

# An 'ingenious system of practical contacts': Historical origins and development of the Institute of Child Welfare Research at Columbia University's Teachers College (1922–36)

History of the Human Sciences

1–31

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DOI: 10.1177/09526951211023315

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## Abstract

During the first two decades of the 20th century, the expansion of private foundations and philanthropic initiatives in the United States converged with a comprehensive, nationwide agenda of progressive education and post-war social reconstruction that situated childhood at its core. From 1924 to 1928, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial was the main foundation behind the aggressive, systematic funding of the child development movement in North America. A pioneering institution, the Institute of Child Welfare Research, established in 1924 at Columbia's Teachers College, was the first Rockefeller-funded programme of its kind at an American university. The Institute was influential in helping set up a nationwide network of child welfare institutes at other universities. Twelve years later, it would also be the first of those institutes to close. Nonetheless, the Institute's context, emergence, and development have been overlooked or misrepresented by previous scholarship, which calls for a new, critical historical analysis. By drawing on a number of archival sources and unpublished materials, this paper offers a critical reconstruction of the Institute's internal, often

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unstable history, emphasizing its origins, members, and administrative changes. I argue that the demise of the Institute should be understood in the context of both the revision of philanthropic policies in the late 1920s and the Institute's singular emphasis on teaching and training over research. The resulting narrative allows for a deeper, more informed understanding of both the Institute's origins and its eventual folding.

### **Keywords**

child development, child welfare research, clinical psychology, Columbia Teachers College, developmental psychology

## **Social reconstruction, philanthropy, and child development research**

During the first two decades of the 20th century, the expansion of private foundations and philanthropic initiatives in the United States converged with a comprehensive, nationwide agenda of progressive education and post-war social reconstruction that situated childhood at its very core. Military recruits' examinations during the First World War showed plenty of physical defects that were attributable to unwholesome conditions in early childhood (Senn, 1975; Smuts, 1985). These findings, along with the evolution of the mental hygiene movement and the advance of applied forms of psychology—such as educational, school, and clinical psychology—contributed to emphasizing early childhood experiences and environments as the defining influence on the individual's adult personality and behaviour (Anderson, 1956; Green, 2019; Hilgard, 1987; Smuts, 2006).

However, the field of the scientific study of children was still undeveloped in the 1910s (Smuts, 2006). By 1918, there were only three North American psychologists who indicated children as a primary interest (Jones, 1956); this represented around 0.6% of the American Psychological Association's membership (Fernberger, 1932). According to Cravens (1993), only two scholars, William Healy and Henry Goddard, could be considered 'serious' researchers on children in the first decade of the century. The once-popular Child Study Movement championed by G. Stanley Hall had fallen into disrepute, criticized in terms of sampling, method, technique, research logic, and conclusions (Young, 2016: 202–3). Research efforts and concrete data on childhood were lacking; what little consensus there was about social behaviours more generally was deemed 'largely controlled by tradition, inspiration and expediency, a natural condition in view of our ignorance of individual and social forces' (Frank, cited in Bulmer and Bulmer, 1981: 362–3; see also Frank, 1962: 210–11).

In this context, from 1915 to 1920, philanthropic organizations such as the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation revised their established, broadly charitable mandates of 'helping the poor' and replaced them with the specific goal of using the new social and behavioural sciences to prevent social ills such as maladjustment, delinquency, and unhealthy personalities (Coffman, 1936; Karl and Katz, 1981; Smuts, 1985). The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM) was the main foundation behind the

aggressive funding of the child development movement in North America from 1924 to 1928. One of the five Rockefeller philanthropic institutions, the LSRM was established in 1918 with an endowment of \$74 million.<sup>1</sup> With the 1922 appointment of 27-year-old psychology PhD Beardsley Ruml as its director, the LSRM shifted from ameliorative to *preventive* philanthropy and adopted a specific agenda: the application of the social sciences for this purpose (Coben, 1976).<sup>2</sup> Specifically regarding its efforts in psychology and child development, from 1923 onwards the LSRM had three primary aims: to develop child study groups among parents, to stimulate the training of personnel and leaders of child study groups, and to develop centres dedicated to scientific research of problems in childcare and development (Lomax, 1977).

To further such research, in 1923 Ruml appointed 31-year-old economist Lawrence Frank as the Memorial's social sciences executive. As a member of the Memorial's permanent staff, Frank was the architect of the LSRM programme in child study and parent education (Bulmer and Bulmer, 1981). A central part of the Memorial's strategy was the establishment of university-based research centres (Smuts, 2006). From 1924 to 1927, the Memorial directly funded or established five child welfare research programmes at American universities. The first of these new centres, established at Columbia's Teachers College in 1924, was the Institute of Child Welfare Research (ICWR). As 'the nation's first well-funded, university-based, research center on children' (Schlossman, 1981: 283), the ICWR was the setting where psychologists such as Carl Rogers, Myrtle McGraw, David Wechsler, and Mary Cover Jones undertook scholarly work. It would also be the first Memorial-funded Institute to close, after just 12 years, in 1936, and the only one to do so during the 1930s.

Although a pioneering institution, the ICWR has often been overlooked by historians of science. Some studies on the history of child development and childcare have stated that the Spelman Memorial financed programmes at stations 'at Iowa, Yale, Minnesota, Denver and Berkeley' (Lomax, 1978: 153), or that notable child development programmes were established at Toronto, Cornell, Minnesota, and Iowa (Seim, 2013), failing to even mention Columbia. What little scholarship there is that includes the ICWR has been limited to perfunctory acknowledgement, failing to account for its creation, development, or eventual demise (Grant, 1999; Sears, 1975; Senn, 1975; Smuts, 1985). Hilgard's (1987) ample, 1000-page study on the history of American psychology dedicates a single paragraph to the Institute. Even Cremin, Shannon and Townsend's (1954) seminal, 280-page history of Teachers College makes only four brief mentions of the Institute, and provides no further historical analysis. Recent accounts of the history of developmental psychology (Thompson, Hogan, and Clark, 2012) and the history of psychology at Columbia (Cautin and Benjamin, 2012; Fierro, 2019) barely mention the College's Institute. This alone calls for an historical analysis of the Institute. Moreover, studies that have acknowledged its existence have stated that 'the Institute's administrative history was tumultuous' (Schlossman, 1981: 283) or that 'matters at the Institute [were] rocky' (Cravens, 1993: 62) but have provided no further analysis. Conversely, other LSRM-funded institutes, such as the Yale Institute of Human Relations (Morawski, 1986), the Yale Psycho-Clinic, directed by Arnold Gesell (Curtis, 2011), and the University of Toronto's programme on child development (Pols, 2002), have been thoroughly analysed, while Bird

T. Baldwin's Iowa Child Welfare Research Station has received multiple book-length accounts (Cravens, 1993).

During the 1920s, the field of child study and child development could be characterized 'almost entirely in terms of a few places and the persons located there—Iowa, Minnesota, Berkeley, Antioch, Yale, Toronto, Detroit, *Columbia*' (Borstelmann, 1975: 106; emphasis added). Thus, the history of the ICWR is integral to the history of both child development and child psychology in North America. With this in mind, the present article aims to fill the gap in the literature regarding the Institute's history. I aim to provide a detailed account of its origins and development, emphasizing its administrative changes and detailing its internal, often unstable history. In order to reconstruct the Institute's history and to assess previous accounts, I have drawn on a number of archival sources and unpublished materials, the majority of which have not previously been considered by published scholarship. Careful, critical analysis of these sources suggests the demise of the Institute should be understood in the context of both the revision of philanthropic policies in the late 1920s and the Institute's singular emphasis on teaching and training over research.

### **Initial funding and forerunner efforts in child welfare studies at Columbia (1922–4)**

In his initial 1923 plan for funding child development research institutes in the United States presented to the LSRM, Lawrence Frank saw Teachers College as an instrument for testing the Memorial's national strategy and for calling attention to the value of scientific research in child welfare (Frank, 1962). The proposition made sense because Teachers College was the leading school of education in the country, with emphases on both research and training in educational and clinical psychology (Fierro, 2019). In 1923, a systematic survey on the status of the social sciences in the United States, commissioned by Ruml and conducted by Frank, concluded that Columbia was the leading institution in the awarding of PhDs from 1919 to 1922. One out of every three American doctorates in the social sciences had been awarded by the university, amounting to between two and three times the number of doctorates granted by Chicago and Harvard.<sup>3</sup> Frank also found that Columbia was one of the few universities that listed applied psychology as a major interest by the faculty, furthering it as a candidate for housing a project on child welfare research.

