successful in reaching workers, and it was always limited in that the workers it reached were mostly White and better educated and worked at better-quality centers. That was partly a resource issue, and there was really not the kind of institutional support for workers that a union can provide.

When I worked at Childspace, a worker cooperative, it was a great model in the sense that people had a real voice on the job. But we served a lot of low-income families, and we asked how we were ever going to meaningfully raise wages and benefits if we didn't do something about reimbursement rates. We recognized from the beginning that organizing workers into a union, while necessary, was not sufficient. We believed it was also necessary to restructure jobs, to get more public resources into the industry, and to improve the quality of care.

So, from the start, we have worked hard at developing a strategy that pulls in all the partners within the industry in order to move three things along at the same time: organizing workers, organizing employers, and public policy. In organizing

workers, we aim to include both family child care and center-based workers. We have been struggling with a strategy to include family child care providers, and our vision and our mission statement very much includes that segment of the workforce. But we have chosen to focus on child care workers in centers that serve low-income families—mostly because of the direct link to public policy and reimbursement rates and because we feel we cannot do everything at once and have to start somewhere. We are also [stressing] the common interest between the employers and the workers in this industry. If employers are not bought in, in a major way, we are not going to be able to effect long-term change [in public policy]. The fact is that the old way of doing things, of just going out and organizing workers, does not work in child care—it is too resource-intensive.

The recognition that new alliances and new approaches were needed to advance the movement also permeated the thinking of activists who were not involved directly in union organizing. In California, for example, repeated efforts failed to win compensation-related reforms in the state agencies that control child care funds. In response, advocates led by CCW drafted the California CARES legislation, and a months-long effort to solicit feedback from all sectors of the field sought to strengthen an industry-wide coalition. Initially, the legislative strategy was designed to build alliances and raise public awareness. It met these goals, but the bill's passage emboldened advocates to work in coalition for similar programs at the local level and was made possible in large measure by the 1998 approval of Proposition 10, a tobacco tax that provided substantial new revenue for services for children birth to age five. The development of locally based CARES programs in nearly every California county created a new coalition with regularly scheduled meetings to share lessons and challenges and to discuss state-level policy strategies. Similarly, in Wisconsin, Worthy Wage Campaign and child care union members joined in coalition with living wage activists and the Wisconsin Women's Network to win support for a child care salary enhancement project called REWARD.

Some initiatives during this period were developed and passed with little input from teachers and providers. But in other states such as North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts, it was central to the movement's strategy to politicize teachers and providers and to ensure their place at the decision-making table. In each of those three states, LEAP courses and training were used to build a cadre of outspoken teacher and provider leaders. LEAP-trained leaders worked on campaigns for better rates and community-based programs in Massachusetts. In one North Carolina community, they won a 30-percent increase in the stipends distributed through the Child Care Wage\$ program in their state.

Accomplishments, Missteps, and Challenges

Undeniably, the increasing number and types of players concerned about child care compensation generated new energy and approaches to addressing the issues. While public education remained a critical component of the movement during these years, organizing and policy work became more central. By engaging in coalitions with labor unions, women's groups and academia, movement activists began to think about untested strategies and possibilities. In turn, labor and women's groups, as well as some academics and policymakers, became sensitized to the complexities of the child care work world and the particular challenges of child care organizing.

By engaging more fully in policy development and political campaigns, the movement experienced substantive victories that helped to renew its spirit and to draw new members in many communities. Activists also learned firsthand what it takes to create, advocate for, and sustain viable reforms, and they came face-to-face with the realities of compromise in the political process. From a strategic perspective, successful initiatives and new ways of organizing have created the opportunity to learn what different strategies can and cannot deliver with respect to improving child care jobs and, in so doing, provide directions for the future.



**Good Child
Care Jobs = Good Care
for Children**

It's a simple equation. It's time to...

Balance it!

