

TC

Today

Spring 2008

The Magazine of Teachers College, Columbia University

In This Issue

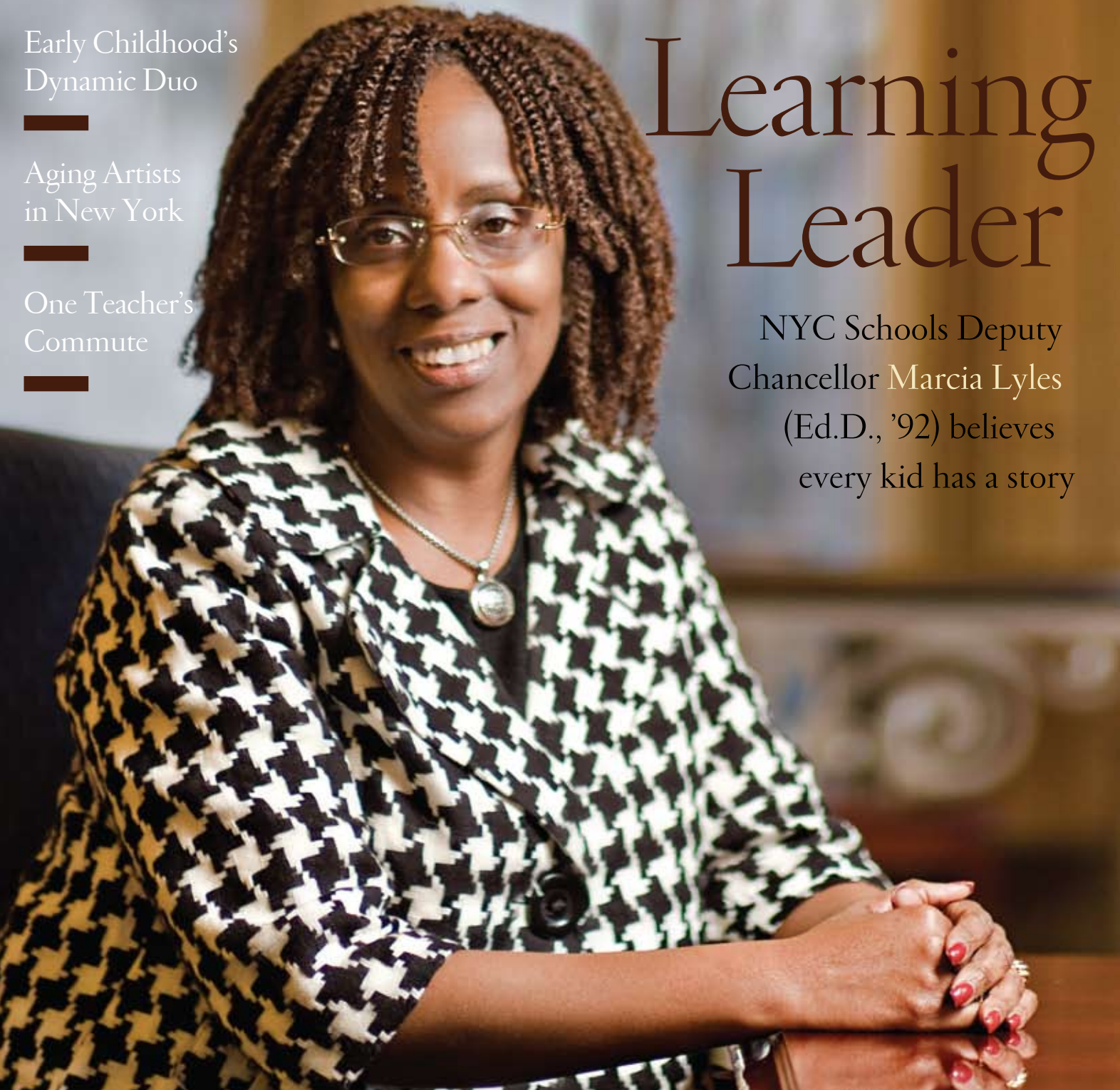
Early Childhood's
Dynamic Duo

Aging Artists
in New York

One Teacher's
Commute

Learning Leader

NYC Schools Deputy
Chancellor Marcia Lyles
(Ed.D., '92) believes
every kid has a story