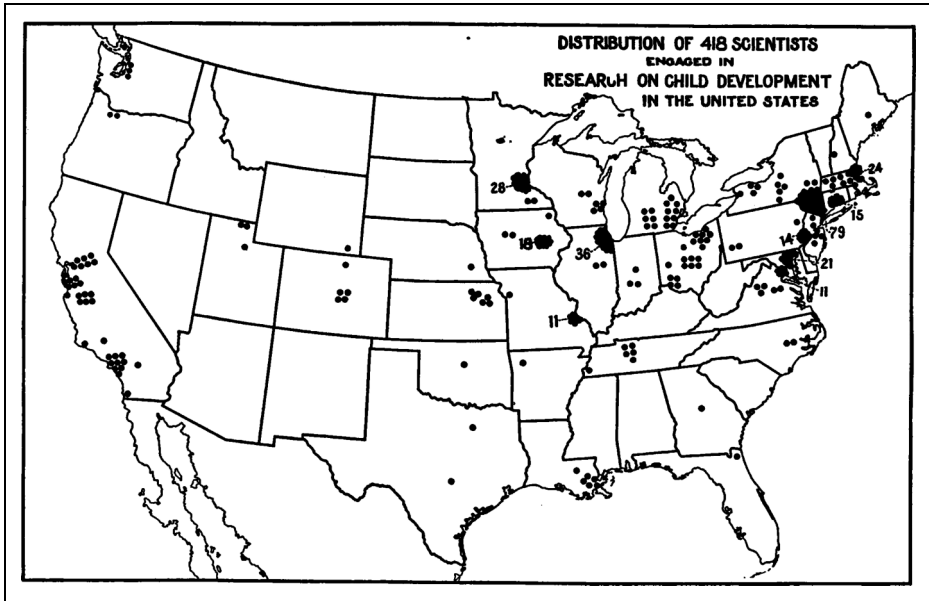
Frank himself was personally acquainted with Columbia. He had taken classes with John Dewey and had graduated from the university in 1912.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Frank's particular case was representative of a broader trend: Columbia was among the four main universities attended by trustees serving philanthropic foundations (Coffman, 1936). And the Rockefeller Foundation already had solid ties with Teachers College, having provided a total of \$6 million in 1917 to establish the College's experimental Lincoln School, where John D. Rockefeller Jr sent four of his five sons (Havighurst, 1980).

Relevantly, in 1922, 53-year-old Robert Sessions Woodworth was appointed chairman of the Committee on Child Welfare at the National Research Council's (NRC) Division of Anthropology and Psychology. Two years later, in 1924, he was appointed

chairman of the entire division. The executive officer of Columbia's psychology department since 1912, Woodworth was a renowned eclectic, and endorsed organizations and establishments on applied and clinical psychology (Farreras, 2001). While not a child researcher himself, he was listed in directories of researchers in child development as interested in the 'thinking in children' (Marston, 1927: 35). Woodworth believed in the 'general significance' of child psychology as a branch of psychology, stating he intended to do what he could 'as opportunity offered, to push forward these lines of research' (Woodworth, 1932: 372). Indeed, it was under Woodworth's direction in 1924 that the Committee first received funding from the LSRM and was reorganized that same year as the Committee on Child Development (CCD). Agencies such as the NRC and the CCD functioned as 'trade associations' for science: their role was to mediate between the scientific community and philanthropists (Kohler, 1987). As chairman of the division, Woodworth assessed and recommended both submissions for research projects on child welfare and applications by individual researchers to philanthropic foundations for support.

Woodworth's initiatives underlined Columbia's importance for child welfare research. By the end of 1924, Woodworth had sent 1200 questionnaires to all members of the American Psychological Association and to a sample of members from other behavioural sciences in order to determine 'who was undertaking research in the physical or mental development of children or young animals' (Woodworth, cited in Smuts, 1985: 112). Of the 355 questionnaires that were returned, 129 reported work in progress. Three aspects of Woodworth's endeavour should be highlighted. First, half of the reporting scholars were psychologists (McLean, 1954). Thus, psychology proved to be the main discipline in the country interested in child research. Second, if in 1918 there were only three American psychologists interested in children, Woodworth's survey showed that in just six years, the number of active researchers in child psychology had increased by around 2000%. Third, given Columbia's national reputation as a Mecca for psychology students in applied educational and clinical psychology at the time (Harper, 1949), the survey suggested that at least a considerable percentage of those active researchers had been educated there. This last point was proven by yet another survey conducted shortly thereafter: of the 425 North American medical and psychological researchers on developmental problems of early childhood, Columbia was the alma mater of the largest single group—18% of the entire sample (which coincidentally comprised the *exact* aggregate number of Chicago, Yale, and Clark graduates; Marston, 1927). Of those researchers who were psychologists, the largest single group—32%—had obtained their PhD at Columbia, some of them soon to become directors or staff at Memorial-funded child development institutes, such as Louis Coffman at Minnesota and Harold and Mary Cover Jones at Berkeley. Chicago, Clark, Stanford, Cornell, and Iowa were responsible for 9.7%, 9.7%, 5.2%, 4.5%, and 4.5% of psychology graduates, respectively. As shown in Figure 1, this survey also revealed that most child researchers were concentrated in the Northeast, particularly in New York State.

Thus, CCD surveys conducted under Woodworth not only provided fresh data for the growing interest in child development, but they also situated psychology, New York, and Columbia as key components in the Memorial's emergent national network. Accordingly, in 1923 the LSRM granted \$10,000 to Teachers College in order to test



**Figure 1.** Geographical distribution of 418 scientists engaged in research on child development in the United States, 1926–7. Source: Marston (1927: 4). Reproduced with permission from the National Academy of Sciences, courtesy of The National Academies Press, Washington, DC.

the prospective relationship between the two institutions. This amount has been described as having been allocated in ‘small awards’ (Cravens, 1993: 49), but the lack of specificity in this portrayal does not provide the full picture. More accurately, a forerunner of the Institute was first established in the academic year 1923–4 through these grants.<sup>5</sup>

In early 1923, the LSRM assigned 10% of its yearly ‘exploratory’ disbursements to two funds within the Teachers College Institute of Educational Research, then directed by Edward L. Thorndike and Otis Caldwell (Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 1925). These funds were known as ‘Spelman Fund A’ and ‘Spelman Fund B’, and allowed a research programme in child development to be set up at the College by November 1923.<sup>6</sup> Spelman Fund A aimed to study the ‘various aspects of child welfare in a type community’ and was allotted from April 1923 to July 1924, for a total amount of \$6750.<sup>7</sup> Research under Fund A assessed ‘the extent, nature and causes of failure of school and community to deal effectively with special cases’ (Russell, 1924: 10). The study was conducted by Lois Mossman at a New York City public school, and aimed to secure accurate and complete case descriptions of children who were not in the social catchments of the various agencies of betterment, such as schools, churches, scouts, and playgrounds. Spelman Fund B was disbursed for ‘an investigation with reference to children of pre-school age’, and was allocated to the College for the period of July 1923 to June 1924, for a total of \$10,000.<sup>8</sup> Two studies were conducted under Fund B: a study on the psychology of children’s fears and a study on the value of eggs in the diet of young children. The first study was the much-referenced and now-

classic study on children's fear by Mary Cover Jones under the direction of John B. Watson. When it had come to Thorndike's attention that young Columbia graduate student Cover Jones was conducting a behavioural study on children, he had persuaded the College's dean, James Earl Russell, to hire Watson to supervise her. Thorndike's choice further cemented the relation between Teachers College and the LSRM, because Watson had previous ties with members of the Memorial: from 1917 to 1918, he had worked closely with both Ruml and Ruml's PhD supervisor, James Rowland Angell, devising tests for the selection of military personnel for the Committee on Classification of Personnel (Hilgard, 1987).

Russell heeded Thorndike's suggestion and approached Watson; by September 1923, Watson had accepted the job offer, and Russell wrote him stating that he hoped they could 'demonstrate within the year that this undertaking is worthwhile'.<sup>9</sup> Watson quickly saw to it, surveying and assessing the existing facilities in New York to choose the location for Jones' experiment. He finally selected the Manhattan Day Nursery, and wrote that 'when we first started psychological laboratories in this country, no university had a plant as good as that [of the nursery]'.<sup>10</sup> Otis Caldwell, the director of the Division of School Experimentation at the Institute of Educational Research and director of the College's Lincoln School, was appointed overall director of the investigation, while Bess V. Cunningham, who at the time was an instructor in kindergarten and first-grade education at Teachers College, was appointed executive secretary.<sup>11</sup> Eighty percent of Cunningham's salary as secretary was charged to Spelman Fund B, and a further \$1000 was used for Watson's services.