Join with other teaching staff to define quality working conditions to improve the education and care of young children. *Create good child care jobs.*

Compared to previous phases of the movement, the achievements of this period were heartening. Still, most states were not actively addressing workforce issues, and many of the newly won programs were small and failed to provide ongoing, substantial increases in pay. Active union organizing was still restricted to very few communities and the campaigns, even when successful, organized small numbers of workers given such a high level of effort. Intense anti-unionism continued to be encountered, along with several other long-term issues that continued to challenge the movement, such as:

- How the current structure of the child care delivery system impedes successful and lasting reform and works against organizing;
- How the diversity of the child care workforce leads to differing ideologies and goals within the movement itself and constrains efforts to develop vision and strategy, particularly around issues of educational requirements and professionalism; and
- How the lack of a unified organizational home for teachers and providers and the ongoing need to diversify the movement's leadership weaken the power of workers' voices among the growing number of players in the compensation movement.

The responses to these challenges would greatly shape the movement in the coming years.



Reprinted from the [Child Care Resources Center Newsletter](#), Cambridge, Massachusetts, Summer 1981.

The End of an Era: 2002 Merger With the American Federation of Teachers

Like other movements, the child care compensation movement shared some of the weaknesses it was trying to address. The compensation movement, the child care workforce it represented, and indeed, the U.S. child care system itself suffered from the absence of a solid infrastructure. Since its early days as the Child Care Employee Project, CCW functioned as the de facto voice for the movement and as the only national organization focused on the child care workforce. While it recognized the limitations of its role, CCW managed to serve as a “container” for the movement. But as the movement grew and just compensation became a more salient national issue, Executive Director [Marci Young](#) acknowledged in late 2001, “CCW cannot hold all the pieces together. We can no longer exist the way we have and meet the needs of the different players in the movement.” It was time to imagine a new coalition linking all who were working on the issue and a new and more powerful organization of teachers and providers who held a prominent place in that coalition.

In the fall of 2001, the Board of Directors of the [Center for the Child Care Workforce](#) approved a plan to close CCW. The decision was due not only to CCW’s ongoing structural and fiscal challenges, but to its strong belief that a new organizational home needed to emerge that would truly represent the child care workforce. CCW convened a series of community meetings across the United States in early 2002, so that varied constituencies could formulate proposals for next steps for the child care compensation movement. The CCW Board reviewed the proposals to identify appropriate organizations to undertake the various activities essential to the movement. These activities included advocating for funding for an early care and education system to support children, families, and the workforce, as well as developing strategies to provide financial resources to support the work and to clarify the role of grassroots advocates in building an organizational home for teachers and providers.

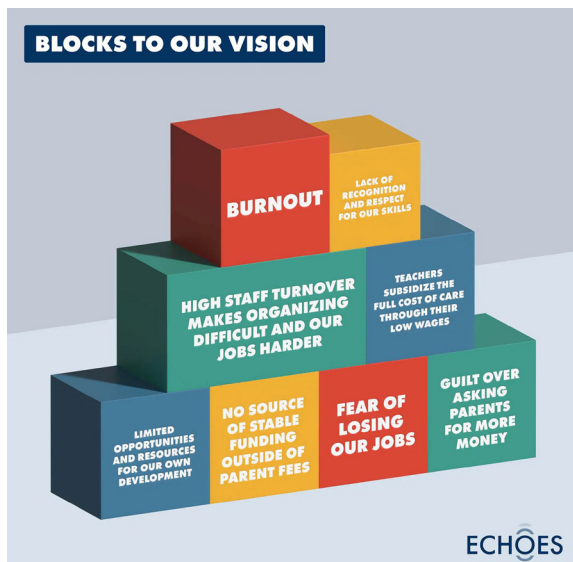
As a result of these meetings, CCW invited interested parties to submit letters of interest describing their ideas for assuming key activities focused on child care workforce issues. Enthusiastic responses were received from more than 30 organizations. The most promising proposal for continuing CCW’s public policy and research work came from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a union representing more than one million teachers and other workers, nationally. On November 1, 2002, after several months of discussion, CCW officially merged with the [AFT Educational Foundation](#) (AFTEF), a nonprofit arm of the union that conducts, sponsors, and disseminates studies and research in education and related fields with the primary objective of improving and restructuring the educational system. Two training organizations—Community Allies for Children, based in Durham, North Carolina, and the MassLEAP Partner Collaboration, based at the Child Care Resource Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts—were chosen to continue providing the child care workforce leadership training previously offered by CCW. The newly established [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment \(CSCCE\)](#) at the University of California, Berkeley, [created](#)