Team Pre-K

*Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Sharon Lynn Kagan
are leaders in the early childhood education revolution
by Jonathan Sapers*

Anna Johnson was a junior at Wesleyan University in Connecticut when she got interested in early childhood education—and, more specifically, in how research in the field translates into policy.

The more she read about her subject, the more she encountered one name: Jeanne Brooks-Gunn of Teachers College, the founding director of the National Center for Children and Families (NCCF). So, Johnson recalls, she sent Brooks-Gunn an email.

“I said, ‘I’m only a junior in college, and I know I want to work when I graduate, but some time in the next decade I will probably find my way to you.’”

Anna Johnson’s story is not uncommon among students of both Brooks-Gunn and Sharon Lynn Kagan, the co-directors of NCCF. Separately, each woman stands at the epicenter of one of the hottest areas in education today: schooling focused on the first five years of life and the vast opportunity it presents for instilling verbal and math skills, socialization and other basics that put children on an equal footing with their peers in and out of the classroom. Together, through NCCF (based at TC on the fourth floor of Grace Dodge Hall and the second floor of Thorndike), they arguably are doing more to shape direction in the field than anyone else in the country.

“They’re a tremendous resource to their students and colleagues at TC and around the university, and they’re very actively involved outside the university with researchers, with policymakers, with government officials, both domestically and overseas,” says the economist Jane Waldfogel, Professor of Social Work and Public Affairs at Columbia’s School for Social Work. “They have strengths that are complementary. Lynn, in spite of having come from the practitioner side of things is an extremely rigorous researcher and scholar, and Brooke, although coming from the research side of things, is very policy-oriented and very dissemination-oriented and very practice-oriented.





(left)
gan



Between the two of them they cover the whole waterfront of early childhood.”

Kagan, author or editor of 13 books and over 250 articles, is best known for her policymaking, appearing on national boards and panels assessing early childhood education standards. This past year, for example, she was the chair of the prestigious National Task Force on Early Childhood Accountability and co-authored “Taking Stock,” its report on the pervasive problem of accountability in early care and education. The report already is influencing states as they allocate funds for establishing data and assessment systems. Kagan also was a major contributor to “Tough Choices or Tough Times,” a report released by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). Focused on the changing skills required for U.S. workers, “Tough Times” argued for a major shift in priorities toward the nation’s K–12 education system—including a reallocation of some \$60 billion a year toward pre-K schooling.

“When I was putting our commission together, I knew I needed someone with a comprehensive view of the early childhood education movement,” says Marc Tucker, President and Chief Executive Officer of the NCEE. “Someone who was highly regarded in the research community, but who was also a major player in the policy world. There really was only one possible name, and that was Lynn. Her research defines best practices in the field, and she’s clearly had an enormous impact on early childhood education policy, not only here in the U.S. but around the world. She understands the need for best practice research and for a system grounded in public policy that can produce and sustain best practice at scale.”

Brooks-Gunn’s specialties are conducting policy-oriented research that illustrates family and community influences on the development of children and adolescents; designing interventions aimed at the lives of children in poverty; and seeing which policies are most effective. Through her prodigious published scholarship (she has written four books, edited a dozen others and published over 500 articles), she has helped to legitimize and substantiate the claim that schools can’t fix the achievement gap alone, and that poverty is a setback that puts some kids further behind the starting line than others (an argument that is the bedrock for the early childhood education movement). For example, a study she recently co-authored analyzed the extent to which a child’s social, behavioral and academic readiness upon arriving at preschool and kindergarten is predictive of later academic achievement. The work was hailed this past fall by the *New York Times* as a landmark effort.