The results of these 'prospective', exploratory research efforts pleased all parties involved: the Memorial, Frank, and the trustees at Teachers College. Frank then wrote to Russell stating that the Memorial would seriously consider a proposal by the College to provide a renewable, five-year grant in order to fund a research centre on child welfare, if the College made such a proposal. Russell was not immediately interested in the offer, but he was persuaded by the College faculty, especially by Thorndike, of the benefits of establishing a broad, long-term research enterprise on child development. Thorndike proved to be quite persuasive: when Russell submitted the College's plan for the promotion of child welfare research to the Memorial on 3 April 1924, he wrote as a complete convert to the cause. Russell highlighted the opportunities offered by New York City and its vicinity

for research, experimentation and demonstration, with every type of child, in every kind of home and institution, under all manner of influences and for all sorts of purposes. There is no end of tasks worth doing, and many worthy efforts are being made for the betterment of social conditions. Teachers College is engaged in solving one specific phase of the problem—the training of leaders for services in schools from kindergarten to college.<sup>12</sup>

By persuading Russell, Thorndike and his colleagues turned the College into a comprehensive venture for the field of child development and parent education. Additionally, by aligning the whole institution behind the idea, Thorndike and his colleagues defused what otherwise could have become a conflict of aims and interests, as shown by the resistance shown by other universities (Frank, in Senn, 1975: 15; see also Cravens, 1993; Lomax, 1977). Such resistance stemmed mainly from two sources: child psychology's

perceived lack of scientific rigour and university administrators' concerns regarding the future of these institutes once the time-limited grants were spent (Smuts, 2006).

Thus, on 3 June 1924, the LSRM granted Teachers College '\$50,000 a year for five years to maintain studies in child welfare research' (Russell, 1924: 12).<sup>13</sup> The grant was the single biggest donation for research purposes received by the College in the more than 30 years of its existence. More importantly, around 55% of the Memorial's *total* nationwide disbursements for child study for 1924 were directed to the College (Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 1925). The grant was almost ten times the amount the Rockefellers provided to the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station from 1922 to 1928, and was either equal to or greater than the introductory amount granted to the new Minnesota and Berkeley institutes. Thus, initially the College was the Memorial's main investment for devising a nationwide network of institutes on child study.

In June 1924, the College trustees formally established the ICWR as a new department at the College.<sup>14</sup> The Institute was to function as an independent division responsible directly to the dean ('The Institute of Child Welfare Research', 1927). Planning regarding the Institute's structure and organization began shortly thereafter (Russell, 1924: 12). The tentative draft of organization and administration was drawn up between June and October 1924, and its contents were formally adopted as 'laws' on 13 November 1924.<sup>15</sup> The draft established a specific scope of work that suggested research projects on psychology, health education, and nutrition. It also stipulated the creation of a psycho-educational clinic, a nursery school as a part of the clinic, and extracurricular projects. According to this first draft, the Institute aimed to provide instruction and research opportunities in child development; it was also to provide clinical services through professional advice to children and adolescents.

The 'forerunner' 1923–4 studies carried out under Fund A and Fund B thus effectively 'launched' the ICWR: the Institute was officially defined as an 'outgrowth' of these studies ('College News', 1925: 408). Several of the people involved would immediately occupy key places at the new Institute. Caldwell was appointed as the Institute's acting director, with the understanding that he was to look for a more suitable, full-time director, while Thorndike was appointed as a member of the administrative board and Cover Jones remained as a research associate until 1926. Bess Cunningham was the first staff member, hired as the Institute's secretary, with a salary of just half of the initial projected amount.<sup>16</sup> Although it has been stated that the Institute was established in 1925 (e.g. Frank, 1962), it was Cunningham's appointment on 1 September 1924 that marked the beginning of the Institute's effective operations.<sup>17</sup>

## **Slow start and administrative instability: The Institute of Child Welfare Research, 1924–9**

The Institute's own founders admitted that the potential research projects contained in their draft could be pursued effectively 'only as and when competent persons can be secured to do the work'.<sup>18</sup> The structure was laid down: now it was time to hire.



Caldwell was appointed as acting director of the ICWR on 13 November 1924, and under his direction in December 1924, Teachers College cashed the Memorial's grant.<sup>19</sup> Soon after the payment, in February 1925, Leslie R. Gregory and Leonard B. Job, two MAs at the College, were appointed as research assistants; because Cunningham was promoted to supervisor of the Institute's educational clinic on December 1924, Gregory soon replaced her as executive secretary.

The key appointment, however, was made several months after securing the grant. In July 1925, Teachers College's Bureau of Educational Service announced that Helen Bradford Thompson Woolley had been appointed director of the ICWR as well as professor of education at the College. The news coverage highlighted that Woolley was 'particularly well qualified to direct the activities of the Institute, a central agency for the many phases of child welfare research undertaken by the various departments of the College'.<sup>20</sup> After a slow initial year at the ICWR under his guidance and with little research to report, Caldwell declared that Woolley's appointment was 'the most important achievement of the year' and that 'her leadership in research in child welfare provides the foundation for vivid expectations of important results from work to be undertaken' (Caldwell, 1925: 51). The appointment made Woolley the only woman director of a child development institute in the United States (Smuts, 2006). As detailed in Table 1, by early 1926 the Institute's staff consisted of 33 people.<sup>21</sup>

Caldwell's description of Woolley was not an exaggeration: by 1925, the 51-year-old Woolley was a distinguished psychologist. A pioneering researcher on mental differences and gender, since obtaining her PhD in 1900 at Chicago under James R. Angell, she had worked as a psychology and philosophy professor, developed scales of psychological measurement for adolescents, and conducted research on child psychology, testing children referred by schools, families, and the juvenile court at Cincinnati, Ohio (Milar, 1999, 2004). Before arriving at Columbia, Woolley had been associate director at the Merrill-Palmer School since 1922, where she had taught courses in childcare and training and organized laboratory work in the then-novel nursery school. Furthermore, as vice president of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) from 1923 to 1925, Woolley had secured funding from the LSRM and worked with Lois Hayden Meek, another Teachers College graduate, in setting up a child development programme. Regarding her links with the Memorial, she shared a PhD supervisor—Angell—with Beardsley Ruml, and in 1919–20 she had worked alongside the latter on the APA's Committee of Five, which had been formed to consider methods of procedure for certifying consulting psychologists (Fernberger, 1932).

As an experimental and applied psychologist tied to the child development movement and to the main national funding agency of the period, Woolley was of clear value to Teachers College. Nonetheless, Woolley's five-year involvement with the ICWR was fraught with complications from the outset. She was formally appointed as director in October 1925, but she took a leave of absence until February 1926, so her actual work at the Institute did not begin until then. During the spring session of 1926—from February to June—she worked part-time at Merrill-Palmer, commuting every two weeks between Detroit and New York. At the time of Woolley's arrival at Columbia, she was also working on the completion of her extensive, complex book on her work at Cincinnati the decade before (Woolley, 1926a). Simultaneously, from 1926 to 1927,

**Table 1.** Staff at Columbia's Institute of Child Welfare Research (1925–6)

Section and post	Name	Appointed
<i>Administration</i>		
Director	Helen T. Woolley	2/1/1926
Executive secretary	Leslie R. Gregory	7/1/1925
Information clerk	Mrs. Earl W. Anderson	10/12/1925
Stenographer	Carrie Gross	7/1/1925
Stenographer	Philomena Denzi	12/1/1925
Stenographer	Sadie Marmelstein	2/1/1926
<i>Educational clinic</i>		
Supervisor	Bess V. Cunningham	7/1/1925
Physician	Mary D. Walsh	9/1/1925
Associate in research	Ethel B. Waring	9/1/1925
Associate in research/Physician	Josephine H. Kenyon	9/1/1925
Assistant in research	Janet Fowler	9/1/1925
Assistant in research	Myrtle McGraw	9/1/1925
Nurse	Virginia Platt	10/1/1925
<i>Nursery School</i>		
Head teacher in Institute school	Mary H. Rankin	9/1/1925
Head teacher in Institute school	Marion Walker	9/1/1925
Physician	Mary D. Walsh	9/1/1925
Associate in research	Mrs Ethel S. Waring	9/1/1925
Associate in research	Josephine H. Kenyon	9/1/1925
Nurse	Virginia Platt	10/1/1925
Assistant	Mrs S. B. Reed	10/1/1925
Part-time assistant	Edith Maddox	9/20/1925
Part-time assistant	Miriam Brubaker	9/20/1925
Part-time assistant	Flora Thurston	1/1/1925
Dietitian and cook	Pearl Shackelford	9/1/1925
Maid	Mitzi Gobiga	10/1/1925
Kitchen helper	Angeline Wood	10/1/1925
Kitchen maid	Bessie Ford	10/15/1925
<i>Individual studies</i>		
Associate in research	John P. Herring	9/1/1925
Associate in research	Leslie R. Gregory	7/1/1925
Associate in research	Leonard B. Job	7/1/1925
Associate in research	Ethel S. Waring	7/1/1925
Associate in research	Ella McCollum	10/1/1925
Assistant in nutritional research	Marion K. Wallace	9/10/1925
Associate in research	Delight B. Butts	7/1/1925
Associate in research	Vera E. Dye	7/1/1925

she sat as a member of the APA's Committee on Certification Policy, which assessed the procedures she had helped establish in 1920 (Fernberger, 1932). She also taught two courses on the mental development of the preschool child and on research in child development at the College.

