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Faculty Research
and Community Initiatives

Applied research—studies that respond directly to the needs of young children and the people who serve them—is an Erikson hallmark.

Community initiatives with children and families or the professionals who work with them is also a key element of our work.

Through these projects, Erikson faculty and staff both generate knowledge and improve life for children and families in Chicago and throughout the nation.



Christine
Maxwell



Gillian
McNamee



Jane
Fleming

Schools and teaching

New Schools Project Under the guidance of director **Christine Maxwell** and with the participation of Erikson professor **Gillian McNamee** and assistant professor **Jane Fleming**, New Schools joins in partnership with a network of Chicago Public Schools to build positive and powerful early education experiences for children in pre-kindergarten through third grade and help close achievement gaps. Using an approach that is both individualized and collaborative, the project works with teachers and administrators to promote high-quality teaching practices. Through ongoing professional development and school-based consultation and coaching, teachers focus on identifying the skills and strategies each child needs to learn, building social capital in classroom and professional communities, integrating instruction across disciplines, and aligning the curriculum across grade levels. Administrators develop their ability to foster teacher leaders who can effectively collaborate to bring new levels of excellence to the early years of schooling, PreK-3, enabling teachers to become effective decision makers and problem solvers and transforming isolated classrooms into a community of learning.

Launched in 2005, the New Schools Project currently serves a network of six public and charter schools: Audubon, Langford, Erie Elementary Charter, Fulton, Prescott, and LaSalle II. It is supported in part by grants from the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation, Polk Bros. Foundation, and Joyce Foundation. The project is endowed by a generous grant from the McCormick Foundation.



Aisha
Ray



Jana
Fleming



Jie-Qi
Chen



Jennifer
McCray

City Colleges of Chicago Early Childhood Faculty Development

Dean **Aisha Ray** and **Jana Fleming**, director of Erikson's Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy, continue to oversee a series of training seminars for the colleges' early childhood faculty to improve the quality of faculty knowledge and practice with diverse students. The seminar includes presentations by leading national researchers and practitioners and is funded by the McCormick Foundation.

Early Mathematics Education Project Professor **Jie-Qi Chen** and project director **Jennifer McCray's** project provides intensive professional development to more than 300 Chicago Public School teachers and teacher coaches in early education classrooms. Participants spend a year sharpening their math skills, learning and implementing new teaching techniques, and reflecting on how young children learn about math. The project is supported by the McCormick, CME Group, Motorola, Exelon, and Robert and Isabelle Bass Foundations and the Chicago Public Schools. In 2009 and 2010, the project held international symposia on early mathematics education featuring participants from Australia, China, Japan, Singapore, Russia, Finland, Netherlands, and United States. Both symposia were supported by the McCormick Foundation.



Pamela
Epley

Predictors of Early School Performance for Kindergarteners with Disabilities

As part of a statewide study of kindergarten school readiness in Kansas, Assistant Professor **Pamela Epley** examined influencing factors of early school performance for kindergarteners with disabilities. Specifically, she examined the effects of early childhood special education services and parents' involvement in typical home- and community-based learning activities on the academic and social-behavioral skills of children with disabilities at the beginning of kindergarten. Findings related to preschool special education services showed a much larger impact on children's social-behavioral performance than on their academic skills. Parents' involvement in typical learning activities also predicted early school performance, affecting social-behavioral and academic skills equally. Findings from this research support limited evidence connecting preschool special education services to school performance. Findings also highlight the importance of children with disabilities and their families having access and opportunity to engage in typical learning activities within their homes and communities. Professor Epley is currently expanding her investigation to a nationally representative sample. She hopes to continue research on outcomes of preschool special education to examine the continuum of services from early intervention to early childhood special education to special education during early elementary school. She also plans to extend her research on parent involvement of young children with disabilities to examine current conceptualizations of parent-professional relationships and the roles, responsibilities, supports, and services available to families.



Luisiana
Meléndez



Jane
Fleming

Head Start and Early Head Start Training on Dual Language

Learners In collaboration with Erikson's doctoral program, Assistant Clinical Professor **Luisiana Meléndez**, director of bilingual/ESL education, designed and helped implement a program for Head Start and Early Head Start teachers on language and literacy development in young dual language learners. The nine-month professional development program, presented at El Valor, a community-based organization that provides a range of services to Chicago's Latina/Latino community, covers methods and materials for teaching young dual language learners and the principles governing the assessment of linguistically diverse learners.