“Brooke has done hugely important work on neighborhood effects on poverty and child development,” says TC



MEETING OF THE MINDS

Clockwise from top left: Kagan addresses TC policy fellows; Brooks-Gunn introduces TC Marx Lecturer Linda Darling-Hammond; Brooks-Gunn protégé Anna Johnson; Kagan protégé Kate Tarrant.



Professor Amy Stuart Wells. “Work that has broader implications beyond psychology and that’s had a huge impact on people working within the field of education in sociology and economics.”

Both women have been showered with honors for their accomplishments. Each holds a Chair at TC endowed by Virginia and Leonard Marx (noted advocates for children who are longtime supporters of early childhood education at TC): Kagan for Early Childhood and Family Policy, Brooks-Gunn for Child and Parent Development Education. Brooks-Gunn, who holds a joint professorial appointment in pediatrics at Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons, received the Urie Bronfenbrenner Award for lifetime contribution to developmental psychology in the areas of science and society from the American Psychological Association (as well as the Association’s award for applying research to policy). She also has received the James McKeen Cattell Fellow Award from the Association for Psychological Science for outstanding contributions to the area of applied psychological research, is a Margaret Mead Fellow of the American Academy of Political



and Social Science and is a fellow in the American Association for the Advancement of Science. For her part, Kagan, who also is a professor adjunct at Yale, is the only woman ever to capture the trifecta of top honors in American education: the Distinguished Service Award from the Council of Chief State School Officers, the 2005 James Bryant Conant

Award for Lifetime Service to Education from the Education Commission of the States and the Harold W. McGraw, Jr. Prize in Education.

AMBITIOUS AGENDA

Those are laurels that most people would be proud to rest upon, but neither Kagan nor Brooks-Gunn appears likely to

slow down any time soon. Kagan sums up NCCF's three-part mission: "The first part is filling gaps in the existing literature with very, very high-quality research that has policy salience," she says. "The second is to train young people to have the repertoire of skills to carry out the kind of research and policy work we still need to have done in this field. And the third is to communicate effectively the scholarship that we and others have produced to public and private audiences, so that it will have social utility."

Generally speaking, the work of NCCF is divided into themes, with some led by Kagan, others by Brooks-Gunn and still others as shared turf. These include Families (both), Neighborhoods (Brooks-Gunn), Finance and Institutional Organization (Kagan), Early Childhood (both), Transitions (both) and International (Kagan).

So, for example, under Kagan, the center is working with UNICEF to help a diverse group of 40 developing countries—including Brazil, Ghana, Jordan, Mongolia, Paraguay, the Philippines, South Africa and Turkmenistan—establish indicators of early child development as the basis for curriculum, teacher preparation and certification, parenting education and national monitoring. Using these indicators, Kagan says, the countries "are doing what we in the United States are not—notably, fully integrating their approach to serving young children and their families."

Brooks-Gunn, on the other hand, directs or co-directs four of the country's major longitudinal studies of children and families: the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study; the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods; Early Head Start Research and Evaluation; and the Infant Health and Development Program. The studies include thousands of subjects in hundreds of neighborhoods in cities across the country. They run for as long as 20 years and have budgets ranging between \$10 million and \$60 million.

Through Brooks-Gunn, NCCF students get access to data from these studies. "They work with us on analyzing papers and learn how to ask questions," she says. "For those studies that are in the field, they'll help collect data, they'll help





code videotapes. They really learn how to use these big data sets to address critical policy issues. There are very few centers in the country where you get this experience because very few people have been able to collect these data.”