This substantial workload precluded Woolley from dedicating herself to the ICWR on a full-time basis and seems to have taken a toll in her health. Work relations at the Institute during Woolley's first semester there were strained, and her daughter worried because Woolley began experiencing insomnia and weight loss (Fischer, cited in Milar, 2004: 314).

In addition to her preoccupation with her own work, available ICWR documents indicate that upon her arrival, it became clear that Woolley's vision for the Institute was different than that of the College's faculty and the Memorial. As conveyed by its title and by its founders' ideas, the ICWR was intended to be first and foremost a research enterprise. In fact, from 1924 to 1926, its official purpose was described as 'promoting research and investigation in pre-school training and the non-academic phases of elementary education' ('General Statement', 1926: 3). As a result of the Memorial's emphasis, child welfare at universities such as Yale, Minnesota, and Berkeley started with definite research programmes and cross-sectional as well as longitudinal studies on physical and mental growth, personality development, and behaviour measurement (Pols, 2002; Sears, 1975), and were coordinated by active and experimentally minded researchers such as Arnold Gesell, John Anderson, and Harold Jones, respectively. And while it is true that Woolley *was* an experimenter and researcher, most of her research had been conducted before the 1920s; by 1925, she was focused on teaching and giving public speeches and lectures. Moreover, it has been argued that there was 'no coherent body of work represented in Woolley's publications', in the sense that she did not develop 'a coherent research program' (Milar, 2004: 307). *An Experimental Study of Children* (Woolley, 1926a) presented the full report and analysis of her earlier work, and therefore did not represent new research. Indeed, between 1925 and 1926, Woolley would publish only three case studies from her work at Merrill-Palmer: analyses of the personality of children, 'whose function is to foster the investigation of and the teaching of child psychology' (Woolley, 1925: 569). Finally, her work at the time suggests Woolley subordinated basic research on physical and mental development to its applied ends: that is, to the scientific *training* and *education* of mothers in child-rearing and childcare. Children should be tested, assessed, and measured insofar as the data could be redirected to improving parental practices and home environments, and it was 'the nursery school [that] offer[ed] a laboratory which can be used to vitalize instruction in child care' (Woolley, 1926c: 68). Woolley finally moved permanently to New York in September 1926. At the time of her arrival, she was first and foremost an applied psychologist and a scholar interested in educating parents and training professionals in the field of child development.

Understandably, the ICWR's reports for the year 1926–7 state that Woolley introduced 'a change in the methods of the work [at the Institute]'.<sup>22</sup> She strengthened the Institute's nursery school and emphasized its cooperation with the university. The ICWR was now intended to function as an educational platform for Teachers College and other university institutions, de-emphasizing research: it was defined as a 'laboratory

for demonstration and practical experience' ('Courses in the Field', 1927: 104). The Institute's reformed aim was to train students and workers in child development, mainly those from Columbia University, the New York School for Social Work, the New School for Social Research, and the Union Theological Seminary (Teachers College, 1930).

Woolley intended the Institute to become 'a place for the training of the workers of child welfare', to the extent 'that its name might almost be changed to an Institute of Child Welfare Research and Training'.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, from 1926 onwards, the developing activities at the Institute were the training of workers in the field of child welfare through courses both at the ICWR and at Teachers College, and training through observation and practice in the nursery school. In her first official report as director of the ICWR, Woolley stated that the Institute would focus in the study of the various phases in the life of the preschool child, and 'in the closely related field of parental education' (Woolley, 1926b: 41). In this scheme, research played a rather small part: only three exploratory research projects were reported during 1925–6, and by 1927 only 9 of the 425 North American researchers in child development listed were working at Teachers College (Marston, 1927). Similarly, the provision of clinical service—originally one of the Institute's three main aims—was refocused as a means of providing opportunities for graduate students' practice and professional training. Thus, the official purposes of the Institute by 1927 were the study of child development and the 'train[ing of] leaders in the fields of child welfare and parental education' ('Courses in the Field of Child Development', 1927).

The Memorial's grants granted a high degree of autonomy to university-based research centres: each institution 'assume[d] responsibility for the competence of the staff and the scientific spirit of the investigations'.<sup>24</sup> Institutes thus became 'small empires, each with a powerful and dominant director' (Sears, 1975: 19). Directors were the key cogs in their institutes' broader machinery: they were in charge of various graduate courses, conducted clinical examinations, and gave public talks. They represented their institutes to their peers, to trustees, and even to philanthropists. More importantly, directors coordinated the intellectual efforts at their institutes, providing them with orientation and guidance. Other LSRM-funded institutes enjoyed steady and stable administrations, their directorships spanning decades. Columbia's, however, showed an unstable leadership and a fragile equilibrium. By January 1927, after four months of directing the ICWR, Woolley began suffering from severe anxiety. In February 1927, she was depressed and suicidal, and had to remain at a New York sanitarium between January and December 1927. She was thus absent on leave at the ICWR (Columbia University, 1928).<sup>25</sup> After leaving the sanitarium, Woolley was granted another leave of absence until February 1928.<sup>26</sup>

The authorities at Teachers College were forced to look for a new, temporary director. Dean Russell's choice for Woolley's replacement from January 1927 to September 1928 was 40-year-old PhD Ruth Andrus.<sup>27</sup> A New York native, Andrus had graduated from Vassar College in 1907, obtaining her MA there in 1908. After working as a teacher in college preparatory schools, she had been dean of the faculty at the Kentucky College for Women from 1914 to 1922. In 1922, she had turned to Teachers College in order to complete her doctorate, obtaining the degree in 1924 with a dissertation on

the creation of an inventory of the habits of children of between two and five years of age (Andrus, 1924). After lecturing in kindergarten and first-grade education in 1925, Andrus had been appointed assistant professor of education on November 1926 and was promoted to associate professor a month after her appointment as director of the ICWR.<sup>28</sup> Contrary to Woolley, Andrus did not have a strong reputation as a researcher, and she was not known by Ruml, Frankl, or the Memorial.

Up to that point in 1926, Andrus had been in charge of teaching three graduate courses at the College and developing the Institute's programme of parent education with the parents of the nursery school children. The programme involved a series of parent meetings and conferences by psychologists, physicians, and nutritionists that instructed the former in child-rearing and education. During her tenure at the ICWR from January 1927 to October 1928, Andrus pushed the Institute further in the direction of her parent education programme. She inherited Woolley's courses, and her teaching load amounted to eight courses a year. In her first unpublished annual report for the LSRM, after lamenting the 'severe [administrative] handicap' that had been caused by 'the illness and temporary discontinuance in office of Dr. Helen T. Woolley', Andrus stated that an administrative policy of the Institute had been 'developing' since the previous year with Woolley as its director.<sup>29</sup> This policy included a reorganization of the Institute from a departmental to an integrated structure, with psychological, medical, nutritional, and social divisions.<sup>30</sup>

Andrus stated that the ICWR had two official functions: instruction and research. No mention was made of child service, one of the Institute's aims since its conception.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, of these two functions, Andrus argued that instruction was the more important. Following Woolley's lead, Andrus asserted that

although the chief function was originally research, there has been a growing emphasis on the instructional side. Since the purpose of Teachers College is to give professional training, it follows that the instructional phase of the work at the Institute must receive increasing attention to meet the demands made upon it. The present country-wide interest in all phases of child development and the need of professional workers in this field, are added factors.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, from 1927 to 1928, the ICWR focused on providing instruction to both its nursery school's children and their parents. 'Instruction' to children meant the reconditioning of their behaviours. This involved the study and modification of children's habits, physical and dietary difficulties, preferences, 'undesirable' social habits, and successful modes of reacting to training materials. Case records of these changes were then used as teaching and research material. Adult instruction, on the other hand, involved parental group meetings and a consultation service, in which the Institute's staff discussed the results of the studies with the children's parents. This whole structure was a replication of Andrus' programme of parent education started in 1926 (Woolley, 1926b).

In March 1928, the College arranged for Woolley to tour Europe with Rockefeller funds to visit child research institutes and nursery schools in Vienna, Brussels, Geneva, and England. She returned as director of the ICWR in September 1928, but her health was worsening and she was perceived as increasingly paranoid by her daughter

(Fischer, cited in Milar, 2004: 315). According to Woolley's psychiatrist, she herself argued that 'during her absence, what organization had existed [at the ICWR] had disintegrated' (Lambert, cited in *ibid.*: 315). However, evidence suggests not only that the Institute's structure and organization had not disintegrated, but that most changes that had taken place—the revision of its departmental structure and the further emphasis on instruction at the expense of research—had originally been proposed by Woolley herself in 1926 (Woolley, 1926b).<sup>33</sup>

In any case, Woolley directed the Institute from September 1928 to March 1929; in October 1928, Andrus resigned all her appointments and left the College. Upon her return, Woolley found she now had more executive responsibilities. Cunningham's reorganization of the nursery school now forced Woolley to supervise both the clinical (medical) service and the clinical examinations conducted by psychology trainees.<sup>34</sup> She was also appointed as adviser to students who were candidates for the College's diplomas in parent education, and now taught over six graduate courses. In early 1929, she was made a member of the College's Committee on Higher Degrees, which was charged with formulating policies regarding work for the PhD degree, setting standards and giving final approval to doctoral dissertations.<sup>35</sup> This meant that Woolley also had to partake in the evaluation of dissertations. She asked for another leave of absence from March to July 1929, returning to teach at the College's summer school by the latter date.