[at the very end of 1999](#), was chosen to complete several CCW research studies and policy reports in process during the transition and to coordinate some California advocacy and policy projects.

We believe that joining forces with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) as a project of the AFTEF, will provide an unprecedented opportunity to broaden the scope of CCW's work and expand our capacity to create a unified voice for the child care workforce. We see this affiliation with the AFTEF as a natural progression of our work...

Since CCW and AFT share a history of advocacy to improve child care jobs, we expect this affiliation to strengthen our collective capacity to influence public policy and to organize to improve wages, benefits, training, and advancement opportunities for the child care workforce. Our activities and projects will continue to focus on developing and advocating for public policy that restructures the early care and education delivery system to better address the issues of workforce recruitment and compensation; we will continue to promote union and community organizing strategies that emphasize a unified voice for child care teachers and family child care providers.

— Marci Young, speaking as the new Deputy Director of CCW/AFTEF



Shortly after the merger, AFT President Sandra Feldman announced the creation of the Child Care Workforce Alliance, an associate membership program within the union that would allow teachers and providers, whether or not they were currently in a collective bargaining unit, to become part of a larger advocacy force for child care employment issues and to receive certain AFT benefits.

At the same time, several other unions (including [AFSCME](#) and [SEIU](#)) and community organizing groups (including [ACORN](#) and local living wage campaigns) stepped up their efforts in 2002 to

organize child care teachers and family child care providers and devise public policy strategies for better child care compensation, particularly in California, Pennsylvania, and Washington. These unions and other groups demonstrated an interest in pursuing new, alternative organizing

strategies. AFT's associate membership program was a prime example of an alternative strategy. Of note, there was interest in finding ways to organize family child care providers—a hopeful sign, given that the classic union-organizing model for large workplaces had never fit this part of the field particularly well.

During 2002, efforts to create or strengthen state-funded universal preschool systems also gained momentum across the United States, emphasizing the need to provide better learning opportunities for three- and four-year-olds to enhance school readiness. A [CCW report](#) on its three-year study of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs in five states, however, raised serious concerns about states' ability to adequately recruit, compensate, and retain the skilled teaching force that universal preschool systems require (Bellm et al., 2002).

It was clear that the terrain of the child care compensation movement had shifted and challenges lay ahead. But the era ended with hope that the next chapter of the movement's history would build on the remarkable and creative endeavors of the past and bring new visibility, strength, and unity to the child care workforce.

Epilogue

The Unwritten History: 2002 to the Present Day

The defining characteristic of the compensation movement from the 1970s through the turn of the century was the role of the child care teacher. Individual teachers and family child care providers had been finding their voices, finding each other, building new skills, learning to be public policy advocates, recognizing their leadership qualities, and indeed, building and leading a national grassroots movement. They knew that taking care of themselves was necessary in order for them to provide the best care and education for children and their families. The role that the teachers played advanced public awareness of their plight, promoted creative policy solutions, and contributed to the disruption of the long-standing ethos within the ECE field about pushing their needs aside for those of young children and their families, often at the expense of their own survival in the field of early education. All these achievements were accomplished with the support of the Child Care Employee Project (CCEP), later known as the [Center for the Child Care Workforce](#) (CCW).