Policy Statement on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Project

Luisiana Meléndez, assistant clinical professor and director of Erikson's Bilingual/ESL Certificate Program, is part of a work group developing a policy statement for the Bounce Learning Network, an eight-state network of Educare schools that services at-risk children from birth to age five. The statement will serve as a guideline for the network's practices regarding dual language learners.

Urban Children's Literature Project

Assistant Professor **Jane Fleming** is studying the impact of urban children's literature on the reading development of children in city schools. Research shows that beginning readers use their background knowledge and familiar experiences to relate to texts, recognize words, and understand stories. Seeing oneself represented in the characters, authors, and illustrators may be a key to engaging students in learning and experiencing school success. But getting access to high-quality children's books that reflect urban public school students' experiences can be



Jane
Fleming

difficult. While much has been published in the way of multicultural children's literature, finding picture books and other texts for beginning readers that reflect city living, language and dialect variation, multicultural communities, and even urban ecology or architecture can be a challenge. Fleming, along with colleagues at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, has developed a rating scale for helping teachers select high-quality children's literature with city settings and urban themes. Professional development strengthens teacher's knowledge of culturally relevant children's literature and methods for using familiar texts and stories to engage young readers. Plans are underway to examine the impact of urban children's literature on students' motivation for and persistence in reading and their developing reading skill.

High Quality Classroom Libraries to Support Emergent Literacy High-quality classroom libraries can generate interest and motivation for reading, support differentiated instruction through better matching of students with texts, and help to close the achievement gap for struggling readers. This project, launched by Assistant Professor **Jane Fleming**, engages teachers in professional development designed to support their use of a high-quality, multicultural classroom library as an effective and essential instructional tool. Teachers participate in a professional development series, classroom-based consulting, and an online network to support the development, organization, and management of their collections in ways that make books more accessible to children in the classroom and increase the availability of trade books for home literacy experiences.



Molly
Collins

Literacy

Early Reading First Assistant Professor **Molly Collins** is principal investigator on an Early Reading First grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Under this grant, she provided intensive professional development designed to improve the quality of literacy, language, and cognitive skills of young children in Chicago Public Schools Head Start classrooms. The project was designed to increase teachers' knowledge of current literacy and language research and to help them apply this knowledge to practice. Data are being analyzed to identify impacts on teachers' instruction and child outcomes.

Electronic and Traditional Books: A Study of Interaction and Language Richness With researchers from Temple University, Assistant Professor **Molly Collins** is examining the amount and quality of parent-child interaction when reading electronic books versus traditional books. Do parents and children spend more time with one rather than another? Do they spend more time talking about the reading? Is there a difference in the kind of comments they make? Finally, which books do children prefer? Philadelphia's Please Touch Museum and the Chicago Children's Museum are co-participants in the study.

Vocabulary Acquisition Among English-Language-Learning Preschoolers Assistant Professor **Molly Collins** examines language acquisition and comprehension in preschool. Her earlier research, on English-language-learning (ELL) preschoolers whose first language was Portuguese, focused

on English vocabulary acquisition and story comprehension from storybook reading. Collins is now in year three of a longitudinal study on the effects of vocabulary support strategies and story discussion questions on vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and early reading skills in native Spanish-speaking preschoolers. Plans are underway to follow children through later grades to examine the effects of rich early experiences on language development in both English and Spanish and in reading comprehension. An intensive seminar based on findings from the first year was offered to teachers and school administrators. This work was funded by the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation.



Linda
Gilkerson

Infancy

Fussy Baby Network® Directed by Professor **Linda Gilkerson**, the Fussy Baby Network® provides support for families who have concerns about their baby's crying, sleeping, feeding, or temperament during the first year of life. Launched in 2003, the Fussy Baby Network® was Erikson's first clinical outreach to Chicago parents and children. The network includes a home visiting program, a clinic offered in collaboration with the University of Chicago Department of Pediatrics, a telephone support line—the Fussy Baby Network® Warmline (888-431-BABY)—and parent support groups. All services are offered in Spanish as well as English and are provided on a sliding fee basis so any family can participate. The program serves more than 800 families each year. The Fussy Baby Network® approach uses five core intervention processes to address parents' urgent concerns about their baby. These core processes are empathic inquiry, mindful self-regulation, collaborative exploration, capacity building, and integration. Parents report high satisfaction with the services and indicate that they would overwhelmingly recommend it to other parents. Pre- and post evaluation reveals that parents' stress levels and symptoms of maternal depression are reduced and mothers' self-efficacy is increased.