NCCF offers students the opportunity to design research, as well. Kagan, Brooks-Gunn and their fellows recently collaborated on the development, implementation and evaluation of a major intervention in Head Start. Here, students designed and evaluated strategies to improve Head Start classroom practice. Kagan and Brooks-Gunn also collaborate with outside organizations. The center recently worked with New York City to develop and implement quality assessment systems to be used across all major types of preschools in the City, including universal pre-K, Head Start, preschools run by the City and family care centers. Other U.S. cities are doing such work, but New York is at the forefront of the trend. “When that opportunity came, both of us went, ‘Oh boy! This is great,’” Brooks-Gunn says. “Working with New York City provides great opportunities for us and our students.”

DIVISION OF LABOR

As personalities, Brooks-Gunn and Kagan offer some obvious contrasts. Kagan is more high-octane, Brooks-Gunn seemingly more laid back; Kagan more visibly impassioned, Brooks-Gunn more ironic; Kagan a bit more wonky, Brooks-Gunn more folksy sounding. But the similarities between the two are more compelling.

Both Brooks-Gunn and Kagan grew up in Michigan—Brooks-Gunn in the western part of the state, Kagan in Detroit.

Brooks-Gunn’s father was a contractor who built integrated housing; her mother worked in early childhood education and with abused and neglected families. She traces her interest in policy research to her “equity-oriented” church youth group, through which she worked in Head Start Centers and on civil rights and traveled to Washington, D.C., where she met Bobby Kennedy.

Kagan’s parents were immigrants from Germany (her mother) and Russia (her father) who met in the United States. She says her father decided to retire from successful businesses when she was a child so that he could focus more on her—particularly on her sociopolitical education. “My father wanted a daughter who would optimize the opportunities that she was given and who would always see giving back to society as a part of that responsibility,” Kagan says.

Both women acknowledge a debt to important, larger-than-life mentors. Brooks-Gunn got her master’s in education from Harvard, where she worked with Lawrence Kohlberg, who linked social and cognitive development and focused

“Most young students doing policy work across the country don’t get the interdisciplinary focus we really push.”

on moral reasoning, and Beatrice Whiting, an anthropologist studying children. At Penn, she did her Ph.D. work with infancy expert Michael Lewis, who helped her get her first post-doctoral job, at the Educational Testing Service. She began a collaboration with medical faculty at Columbia University and ran the Adolescent Study Program there before coming to TC.

Over the years, she repeatedly met with Urie Bronfenbrenner, one of Head Start’s principal architects and a man widely credited with championing the importance of children’s contexts (family, school, peers, neighborhoods) for their development.

“I feel in my heart as though I was one of his students,” Brooks-Gunn says. “One reason was that he looks at multiple contexts for how children develop. The second is that he was so passionate about his research and policy work, and he would really, really question you—‘Why are you thinking that?’, ‘I can’t believe you’re saying that.’”

Looking back, Brooks-Gunn says, the chance to work with Bronfenbrenner was just one among many serendipitous opportunities throughout her career. “They occur in any researcher’s life, and the trick is to figure out which ones to take,” she says.

Kagan graduated from the University of Michigan and became a Head Start teacher in Norwalk, Connecticut. “Head Start was a new anti-poverty program, and I knew I needed to work with poor children and their families,” she says. “That I ended up teaching was a fabulous by-product.” She went on to work at the local, state and federal levels, as a Head Start director and elementary school principal, a state department of education specialist and a fellow on Capitol Hill. Along the way, she says, “Somebody” suggested she get a doctorate. So she went to TC, and there she fell in love—with research and statistics. “I had taken English, political science, philosophy and history at the bachelor’s and master’s levels, but thought it was so neat to really delve into curriculum theory and statistics. I just loved the way all these formula worked out and the way you could predict things,” she says.

From TC, where she got her doctorate in curriculum and teaching, she went on to work at the Yale Child Study Center and at Yale’s Bush Center in Child Development and

(Continued on page 34)

Marcia Lyles
(Continued from page 15)

into where you don't get that. But there needs to be more rigor, because—bottom line—his scores still need to come up.”

COMING FULL CIRCLE

There is a postscript to Lyles' story about her sixth grade teacher, Carrie Simpson.