## **Consolidating a venture for training psychologists: The Child Development Institute from 1929 to 1936**

Already in 1927, Woolley had suggested that the Institute's change of aims and emphasis should be reflected in a change of its title. When she returned in September 1928, she quickly saw to this. On an unsigned report for the year 1928 that nonetheless bears Woolley's style, it was again stated that a change of title was desirable. The rationale was even clearer this time: 'Research is only one of the purposes of the Institute. *And from one point of view not the leading purpose.* The present title seems to place too much emphasis on the research phases of the Institute'.<sup>36</sup> She would repeat the same statement word by word in her last yearly report as director of the Institute (Woolley, 1929: 51).

On 5 February 1929, the Institute was finally renamed the Child Development Institute. As the title suggested, its main purpose was stated to be the training of 'leaders, executives and workers in the field of child development, child welfare and parental education', such as heads of department at universities, executives in social clinics, nursery school teachers, nurses, and professionals from the developing fields of training and service.<sup>37</sup> However, further problems ensued. The Institute kept attracting more graduate students from the College and from several departments at the university, mainly from its psychology department. The scheduled observations at the nursery school for training and research purposes often overlapped with the physical presence of students from the College, which was deemed disruptive. This was added to the fact that research work with preschool children consumed most of the Institute's infrastructure, although the Institute had been relocated to the remodelled Speyer School building

in Manhattan in 1926. The 'already excessively limited space' forced the Institute to refuse access to several classes during the 1928–9 academic year.<sup>38</sup> Woolley's own class in child development, Cunningham's in child development, and Mary Whitley's in child psychology could not make use of the Institute as a training laboratory during these semesters.

It was becoming evident that the Institute's limited space and resources were hindering its overall functioning. Woolley used this situation to keep reducing the Institute's research remit. In her last yearly report, she defined research activities at the Institute as an 'outstanding activity' (Woolley, 1929: 51) and argued that such research should not 'preclude attention to the equally important purpose of developing leaders' (*ibid.*). Her leave of absence in March amidst discussions on these issues did not improve the situation and left the Institute at an impasse.

As mentioned above, directors were responsible for their institutes' productivity and coordination. Woolley's leave in March 1929 was her fourth in less than three years, so the College's authorities intervened. At their insistence, by early 1929 she acknowledged the need to hire an associate director at the Institute. Woolley recommended Lois Hayden Meek, her former colleague at the AAUW between 1924 and 1925.

Meek was a Teachers College graduate. In 1921, the 29-year-old Meek had enrolled as a graduate student at Columbia. After a year of study under Thorndike, Woodworth, Arthur Gates, and Leta Stetter Hollingworth, she had obtained her MA in 1922 (Meek Stolz, 1988). Meek was interested in the learning abilities of children, and for her doctoral dissertation she had conducted experiments on the effect of practice in learning and retention in young children (Meek, 1925). After obtaining her PhD in 1925, she had been offered an assistant professorship at the College and a job at the aforementioned LSRM-funded programme for parent education at the AAUW in Washington. Thorndike advised Meek to accept the AAUW's offer in order to boost her work credentials. She moved to Washington and in 1924 became the educational secretary of the Memorial's programme on child development and parent education.

Five years after her departure, William Russell—dean of the College since 1927 and son of former dean James Russell—contacted Meek in early 1929 and encouraged her to come to New York.<sup>39</sup> He offered her an associate professorship of education at the College and the associate directorship of the Institute.<sup>40</sup> Meek promptly accepted.<sup>41</sup> The same day that Meek accepted the job, Russell communicated her appointment to Ruml.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to Woolley's unavailability, it is useful to situate both Meek's hiring and Russell's rapid communication to Ruml in a broader context. By 1929, the five-year grant that the LSRM had granted to the College in 1924 was about to expire, and as per the Memorial's policy, there was no 'assurances of continuity of support'.<sup>43</sup> Russell was clearly interested in securing another grant from the Fund in order to keep the venture running. But given the Institute's problematic history, its limited success, its conflicting aims, and Woolley's discontinuous presence there, he first needed to stabilize the staff and assure the LSRM that the whole enterprise was still profitable. Rockefeller officers and administrators assessed the overall quality of institutions and their executive capacities: as stated by Ruml himself, the Memorial cultivated its fields of interest 'systematically': it was 'not interested [in] particular organizations; it [was] interested

in the work that [was] to be done'.<sup>44</sup> And it was precisely in the area of concrete work that the College's Institute was failing. Meek was thus seen as a much-needed strategic addition in order to strengthen the Institute's operations and placate the funder.

However, an additional problem had presented itself during 1928, when the Rockefeller Foundation dissolved the Memorial and assigned the Spelman Fund of New York, a Rockefeller subsidiary, to oversee the administration of new grants.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, by 1928, and after two years of internal conflict and debates on excessive spending, overlapping boards, organizational inconsistencies, and the Foundation's overall efficiency, Rockefeller's agencies consolidated into a single foundation focused on pure research. One of its now many subsidiaries, the Spelman Fund was left to focus on social research and application from May 1928 onwards. Regarding its funding, the Fund was left with \$10 million to operate; the LSRM's remaining \$63 million, which Ruml had not yet given away to the social sciences, was reabsorbed by the Foundation and redirected, and the Memorial itself was terminated on 3 January 1929 (Bulmer and Bulmer, 1981).<sup>46</sup> Regarding its policy, the Fund was to focus on knowledge useful for practitioners in areas such as social work and social control. Altogether, the Foundation's new policies greatly diverged from its previous outlook: it now emphasized research over teaching or application; it provided for individuals rather than institutions; and it gave short-term grants for specific projects after specific, commonly agreed schemes had been worked out between the Foundation and the recipient (Kohler, 1978). These changes were bad news for the Child Development Institute: as an institution centred on teaching and parent education with no top-down imposed agenda, it was exemplary of the kind of work the Foundation was abandoning.

In a letter sent in January 1929 communicating the reorganization to Russell, the president of the Rockefeller Foundation, George Vincent, clearly stated that in assuming the obligations of the former LSRM, the Foundation 'regards itself as in no way committed to the renewal of appropriations or pledges in the future'.<sup>47</sup> Vincent's phrasing, together with the fact that he had participated in and personally overseen the Foundation's reorganization, only added to the uncertainty of the Institute's immediate future. In this context, Meek was seen as the ideal choice for associate director, not only because of her qualifications and her previous ties with the College, but because she was trusted by Ruml and Frank at the Rockefeller Foundation due to her work at the LSRM-funded AAUW programme (Meek Stolz, 1988). As Woolley had been years before, Meek was now an asset to Columbia.

Meek was appointed at the Institute in July 1929, arriving in New York between August and September. After her arrival, Russell again reassured Ruml that Meek 'will be of invaluable service to the Institute'.<sup>48</sup> Undoubtedly in part because of what Meek's inclusion brought to the table, the Spelman Fund renewed its funding with a five-year grant of \$100,000 per year.<sup>49</sup> Unwilling to participate in the Foundation's new structure, however, Ruml left the Spelman Fund shortly thereafter and accepted a post as dean of the Division of the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago.

Although the \$500,000 amount of the Institute's 1929 endowment was double that of the previous 1924–9 grant, the Institute's standing with the Fund had clearly changed. Columbia's share of the Memorial's total yearly child study disbursements had been reduced from 55% in 1924 to less than 10% in 1929; the amount was also the smallest



if compared to those granted to the other university institutes (Coffman, 1936; Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 1929). It was the Memorial's policy not to concentrate too narrowly on particular institutions so as to avoid 'the danger of institutional bias', and the natural intellectual competitiveness brought about by the existence of a variety of child welfare institutions looking for funding pushed Columbia into last place.<sup>50</sup>

During the few months that Woolley and Meek worked together from September 1929 to early 1930, the Institute further increased its emphasis on teaching and training. Courses of instruction for qualified students at Teachers College centred on nursery school teaching, on the psychological testing of young children, and on the behaviour of young children (Child Development Institute, 1929). From around 1929 onwards, the Institute also increased its involvement in the wider community and began offering its students visits to schools and clinics in New York City. By 1929, the Institute staff consisted of 22 members, less than a third of whom were research associates.<sup>51</sup>

In February 1930, four months after Meek's arrival, Dean Russell asked for Woolley's resignation, citing her health issues and the need to reorganize the Institute as his reasons. She presented her resignation on 13 February, to be effective as of 1 September, but that same day Russell underlined that Woolley's association with the ICWR was immediately ended. Only a day before, in a letter written to Meek on 12 February, Russell had claimed that Woolley was taking a leave of absence 'to finish her book and to prepare for publication certain studies in the Institute'.<sup>52</sup> Russell was presumably being diplomatic, since there is no evidence suggesting that Woolley was entertaining such plans. In the letter, Russell informed Meek that he was hereby transferring 'all administrative authority, formerly appertaining to the Director, to the Associate Director'.<sup>53</sup> This was not a temporary measure of the kind arranged with Andrus a few years earlier. Meek was not appointed as acting director, but as *director*, with all its corresponding responsibilities, even if the formal title was not yet available.<sup>54</sup> This is further reflected by the fact that in the same letter Russell asked Meek to 'prepare plans for the future development of this enterprise, and submit a statement as to next year with a budget in accord'.<sup>55</sup>

Russell seems to have intended to minimize the publicity of Woolley's dismissal and the changes at the Institute: when after six months Meek wrote her first director's report, she included references to Woolley's departure in her draft. Russell passed the report to the Spelman Fund 'as it stood', but regarding the version that was to be published in the dean's annual report, he informed Meek that 'the references to changes in the staff have been omitted'.<sup>56</sup> Following Russell's editing, Meek's first published report as director did not make any mention of Woolley's leaving or any related staff change (Meek, 1930).