Fussy Baby Network® has articulated its program approach and has a training/dissemination component that works with recognized centers of excellence in infancy to implement the program nationally. Affiliate sites are located in Phoenix, Oakland, Los Angeles,



Tracy
Moran



Linda
Gilkerson

Denver, Boston, and the Washington, D.C., area. The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Irving Harris Foundation, Pritzker Early Childhood Foundation, Topfer Family Foundation, Prince Charitable Trusts, and Chicago Public Schools support the program.

For more information, contact 888-431-BABY or fussybabynetwork.erikson.edu.

Promoting Parenting Self-Efficacy Assistant Professor **Tracy Moran**, in collaboration with Professor **Linda Gilkerson** and colleagues at the Universities of Iowa and Minnesota, is examining parenting self-efficacy, i.e., parents' perceptions of their parenting abilities overall and competence in completing the specific tasks associated with parenting. Moran is currently in the process of validating a new measure of parenting self-efficacy that she created with her colleagues; the measure emphasizes inclusion of developmentally appropriate items for parents of infants ages birth to 24 months of age. In addition, Moran and her colleagues are reexamining a series of previously conducted studies and uncovering the relationships between self-efficacy and several variables of infant and parent mental health (i.e., maternal depressive and anxiety symptoms, perceived social support, and infant temperament). By collecting new data and examining preexisting data, they are attempting to further understand the development, stability, malleability, and cultural implications of self-efficacy.



Pamela
Epley



Tracy
Moran

Family Outcomes of Early Intervention Collaborating with researchers at the University of Kansas, Assistant Professor **Pamela Epley** is investigating family outcomes of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities. Interested in both immediate and longer-term outcomes, she is examining whether the quality of early intervention services predicted families' ability to understand their child's strengths and needs, help their children learn and develop, effectively advocate for their child, and access community services and programs. She is also examining whether the quality of early intervention services affected families' overall quality of life and the relationship between immediate outcomes of services and quality of life. Professor Epley's research reinforces the importance of family supports and services for families of young children with disabilities by suggesting that when early intervention services meet families' needs, families experience both immediate outcomes and enhanced quality of life.

Maternal Anxiety and Infant Health Care Use In a National Institute of Mental Health-funded prospective longitudinal study, Assistant Professor **Tracy Moran** examined predictors of the use of infant health care during the first six months of life. She examined a number of maternal psychosocial, demographic, and enabling variables (i.e., insurance, proximity to physician). The findings highlighted the significant influence of the mother's anxiety symptoms and the opinions of the mothers' social supports regarding the infant's need for health care. Professor Moran intends to address the implications of the findings by working



Tracy
Moran

with prospective parents and their social supports. In addition, Moran hopes to partner with pediatric nurses and physicians to foster an appreciation of infant mental health and the use of available parent-infant psychosocial interventions when appropriate. Finally, Moran is working with a colleague at the University of Pennsylvania to validate a new measure of postpartum anxiety that may be useful in obstetric and gynecologic as well as pediatric health care contexts.

Culturally Informed Parent-Infant Psychotherapy Having piloted a group treatment for peripartum mood disorders that originated in Australia—Group Interpersonal Psychotherapy (G-IPT)—with a group of urban, low-income African American mothers in New Orleans, Assistant Professor **Tracy Moran** is applying the knowledge gained to future treatment studies conducted in Chicago. Her goal is to refine existing and develop new approaches to family psychotherapy that address the socioemotional needs of both parents and children and is well received within the family’s cultural context, in order to overcome parents’ physical, financial, and attitudinal barriers to mental health treatment for themselves and their young children.



Jon
Korfmacher

Infants at risk

Illinois Child-Parent Psychotherapy Learning Collaborative

Associate Professor **Jon Korfmacher** directs a project that provides training to local clinical teams in child-parent psychotherapy for young children and their families who have experienced trauma or domestic violence. The collaborative hosts trainings for two cohorts of seven clinical teams—each composed of three to five clinicians and supervisors—who meet biweekly over the phone and in person three different times over the course of 18 months. This initiative is a partnership of Erikson Institute, the Child Trauma Research Project (CTRP), and Jewish Child and Family Services (JCFS). It is funded by the Irving Harris Foundation. For more information, see *Illinoiscpp.org*.

