



National Center for Children in Poverty  
Mailman School of Public Health  
Columbia University

**For Immediate Release**

**Contact: Diana Barnes-Brown**, 646-284-9628, [barnes-brown@nccp.org](mailto:barnes-brown@nccp.org)

**Early Childhood Literacy Expert Joins National Center for Children in Poverty**

**New York City** – Sheila Smith, PhD, an expert in child development and policy, early childhood education and literacy, will be joining the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) as director of early childhood.

Smith will be joining NCCP, which is part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, after 12 years spent directing early childhood research and policy initiatives at New York University, where she was a research scientist at the Child and Family Policy Center in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

While at NYU she served as director of the Forum on Children and Families, leading a research dissemination effort to promote collaboration among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and advocates for children’s healthy development. She also directed a series of projects that developed and evaluated models for improving classroom supports for preschoolers’ early literacy and social emotional, including two Early Reading First projects. Smith has published extensively in the field of early childhood, and has received multiple grants from the United States Department of Education and foundations.

Prior to her time at NYU, Smith worked in early childhood education and development as research director for the Foundation for Child Development, and before that at the Carnegie Corporation of New York, where she administered grants designed to prevent school failure and promote research dissemination.

In her new role, Smith will spearhead NCCP’s early childhood agenda to help states and communities implement effective policies and evidence-based practices in support of healthy development for young children, as well as collaborate with researchers and policy analysts in areas of family economic security and child health.

“Access to appropriate resources and interventions is crucial to children’s healthy development, and in turn to closing the achievement gap,” notes Janice Cooper, PhD, director of NCCP. “Sheila Smith’s groundbreaking work in promoting early literacy is a huge piece of this puzzle, and we expect that she will be a strong asset in our efforts to promote effective policies that support marginalized children and families.”

NCCP has often emphasized the role of the “achievement gap” – the developmental lag between poor and low-income children and their wealthier counterparts – in intensifying the difficulties of children whose families must cope with economic hardship. The center’s review of national

research data has shown by the age of 4, poor children are 18 months behind developmentally; at age 10, this gap persists. Ensuring that young children and families have access to programs that promote healthy growth and development and provide support for children who fall behind is one way to help close the gap.

Speaking about her new role, Smith comments, “I am very pleased to be joining forces with NCCP, and to be able to contribute to their 20-year legacy of promoting the well-being of low-income families and children through better public policy.”

Smith holds both a PhD in educational psychology with a specialization in child development and an MA in English language and literature from the University of Chicago, and a BA in English from Drake University. She completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan Bush Program in Child Development and Social Policy, and served as a Congressional Science Fellow of the Society for Research in Child Development.

- 30 -

*The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation’s leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America’s low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.*

**NOTE: If you do not wish to get news from us, please let us know and we'll remove you from the list. Thank you.**