The historical account presented here was originally written more than two decades ago. Unfortunately, the optimism and vision expressed when CCW merged with AFTEF were never fully realized. Problems persist: policy divides early education from child care; there is a lack of consensus regarding teacher and provider education and training; institutionalized racism creates barriers to opportunities for women of color and drives inequities within the workforce; recruitment and retention of the workforce remain a major challenge; inequities endure in the quality of early learning that children receive; care is unaffordable and inaccessible for many families; and most significantly, the ultimate goal for equitable, just compensation remains elusive. Undergirding all of these problems is the reality that child care is not considered a right for all families nor is it sufficiently publicly funded.



Day Without Child Care protest at City Hall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 9, 2022. Photo by Cory Clark/NurPhoto via Associated Press.

In 2002, we could not have foreseen all the significant challenges and barriers the movement would encounter, but we can look back now and identify major developments that deserve to be explored more deeply in order to continue learning from our history. Perhaps most importantly, we must learn how to once again center early educators as key players and leaders of the movement. Following are some of the changes, challenges, and barriers experienced in the course of the past two decades. A more detailed exploration and answers to the questions remain to be written as the next chapter of ECE history.

A Plethora of New Players: By 2002, it seemed that everyone was embracing the idea that poor compensation was a problem, yet there was no cohesive strategy for addressing it. Researchers were documenting what we already knew: the early years were vitally important for the trajectory of one's lifetime. Advocacy groups were including the issue on their policy agendas, but rarely prioritizing it. Even the professional association, NAEYC, began calling for change, though notably today the structure of local affiliates—where so much of the energy for change was generated in previous years—has largely been diminished. As of 2022, according to the NAEYC website, the association had only 52 statewide affiliates compared to the more than 450 affiliated groups in 2001. Do early educators have an alternative structure for meeting and organizing with each other in their local communities? Are their voices silenced in the din of new, perhaps more powerful, voices? Is the sense of urgency to solve the problem of low compensation lost because only teachers and providers themselves truly feel that sense of urgency?

The Emergence of Rating Quality: Policy initiatives in the early 2000s became focused on improving programs and improving teachers, rather than improving the early education system that drove low quality. By 2010, quality rating and improvement systems ([QRIS](#)) were operating in almost every state, and they absorbed the majority of the funding and focus within states. Consultants, coaches, raters, evaluators, and trainers were hired, typically at higher rates of pay and sometimes at a cost to children as their teachers left classrooms for these jobs. Teachers and family child care providers frequently reported that their experience, skill, and wisdom were not honored in the rating process. Research demonstrated that pay and working conditions impacted quality, however, standards rarely rated a program based on these factors. What message do these actions send to the workforce, particularly when few programs have an avenue for early educators to express their opposition?

Increased Demands on the ECE Workforce: The work of caring for and educating young children looks very different today than it did in the 1980s. Improving quality has become an all-encompassing task. Meeting standards, observing and assessing individual children, documenting one's actions with written records, completing additional training requirements—all these tasks and more have been added to the list of job responsibilities. Increased demands, many argue, are often fulfilled at the expense of building quality relationships with children, their families, and one's co-workers. They come at personal expense to the educators themselves and mean more work without more pay, more duties without more staff, and less time without child responsibilities to complete them. Is there even time or energy left to learn from history and undertake building a new movement for change?

A Changing ECE Landscape: The impacts of welfare reforms were just beginning to be felt and an economic downturn was underway in 2002. The initial excitement of the Child Development Fund (CCDBG) was also waning as it became apparent that the funds were a drop in the bucket

in relation to the need that families were experiencing. Public dollars in the form of subsidies continued to be increasingly accessible to for-profit entities and unregulated family child care. Many small nonprofits were hanging on [by a thread](#) or closing their doors; family child care expanded, and later, many of these home-based providers shut down as they struggled to meet rising expenses and standards. Meanwhile, large for-profit corporate child care centers thrived. A recent brief from [Capita](#) reveals that investor-backed for-profit chains are still growing and serve 750,000 children every day. Most recently, this growth can be attributed to the acquisition of independent programs and smaller chains. What impact do these shifts continue to have on the child care workforce?