Over her five-year tenure, Woolley's time at the Institute totalled approximately 24 months—little more than a third of the intended time—and was marked by disruption. This placed unexpected and sometimes unmanageable strain on Woolley's colleagues and replacements, as suggested by Andrus' resignation. Alongside workload-related tensions, there was a significant financial concern: from 1927 to 1929, almost 25% of the annual appropriation from the LSRM fund was allocated to 'the medical care of Mrs. Woolley'.<sup>57</sup> Available evidence suggests that the reasons for Woolley's dismissal were related to her chronic absence as the head of the Institute and the ensuing institutional instability, rather than part of the personal agenda of Dean Russell (Morse, 2002) or a gender issue (Rodkey, 2010).

Moreover, given that it was Woolley who recommended Meek as associate director, the implied umbrage in phrasing such as '*to add insult to her injury*, her assistant, Lois Meek Stoltz [*sic*], was appointed to Woolley's position' (Morse, 2002: 137; emphasis added) is clearly speculative. In any case, Lois Meek was formally appointed as director of the Institute in April 1930 but was announced only several weeks later.<sup>58</sup>

It has been claimed that in 1931, a year after Woolley's resignation, '[Meek] Stoltz [*sic*] was moved over to the college when the institute was disbanded' (Morse, 2002: 137). However, Meek had been assistant professor of education at the College since 1929. More importantly, the Institute was not disbanded in 1931. On the contrary, between 1930 and 1931 the Institute reorganized its nursery schools, and developed a programme in which different groups of children were arranged by controlling for different variables, such as parents' occupation and socio-economic status, in order to provide better services and improved research opportunities in undergraduate and graduate research.<sup>59</sup> Meek also oversaw the implementation of Woolley's reorganization plan, replacing the Institute's departmentalism with functional divisions based on the integration of the activities carried out by its various specialists.<sup>60</sup>

By 1932, the Institute was providing its students with observation opportunities at 39 educational and clinical institutions, practicums at 16 institutions, and research activities at 9 institutions; again, teaching and training locations greatly surpassed research settings.<sup>61</sup> Around half of these agencies were New York public schools or nurseries, but there were also juvenile courts, crime prevention bureaus, churches, orphanages, and associations. As director, Meek was also a general adviser to all College students who wished to prepare for work in welfare institutions of these kinds.<sup>62</sup> Members of national welfare organizations, such as the Child Study Association of America (CSAA) and the National Council of Parent Education, often gave lectures and offered courses at the Institute. Conversely, members of the Institute's staff participated in several national and local committees, including the advisory board of the CSAA, the national council of the YMCA, and the New York Committee on Mental Hygiene. From 1930 to 1936, the Institute expanded its role as an agent in local and national debates on psychology, education, and child study; starting in 1929, Institute staff attended and gave conferences at every APA annual meeting and at every annual meeting of the New York Psychological Association, of which Teachers College instructors in clinical psychology such as David Mitchell and Leta Stetter Hollingworth were members.

The intensification of the Institute's relations with public agencies took place alongside the refocusing and diversifying of its ongoing services to the community. Under Meek's tenure, the Institute provided five kinds of service: information on and demonstration of the care and guidance of children, business advice for children-related industries, educational counsel to schools and child welfare institutions, lectures and short courses to professional groups, and individual consultation opportunities for parents (Child Development Institute, 1934). In 1929–30, a psychological clinic for 'problem children' was established by Columbia's psychology department using the Institute's resources, being supervised by Teachers College professor Goodwin Watson (Meek, 1930). Family issues were processed through the Family Consultation Bureau, which from 1932 onwards provided a wide range of services to both the families of members of Columbia University faculty and the parents of children at Columbia's schools and

departments, from advice on cookery, clothing, and household engineering to information on bacteriology and management (Figures 2 and 3).<sup>63</sup>

By 1933, the Institute was registering a yearly enrolment of almost 600 students. Based on an empirical report of its students' interests, it was clear the Institute was fulfilling two aims: for students specializing in this work, it provided intensive training for major positions in child development and parent education; and for a broader range of students, it provided service opportunities through courses, field work, and research (Meek, 1931). During the 1930s, most students at the Institute chose child development and parent education as their major, but psychology majors were the third most prevalent: 1 out of 10 graduate students majored in psychology.<sup>64</sup> More than half of those psychology majors were enrolled on two advanced courses at the Institute: Meek's own 'Mental and Social Development of the Young Child' course and a course on the 'behavior problems of children', although courses on the mental testing of young children were also popular. Teaching was also supplemented by activities conducted in special rooms with equipment for specific demonstrations and research. Built during the early 1930s, these rooms included respiration chambers and dedicated spaces for mental testing and the experimental study of phenomena such as the psychology of music, emotions, problem solving, and imagination (Child Development Institute, 1934). However, even a decade after its establishment, the Institute itself was not producing a stable amount of research, and was having relatively little impact on state-of-the-art child psychology.



**Figure 2.** A typical physical examination at the Child Development Institute, ca. 1931. Children at the nursery schools underwent daily physical examinations in order to prevent contagion and to place them in suitable educational programmes. Source: Davis and Hansen (1933: 6–1). Image in public domain.



**Figure 3.** Intelligence testing at the Child Development Institute, ca. 1931. Intelligence testing was a key feature at Columbia's Institute. It was conceived as a means for advancing research on developmental norms and for providing practice for graduate students. Source: Davis and Hansen (1933: 14–1). Reproduced with permission from the National Academy of Sciences, courtesy of The National Academies Press, Washington, DC. Image in public domain.

By 1931, less than 1% of American researchers in child development were working at the Institute (Hicks, 1931).

In June 1934, the Institute moved again, from the Speyer building to the Lincoln Research Building at Teachers College. The building had been erected in 1928 and housed the College's Institute of School Experimentation. Better facilities and a closer proximity to the university furthered the Institute's ability to serve as a teaching and training enterprise.

This suggests that the Institute was effectively integrated into Columbia's and the College's agenda. Thus, it is striking that Lawrence Frank was under the impression that Dean Russell and his faculty saw 'Teachers' [*sic*] College [as merely] running this Institute for the Memorial' (Frank, cited in Cravens, 1993: 62). Moreover, historians' conclusions that Frank 'had not given Russell any reason to consider the institute an integral part of Teachers College' (*ibid.*) or that the College's Institute suffered 'from [a] divorce from the ongoing operations of the universit[y]' (Sears, in Senn, 1975: 86) should also be read cautiously. Indeed, and as pointed out by Meek herself (Meek, in *ibid.*), one of the main problems at American child welfare research institutes was that most staff members were not stable faculty. But this applied to almost every other institute, not only Columbia's; in fact, in the 1920s, the then-new research committees and institutes at American universities were all distinguished by both their autonomy (or

semi-autonomy) from their ‘mother’ institutions and their freedom to pursue research unhindered by teaching obligations (Karl and Katz, 1981; Kohler, 1978). Child welfare institutes owed their very existence as administrative units to what Ruml and the Memorial saw as the shortcomings of universities regarding research: lack of funding, limited facilities for collecting and analysing data, and, most importantly, faculty diverted from research because of teaching demands. Moreover, to avoid any potential public controversy, Rockefeller’s policy regarding social sciences research *mandated* that the institutes were to retain total freedom regarding their procedures, staff, and decisions.

Finally, Meek herself noted that Columbia’s particular situation regarding its staff and appointments was a necessary corollary of the short-term grant system that had been devised by Frank and the Memorial. This system forced researchers to think ‘just sort of out of breath’, hindered faculty appointments at the Institute, and made the staff feel pressed by the limited scope of the funding time frames. The system made long-term studies impossible and precluded the Institute from ‘assur[ing] people of a long-time appointment’ (Meek, in Senn, 1975: 84).