In August, prompted by a reunion with her old classmate, Janette Domingo and aided by the miracle of Google, Lyles tracked her old teacher down. Simpson, now 76, was still working in education, as a public school leadership consultant for the Lorraine Monroe Leadership Institute. It turned out that she had become a principal after her teaching days and had served under Lyles when Lyles was superintendent of Region 16, once even standing in a crowded room to listen to her speak.

“She looked so familiar, but I don't know the married names of my students, and she was Marcia Pope back then,” Simpson said, in a phone interview. “It's the most fantastic story, because this was a woman I had been admiring, and I had heard that so many principals admired her.”

Simpson said that Lyles had “blossomed unbelievably” during that year in sixth grade, but that “she was just waiting to get there, to come to the place I was in. I really believe that when students are ready, the teacher will come.”

Was young Marcia Pope still recognizable in the Deputy Chancellor of today?

“Oh yes, she hasn't been changed by working at this high level. She's risen to the occasion as a whole person. She's not on a stage. She's the real thing, and that's a compliment that not many can be paid.

“She is a shining star,” Carrie Simpson said. “She's living proof of what young people can do.” ❧

Team Pre-K
(Continued from page 20)

Social Policy. There she assisted the psychologist Edward Zigler and set up a network of Bush Centers at other locations. Zigler, who had served as the first director of the nation's Office of Child Development (now the Administration on Children, Youth and Families) and Chief of the U.S. Children's Bureau, was lauded as a national leader in child development research and education policy. He had administered the Head Start program, as well as Home Start, Education for Parenthood, the Child Development Associate Program, and the Child and Family Resource Program. From Zigler, Kagan learned how to meld first-rate scholarship and policy work. “Opportunities for interesting work cascaded in, and I would pinch myself just realizing that I had a front-row seat, if not a real part, in federal policymaking,” she says. “Ed was exacting and tough and loving; he made you be better than you ever thought you could be.”

While at Yale, Kagan also served as Co-Chair of the National Education Goals Panel on Goal One (readiness to learn) and then President of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, restructuring the relationship between that organization's board members and its staff and expanding its public policy efforts. She has taken on many similar public roles over the years, serving as Executive Director of the Office of Early Childhood Education in New York; as a member of President Bill Clinton's education transition team; and on scores of national and international committees, including her current work with the National Academy of Sciences and national task forces on the reconstruction of NCLB.

Brooks-Gunn says that in 2000, when she learned that the Marx family had endowed a second chair at TC and that Kagan had been offered the position, she instantly envisioned their joining forces: “It was in my mind for three months before she came—‘I hope she says yes.’ That was my only concern.”

It was in Kagan's mind too. “When I came I wanted to set up a center on early childhood policy, and it was really one of the conditions under which I would even entertain coming to Teachers College. Brooke very graciously invited me to dinner and said, ‘Let's do this together.’”

They sat outside at a place somewhere on upper Broadway. Afterwards, Kagan sought the advice of friends and advisors.

“Everybody said, ‘Two high-powered women like the two of you? It'll never work. Don't. You're crazy,’” Kagan says. “These comments came from people I really, really respected. It had nothing to do with Brooke as a person. It was sort of knowing me and knowing the profiles that we each represented. Everybody said no.”

Naturally, they went ahead anyway—and both agree things have worked out magnificently. Both say that's due directly to their staff—Anne Martin, Coordinator of NCCF and Senior Research Scientist; Finance Director Samara Wallace-Noyola; five research scientists; eight graduate fellows; and approximately 10 to 12 other TC students who work at the center each year—but both also credit an arrangement that gives each woman the room to do what she does best.

“I like to think of our center as something that looks like a Venn dia-

(Continued on next page)

Team Pre-K

(Continued from previous page)

gram,” Kagan says. “There are projects I do without Brooke, and there are projects she does without me and then there are a whole bunch of projects that we overlap on. Sometimes we have more that we’re doing together, sometimes less. The arrangement has given us each room to do what we love while fully recognizing our obligations to each other and to our students.”