Reckoning With Race: The 21st century has brought to the forefront a heightened awareness of racial injustice. Every aspect of American life today, including the care of our young children, has been shaped by the history of a nation built on the enslavement of Black people. Historically and to this present day, Black women and many immigrants, Indigenous, and other women of color have been steeped in the work of caring for children, White children as well as their own. And yet the stories of their contributions are largely obscured or ignored. Within the field itself, racial disparities in compensation, ages of children served, and advancement to leadership positions persist. How do diverse voices and leaders of color contribute to organizing the ECE workforce today? What can child care activists learn from the Black Lives Matter movement today and [leadership of women of color in the previous century](#)? How do we ensure that racial reckoning continues to be part of the public discourse on early education?

A Troubled Nation and a Global Pandemic: Like all of us, the U.S. child care workforce experiences the impacts of the current social and political climate. The past two decades have been marked by international and domestic conflicts, the 2008-2009 recession, heightened racial tensions, a growing wealth divide, extreme political partisanship, anti-unionism, constriction of educational funding that undermines K-12 support for early care and education, increased costs of higher education, and finally, a global pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis, in particular, shone a spotlight on the [dysfunctional ECE system](#) in our country. Child care program closures, loss of valuable staff, families under duress, and limited resources to deal with health and safety needs revealed a system that was both threadbare and inequitable. In the midst of the pandemic, a major staffing crisis resulted in closed classrooms, family child care closures, and difficulties finding child care, which all continue to this day.

Will the essential nature of the work of caring for and educating our young children finally be acknowledged as an historic and ongoing problem? Will educators work in a sufficiently resourced system that values them as workers, regardless of the sector in which they work or the ages of children they serve? Or will programs considered educational continue to be valued over those viewed as child care, whether in homes or centers, particularly those serving the youngest children?

Final Note From the Authors of This Update



Peggy Haack, Marcy Whitebook, and Rosemarie Vardell

While it is disheartening to acknowledge that low compensation persists, [21st-century activists](#) are in a position to understand much more fully that the problems plaguing the ECE system are entrenched and foundational, that the United States is resistant to expanding public goods, and that concentration of greater political power in the hands of corporate and financial institutions will negatively impact and shape ECE policy. In response to the COVID crisis, public dollars went into the ECE system, including some support for the workforce. As a result, today's activists have experienced [new possibilities](#) for making long-term change.

It is time once again to be bold in actions and willing to experiment with policy solutions. A new generation of activists can benefit from the energy of the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement, a resurgence in union organizing, and a commitment to centering those who experience the problem most directly in the call for change. At this time in our history, there are [partners](#) calling for a total transformation of the system of ECE financing, and there is hope in the establishment of a new [National Early Care and Education Workforce Center](#).¹³

As of this writing and as women in our eighth decade, we are humbled and sometimes grumpy, even mad, that so many of the same challenges around disrupting racial inequities, improving jobs, supporting teachers as leaders, shaping policy and research, and building collective power remain to be solved. Throughout a long time together as teachers, learners, activists, and friends, the three of us have never lost sight of our conviction that early childhood educators must receive the compensation, support, and respect that they and the children and families in their care deserve, regardless of the sector in which they work or the ages of children served. We are grateful and inspired by those who work tirelessly today to carry the mantle we once had the privilege to bear. We know that they will take this work to places we were not able to, and we hope this history will serve them as they move forward.

Marcy Whitebook, Peggy Haack, and Rosemarie Vardell

¹³ In early 2023, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced a new initiative, the National Early Care and Education Workforce Center and its core partners: the BUILD Initiative, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), Child Trends, the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood at University of Delaware, the Institute for Early Education Leadership and Innovation at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and Zero to Three.

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About CSCCE

The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) was founded in 1999 to focus on achieving comprehensive public investments that enable and reward the early childhood workforce to deliver high-quality care and education for all children. To achieve this goal, CSCCE conducts cutting-edge research and proposes policy solutions aimed at improving how our nation prepares, supports, and rewards the early care and education workforce to ensure young children's optimal development.