Be that as it may, available records show the Institute collaborated closely with both its ‘parent’ institutions. They also suggest that by 1934 the Institute, an intended research venture, had effectively become a training facility for the College.

## **Further philanthropic revisions and economic crises: The folding of the Child Development Institute**

The Institute’s expansion doubled its expenses and budgetary needs in a critical historical context marked by the social and economic consequences of the Great Depression. Economic recession forced further rationalization of both public and private investments. Budgetary cuts affected both the institutes and their host institutions. More importantly, it led to societal prioritization of employment, housing, and adult—not just child—welfare (Havighurst, 1980; Smuts, 2006).

Preoccupations and doubts regarding the future of the Institute during the economic crisis were first voiced by the parents of its nursery school children, who as early as May 1933 wrote to the New York Academy of Medicine about their concern that there was ‘grave danger’ that the Institute’s grant, which expired the following year, would not be renewed.<sup>65</sup> This concern would prove to be prophetic. Seven months later, and on the verge of the grant’s depletion, on 4 January 1934 Dean Russell wrote to Lawrence Frank, then associate director of education at the Rockefeller Foundation’s General Education Board (GEB), with a proposal for the future development of the Institute.<sup>66</sup> Originally dedicated to improving schooling and education problems in the South through general grants, since the Foundation’s reorganization in 1928 the GEB had turned its \$40 million endowment ‘toward a few selected purposes rather than toward any general expansion of the well-recognized and established forms of higher education’ (Coffman, 1936: 55). This meant giving limited grants for specific purposes with the aim of improving secondary education and colleges (Biebel, 1976). Child welfare was not part of the GEB’s jurisdiction—its ‘child growth and development’

programme, under Frank's direction, was rather small and had a limited budget—and as a result, Columbia's Institute did not quite fall within its remit, but Russell had run out of options: with Ruml gone since 1930, the Foundation focused on basic research on medical sciences, and the Spelman Fund focused on Southern charities, Frank and the GEB were the Institute's only remaining allies.

Russell requested a *yearly* grant of \$200,000 from the GEB to be used during the 1934–6 period: twice the amount of the previous grant and to be used in less than half the time. Moreover, this amount was approximately 10% of the entire budget the GEB allocated for scientific research on childhood. Frank took almost two months to answer. On 20 February 1934, he acknowledged Russell's request and communicated that the executive committee of the GEB 'did not find it practicable to accede to this request fully'.<sup>67</sup> The committee offered half the requested amount instead; it also explicitly stated that after supplying that grant, no further assistance would be given by the GEB towards maintaining the Institute.

Frank's communication constituted the official termination of Rockefeller support; he himself would leave the GEB and the Rockefeller Foundation altogether in 1936. Between 1934 and 1936, Columbia's Institute was forced to work with half the initially necessary funds. This prompted the re-evaluation of the venture's future plans. In private correspondence to Russell, Meek stated that the future of the Institute's work would be determined 'not by measure of outside support, but by the degree that Teachers College may find it practicable to provide for the support of the work the Child Development Institute had carried on'.<sup>68</sup> With this in mind, Meek devised a tighter budget for the 1934–7 period, and again emphasized that its work had to be successfully integrated with that of the College if it was to continue. Meek was forced to release people from their contracts: non-administrative staff, such as research associates, assistants, and consultants, were reduced from around 30 in 1934 to between 16 and 18 in 1934.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, under Meek's plan the Institute still required an additional \$60,000 per year from the College to keep operating.<sup>70</sup>

The College could not maintain the Institute's staff and services for long. While other institutes survived by reducing research efforts and curtailing programmes, by the end of 1936 Columbia's Institute of Child Development finally ceased operating.

## Conclusion: Beyond a history of underachievement

Initially conceived as a research station for obtaining data and developing applications relating to child welfare, the ICWR experienced a slow but promising start between 1924 and 1926. A limited number of research studies were undertaken during the Institute's first three years. The Institute set up and ran one of the few active American psycho-educational clinics during the 1920s, organized a nursery school, and provided opportunities in instruction, research, and clinical service for New York educators and psychologists.

Conflicts regarding the Institute's purpose became chronic during its short existence. Starting in 1926, Woolley shifted the emphasis from research to the training and education of professionals in child welfare, emphasizing parent education and nursery schools. This trend was continued by her temporary replacement, Andrus, but by 1929 the

Institute's teaching capacities and resources were lacking, as acknowledged by its own members. After Woolley's dismissal, Lois Hayden Meek increased the Institute's emphasis on childcare and parent education from 1930 to 1936, although some research was still carried out. This reflected a deeper schism between the Memorial's broad strategy and what the Institute staff actually managed to carry out.

In addition to these problems of definition, the American economic crisis and the redefinition of philanthropic policies proved to be the fatal blows to the Institute. After the GEB refused to renew funding for the Institute in 1936, the whole enterprise folded. Frank's take on the Institute's demise—that Meek's 'vigorous program' at the College was terminated when Columbia was '*unwilling* to continue to support the institute after the foundation support had terminated' (Frank, 1962: 211; emphasis added)—underestimates the exorbitant expense the Institute would have imposed on Columbia on a yearly basis. Ironically, universities such as Iowa and Berkeley, which had initially resisted child development institutes, managed to maintain their institutes during the 1930s, while Columbia, which had welcomed the strategy with no resistance and even with marked enthusiasm, became the only university whose Institute vanished quickly after the funding had ended.

Differences and contrasts between the ICWR and other philanthropy-funded child welfare institutes shed further light on its fall. First, while every other Memorial-funded child welfare institute had an appointed director from its inception, Columbia's was the only venture that received funding *before* a stable, regular director had been appointed. This led to a slow start for the Institute, which soon lagged behind its contemporaries. Changes in and struggles over the Institute's leadership weakened the coherence and consistency of its scholarly efforts, which did not happen at Iowa, Yale, or Berkeley. More importantly, the Institute's policy departed from both the Memorial's research aims and developments at other institutes. Efforts at other universities developed into systematic and thorough research programmes, and their institutes could account for their efforts and the investments of their philanthropic funders. During the 1930s, the field of child development as a whole steered away from dissemination and parent education and towards basic and applied research in child growth and development (Grant, 1999), but Columbia's Institute continued to favour the education and training of specialists in child development and the provision of psychological and clinical services. The lack of a coherent research programme was Columbia's distinctive feature, a fact that in turn stemmed from the Institute directors' eclectic interests and their own lack of a cumulative research record.

Nonetheless, to consider the ICWR a failure would be an oversimplification. Although launched through private philanthropy, the Institute was an outgrowth of Teachers College's philosophy of education, which stressed professional education and practical training and teaching beyond readings and lectures. As stated by Dean William Russell, professional preparation for teachers and psychologists came 'from laboratories, models, and apparatus, from observing and participating in practical work, from things as contrasted with persons' (Russell, 1928: 14). The ICWR, with its 'ingenious system of practical contacts' (ibid.: 15), was a clear example of that professional, practical education; as a hub for scholarly training, it served the College well, at least to some extent. If by 1910 there were few 'serious' scholars in child psychology in the United States,

by 1936 the field was populated by hundreds of clinical and educational psychologists. The ICWR played no small part in this strengthening of the field, providing training and education in child development, clinical psychology, and educational procedures to hundreds of students from 1927 to 1936.

More psychologists and teachers in the New York area also meant improved psychological services. By the 1930s, College students and graduates were lecturing, conducting observations, undertaking practices, and researching in almost five dozen New York schools, clinics, hospitals, juvenile courts, and churches. The ICWR was a regional asset, collaborating with parent and child study associations, nursery schools, department stores, radio stations, and even national councils.

More broadly, on a national scale the ICWR was neither a failure nor an unfulfilled promise. Its pilot 1923–4 studies showed the feasibility of undertaking Rockefeller-funded research in child psychology. These studies also meant the legitimization of the whole enterprise in the eyes of university trustees, private funders, and psychologists alike, which led other universities to accept private grants and to develop fully fledged child development programmes.

When defining their main objective, philanthropic organizations set a quite high bar in the 1920s: they intended to ‘investigate the underlying causes of human and social evil’ (Karl and Katz, 1981: 244) or, even more broadly, to prevent and reduce social problems and ‘thus to permanently improve the human condition’ (Havighurst, 1980: 5). Amidst the post-war enthusiasm and optimism for social reconstruction, government officials, universities, research institutes, and individual scholars legitimated these lofty aspirations. It is plausible that, as stated by Cravens (1993: 61–2), Columbia’s Institute ‘never achieved the high goals Frank [and the Memorial] had hoped for it’, that its results were ‘disappointing’ (ibid.), and even that, as stated by Schlossman (1981: 283), the Institute ‘never quite realized its intellectual promise’. But these rather harsh assessments take for granted the heavy expectations that were placed on American child welfare institutes. More importantly, they neglect the Institute’s troubled internal history, thus preventing us from being able to fully grasp its development and dynamics. These developments contributed in no small measure to the scientific legitimization of child psychology and thus to the professionalization and institutionalization of clinical and child psychology in university settings during the 1920s and 1930s.