PAYING IT FORWARD

In the end, it may be their students—“the leaders of tomorrow,” Brooks-Gunn calls them—who represent Kagan’s and Brooks-Gunn’s finest achievement. NCCF operates on what Kagan and Brooks-Gunn call the “apprentice model,” allowing promising future practitioners to learn from participating in active studies and policymaking efforts.

“Most young scholars doing policy work across the country don’t get the interdisciplinary focus that we really push,” Brooks-Gunn says. “And it’s not just our two disciplines. We really want our young people to know something about economics, something about evaluation designs. We want them to be fairly sophisticated in statistics. We push our students to develop both the core program that we want them to have, but also to individualize their programs. A lot of people contributed to us so we know we’ve got to give back. And the way to do that is to mentor young people who end up going out and doing fabulous work.”

Kate Tarrant, currently the center’s second-most senior fellow, came to NCCF to work with Kagan. “Knowing Lynn was here was actually one of the reasons I chose Columbia,” says Tarrant, who applied to the center as a data col-

lector while working on her master’s in public administration at the School of International and Public Affairs. She met with Kagan, who told her that if she wanted to become “a real source of new information” on early childhood, she should get her doctorate at TC. “When she said that, my jaw kind of dropped,” Tarrant says.

Four years later Tarrant is on track to get that doctorate and is also currently assessment coordinator for the new pilot testing program for New York City preschool programs, an experience she says has been “pretty eye-opening.” For example, during a recent visit to a childcare program, she realized she represented only one of several outside agencies monitoring the program’s work that day. “I’m much more aware of how sensitive policy has to be to work within this complex system,” Tarrant says. “You can see that the people who run these programs do a fabulous job and face a lot of challenges.”

Along with another Kagan protégé, Kristie Kauerz (now currently pre-K advisor to Colorado’s Lieutenant Governor), Tarrant also recently co-authored a book with Kagan: *The Early Care and Education Teaching Workforce at the Fulcrum: An Agenda for Reform*. Published by TC Press, the book argues that the pre-K teaching field is characterized by “low entry criteria, limited growth opportunities, low compensation and high turnover” and calls for, among other things, increases in Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers’ compensation and benefits and the creation of a national ECE teacher education compact that would foster effective and consistent ECE teacher preparation and licensure. Not too shabby for an aspiring policymaker.

And then there is Anna Johnson, who did, at long last, make it to TC. To Johnson’s surprise, Brooks-Gunn answered that long-ago email, and in 2004 they finally met when Johnson, who was working at the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office’s Child Abuse and Family Violence Bureau, came up to Brooks-Gunn’s office at TC for an interview.

“It felt like I’d always known who she was,” Johnson recalls. “It’s almost like the story of when you meet the person you’re going to spend your life with.”

Today, as the most senior doctoral fellow at NCCF, Johnson is indeed spending much of her life with Brooks-Gunn and with Kagan as well. So far, she has worked on several studies and served as student coordinator of the Policy Student Network under Kagan, who is also TC’s Associate Dean for Policy and Director of its Office for Policy and Research. Johnson also is earning a degree from Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs and working on a new NCCF project on childcare subsidy use in New York City families—“which means I’m getting to do exactly what I want to do,” Johnson says. “That’s the kind of mentors Brooke and Lynn are. As long as we’re furthering good policies for kids, they give us the room to do what we want. And they’re big on interdisciplinary collaboration. Because if you can say the economists and the political scientists and the behaviorists and the geneticists and the developmental psychologists all agree, you’re going to make a better argument—you know?” ❧

To learn more about the National Center for Children and Families, visit www.policyforchildren.org. To view interviews with Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Sharon Lynn Kagan, visit www.tc.edu/tctoday/teamprek.