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Addendum

Marcy Whitebook facilitated four focus group conversations between October 2000 and August 2001 to explore the history of efforts to improve compensation for child care providers. What follows are descriptions of the participants at the time of the conversations and a link to the conversations. She opened one of the focus groups by stating:

The purpose of this project is to write about the history of efforts to improve child care compensation in the United States.... Many believe that these efforts have only been going on for a year or two. People don't have a sense that work has been going on for a quarter of a century, if not more, and has changed over time. The conversations have focused on public awareness, policy, and organizing....

Toward the end of Conversation 1, Whitebook observed, "We think it's important to remind people that it took kindergarten teachers over 100 years to get the same pay as 1-12 teachers, and so we may only be in the first third of the way through this process."

Names and Descriptions of Focus Group Participants in 2000-2001

Conversation 1: Arlyce Currie, Ellen Galinsky, Gwen Morgan, Barbara Reisman, Deborah Stone

Arlyce Currie [Feist] was a founder and director of BANANAS, a child care resource and referral agency in Oakland, California.

Ellen Galinsky was a nationally acclaimed researcher and advocate on child care and work and family issues and headed the Families and Work institute in New York City.

Gwen Morgan was a nationally acclaimed child care policy expert affiliated with Wheelock College and Work/Family Directions in Boston.

Barbara Reisman served as Executive Director of the Child Care Action Campaign for many years and was a program officer at the Schumann Fund of New Jersey.

Deborah Stone was a nationally recognized journalist who focused on issues relating to women and employment.

Conversation 2: Helen Blank, Rory Darrah, Joan Lombardi, Sue Russell, Michelle Rutherford, Mary Tuominen

Helen Blank was Director of Child Care at the Children's Defense Fund.

Rory Darrah was the Coordinator of the Every Child Counts Initiative in Alameda County, California, and a founder of CCEP.

Joan Lombardi served as the first Director of the Child Care Bureau in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and was a policy consultant.

Sue Russell was Director of Day Care Services in North Carolina and developed the T.E.A.C.H program.

Michelle Rutherford headed the City and County of San Francisco Department of Human Services Child Care Division and administered the Wages Plus program.

Mary Tuominen was Professor of Sociology at Denison University in Ohio and had researched and written extensively about center-based and family child care workers.

Conversation 3: Netsy Firestein, Jennifer Kagiwada, Deborah Phillips, Dora Pulido-Tobiassen

Netsy Firestein was the Director of the Labor Project for Working Families.

Jennifer Kagiwada was the California Policy Coordinator for the Center for the Child Care Workforce.

Deborah Phillips was Chair of the Psychology Department of Georgetown University.

Dora Pulido-Tobiassen was a child care consultant and a former staff member of California Tomorrow.

Conversation 4: Denise Dowell, Peggy Haack, Shannah Kurland, Nancy deProse, Barb Wiley

Denise Dowell was the director of organizing for child care at 1199, a national hospital and healthcare union affiliated with AFSCME.

Peggy Haack was a family child care provider and also served as the Worthy Wage Coordinator for the Center for the Child Care Workforce.

Shannah Kurland worked as an organizer at Direct Action for Rights & Equality (DARE) for many years and had left to pursue other efforts.

Nancy deProse worked in several capacities for the United Auto Workers, organizing child care and other workers, and was pursuing graduate studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Barb Wiley worked for several years as a teacher and had worked as an organizer for the SEIU 925 and Seattle Worthy Wages. She coordinated the LEAP trainings in Seattle.

Other People Interviewed

Dan Bellm coauthored several articles cited.

Bob French was a longtime compensation advocate, a center program director, and a founding member of the Child Care Employee Caucus.

Jim Morin was one of the first teachers ever elected to the governing board of NAEYC.

Claudia Wayne was the former Director of the National Committee on Pay Equity and Associate Director of Women's Affairs at AFSCME and served as Executive Director of CCEP.

Marci Young was Executive Director of CCW and was the Deputy Director of CCW/AFTEF.

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