### **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas through a posdoctoral research grant.

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## Notes

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 14th Clio-Psyché Meeting and 4th Brazilian Congress of the History of Psychology, 5–6 November 2020. This research is part of the broader research project ‘The Roots of Scientific Research in Psychotherapy: The Applied Psychology of Carl R. Rogers in the Context of the Philosophical Debates on Psychological Science (1920–46)’. The author would like to thank Rhodri Hayward, Nadine Weidman, Gabriel Ruiz Ortiz, Shayna Fox Lee, and the two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on an earlier version of this article. The author would also like to thank Argentina’s National Council of Scientific and Technical Research for financial support through a postdoctoral grant.

1. B. Ruml, *Memorandum Regarding Memorial Policy*, 1922, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY, USA, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Records (hereafter ‘LSRMA’), Series 2, Box 2, Folder 31.
2. B. Ruml, *Memorandum Regarding Conditions Affecting the Memorial’s Participation in Projects in Social Sciences*, 1924, LSRMA, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 31.
3. L. K. Frank, *The Status of Social Science in the United States*, 1923, LSRMA, Series 3.6, Box 63, Folder 679.
4. L. K. Frank, *Biography of Lawrence K. Frank*, 1924, LSRMA, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 22.
5. *Chronology of the Child Development Institute (Institute of Child Welfare Research)* (unpublished manuscript), 1929, Columbia University, NY, USA, Teachers College, Gottesman Libraries Archive, William F. Russell Collection (hereafter ‘WRC’).
6. *Research Activities at the Child Development Institute of Teachers College* (unpublished report), 1934, WRC.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Letter from J. Russell to J. B. Watson, 9 August 1923, WRC, p. 1.
10. Letter from J. B. Watson to P. S. Hill, 1 August 1923, Columbia University, NY, USA, Teachers College, Gottesman Libraries Archive, James E. Russell Collection (hereafter ‘JRC’), p. 1.
11. Letter from J. Russell to A. Whitman, 15 August 1923, WRC, p. 1.
12. Letter from J. Russell to the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 3 April 1924, JRC, p. 1.
13. Schlossman (1981: 283) states that ‘each [child development] center received one hundred thousand dollars per year’. This statement is repeated by other historical accounts (Hilgard, 1987: 539; Thompson, Hogan, and Clark, 2012: 65) but is inaccurate. According to Teachers College’s official annual reports, the fund provided half that amount between 1924 and 1929. Moreover, no American institute received more than \$50,000 per year between 1924 and 1927. Only in 1929 would the Memorial double its funding to the ICWR to \$100,000 (see the following section).
14. The Institute’s own title prior to 1924 has been misrepresented before, including by Anderson (1956: 185), as the ‘Child Welfare Institute’; by Hilgard (1987: 539), Thompson, Hogan, and Clark (2012: 65), and Sears (1975: 19) as the ‘Child Development Institute’; by Grant (1999: 133) as the ‘Institute of Child Welfare’; and even by Frank (1962: 219) as the ‘Child Development Center’.
15. *Institute of Child Welfare Research: Tentative Draft of Organization and Administration*, 1924, WRC; *Laws of the Institute of Child Welfare Research*, 13 November 1924, WRC.
16. *Institute of Child Welfare Research Salaries*, 1924, WRC.

17. *Chronology of the Institute of Child Welfare Research (Child Development Institute)*, 1933, Columbia University, NY, USA, Teachers College, Gottesman Libraries Archive, Administrative Records Archive (hereafter 'ARC').
18. *Tentative Draft of Organization and Administration*, 1924, p. 5.
19. Letter from F. Stubbs to O. W. Caldwell, 26 December 1924, WRC.
20. *Release on the Institute of Child Welfare Research*, July 1925, WRC, p. 1. Interestingly, she is named as 'Dr. Helen P. Woolley' in the news release.
21. *Appointments at the Institute of Child Welfare Research, 1925–26*, 1926, ARC.
22. H. B. T. Woolley (presumed), *Plans and Progress of the Institute of Child Welfare Research* (unpublished manuscript), c.1927, WRC, p. 1.
23. Ibid.
24. Ruml, *Memorandum Regarding Conditions Affecting the Memorial's Participation in Projects in Social Sciences*, 1924, p. 3.
25. Previous accounts of these events have mostly omitted Woolley's hospitalization (Morse, 2002) or dated it erroneously to 1926 (Cautin and Benjamin, 2012).
26. Iowa's research station was the only other exception: in 1928, George Stoddard was appointed its director, but this was due to the death of former director Bird Baldwin. Moreover, Stoddard continued developing the research programme on mental growth inaugurated by Baldwin (Cravens, 1993; Sears, 1975).
27. Letter from J. Russell to R. Andrus, 21 January 1927, WRC.
28. *Ruth Andrus Academic Appointments*, 1928, ARC.
29. R. Andrus, *Report of the Institute of Child Welfare Research for the Year 1926–27 for the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial* (unpublished report), 1927, WRC, p. 1.
30. *Child Development Institute Staff Members*, 1929, ARC.
31. *Tentative Draft of Organization and Administration*, 1924.
32. Andrus, *Report of the Institute of Child Welfare Research for the Year 1926–27 for the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial*, p. 1.
33. See also *ibid.*
34. Letter from B. V. Cunningham to W. Russell, 26 January 1927, WRC.
35. *Research in the Child Development Institute, 1929–33*, 1933, WRC.
36. Woolley, *Plans and Progress*, p. 1, emphasis added.
37. H. B. T. Woolley, *Report of the Institute of Child Welfare Research* (unpublished manuscript), 1928, WRC, p. 1.
38. Ibid.
39. Letter from W. Russell to L. H. Meek, 17 January 1929, WRC.
40. Pelcowitz (2012: Paragraph 5) erroneously states that Meek was made a full professor of education upon her arrival.
41. Letter from W. Russell to L. H. Meek, 15 February 1929, WRC.
42. Letter from W. Russell to B. Ruml, 15 February 1929, WRC.
43. Ruml, *Memorandum Regarding Conditions Affecting the Memorial's Participation in Projects in Social Sciences*, 1924, p. 2.
44. Ruml, *Memorandum Regarding Memorial Policy*, 1922, p. 10.
45. Frank (1962: 214) and Hilgard (1987: 539) have mistakenly stated that the LSRM ceased operation in 1930.
46. By February 1925, Rockefeller's senior members thought Ruml had been given 'too free [a] hand' with his social sciences programme, which involved child welfare institutes; thus, 'the

- Memorial under Ruml's leadership was criticised for lavish spending' (Fosdick, 1952: 199; see also Kohler, 1978: 487–8). One motive for the *whole* Rockefeller reorganization was to curb what were perceived as Ruml's excesses (Bulmer and Bulmer, 1981).
47. Letter from G. E. Vincent to W. Russell, 16 January 1929, WRC, p. 1.
  48. Letter from W. Russell to B. Ruml, 1 October 1929, WRC, p. 1.
  49. Letter from B. Ruml to W. Russell, 5 February 1929, WRC.
  50. Ruml, *Memorandum Regarding Conditions Affecting the Memorial's Participation in Projects in Social Sciences*, 1924, p. 2.
  51. *Child Development Institute Staff Members*, 1929.
  52. Letter from W. Russell to L. H. Meek, 12 February 1930, WRC, p. 1.
  53. Ibid.
  54. Cravens (1993: 62) erroneously states that Woolley was replaced in 1929.
  55. Letter from W. Russell to L. H. Meek, 12 February 1930, p. 1.
  56. Letter from W. Russell to L. H. Meek, 15 October 1930, WRC, p. 1.
  57. Letter from W. Russell to B. Ruml, 14 August 1929, WRC, p. 1.
  58. Letter from L. H. Meek to W. Russell, 28 March 1931, WRC.
  59. Letter from L. H. Meek to W. Russell, 14 May 1931, WRC; Letter from L. H. Meek to W. Russell, 11 June 1931, WRC.
  60. Letter from L. H. Meek to W. Russell, 28 March 1930, WRC.
  61. *Cooperating Agencies With the Child Development Institute* (unpublished report), 1932, WRC.
  62. *Cooperation and Inter-relations With Other Departments of the University* (unpublished report), 1933, WRC.
  63. Ibid.
  64. *Enrollment in Courses, 1932–33* (unpublished report), 1933, ARC.
  65. Anonymous letter ('A Parent') to the New York Academy of Medicine, 27 May 1933, WRC, p. 1.
  66. Letter from W. Russell to L. Frank, 4 January 1934, WRC.
  67. Letter from L. Frank to W. Russell, 20 February 1934, WRC, p. 1.
  68. Letter from L. H. Meek to W. Russell, 28 March 1934, WRC, p. 1.
  69. Unsigned letter to W. Russell, 11 May 1934, WRC.
  70. Letter from L. H. Meek to W. Russell, 28 March 1934, p. 1.

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