Home Visiting Program Quality Assessment Project

Associate Professor **Jon Korfmacher** is the research director and principal investigator for a study focused on developing a practical and reliable tool for measuring program quality across different models of home visiting for families with infants and young children. The project will develop and field test a measure that can be used as both a self-assessment and a tool for external evaluation. Such a measure will provide home visiting providers a mechanism to improve the quality and accountability of their programming. It will also assist policy makers and early childhood funders in determining if they are making investments in quality programs. The project is



Linda
Gilkerson

a collaboration with the Milwaukee Children's Hospital and Health System Child Abuse Prevention Fund and Performance Works of Wisconsin. It is funded by the Pew Home Visiting Campaign, a project of the Pew Center on the States.

Infant Crying and Developmental Outcome: A Biobehavioral Approach

Professor [Linda Gilkerson](#) is coinvestigator, with principal investigator Stephen Porges, Ph.D., of the University of Illinois at Chicago, on an NIH-funded grant to look at the neurodevelopment of infants and young children. The project assesses infants who persist in excessive crying and will follow the children and their families until two years of age. This quasi-experimental longitudinal study (N = 149) consists of four groups: never cried excessively (N = 74), excessively cried until 3 months of age (N = 33), excessively cried until 6 months of age (N = 22), and excessively cried past 6 months of age (N = 20). From 6 weeks to 24 months of age, the families complete questionnaires and participate in developmental assessments while the infant's physiological response (i.e., vagal tone) is monitored at the Brain-Body Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Some of the factors that will be



Laura
Esikoff



Andria
Goss

examined in relation to infant crying and physiological response include parenting stress, maternal depression, parenting self-efficacy, child temperament, and multiple aspects of the child's behavior and development. The main research questions are the following: 1) Is infant crying related to the infant's physiological response? 2) Does infant crying and/or physiological response predict developmental outcome? 3) What other factors are related to infant crying?

Foster care

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Early Childhood Unit DCFS contracted with Erikson to manage its Early Childhood Unit, which administers developmental assessments to all children ages birth to five entering the foster care system. Biological and foster parents are also evaluated. Alumnae **Laura Esikoff** and **Andria Goss** direct 24 early childhood specialists based at Erikson who work statewide to determine services necessary for both the children and their caregivers.



Aisha
Ray



Barbara
Bowman



Jana
Fleming

Workforce development

Developmental and Educational Needs of Culturally Marginalized Children Project

Young children from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds are projected to be the majority in U.S. schools in the next two decades. Yet national studies conducted by Dean **Aisha Ray** and Professor **Barbara Bowman** demonstrate that the early childhood infrastructure—including higher education, accreditation bodies, and state teacher credentialing systems—insufficiently prepares teachers who can effectively work with culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse children. The failure of preservice teacher preparation programs to adequately train teachers has been associated with poorer educational outcomes. Further, early childhood teacher standards, which help guide the content and practice skills addressed in higher education teacher preparation, also do not adequately focus on culturally marginalized children. Ray and Bowman, along with Herr Center director **Jana Fleming**, are conducting a study aimed at improving efforts in Illinois to place the specific developmental and educational needs of culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse children explicitly within teacher standards, teacher certification, and teacher preparation in higher education. The study examines the diversity content of the curricula in all accredited associate- and bachelor-degree early childhood teacher preparation programs in Illinois, interviews early childhood faculty in each institution, develops teaching materials for higher education faculty, and develops policy recommendations for early childhood teacher standards and certification. The project has received a two-year grant from the McCormick Foundation.

Family support

Project Match Founded in 1985 by Erikson alumna **Toby Herr**, Project Match engages in program development and research in a range of fields related to low-income populations, including welfare-to-work, workforce development, family stability, and community revitalization. Project Match's employment model for community-based organizations and its case management system for welfare agencies have both been replicated at sites around the country. Having provided employment services in Chicago for more than 20 years, Project Match recently expanded its own direct-service activities and is focused on the city's West Haven neighborhood, where a mixed-income community is being built to replace the Chicago Housing Authority's Henry Horner Homes. New Project Match initiatives to promote stabilization of this emergent community target adults, teens, and children. In 2008, Project Match was one of only eight nonprofits internationally to receive the MacArthur Foundation Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy

The Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy was established to **inform, support, and encourage effective early childhood policy**. The center provides new, evidence-based knowledge to legislators, advocates, foundation officials, and other participants in the policy-making process.

The center is endowed with a generous gift from the Jeffrey Herr Family, with additional support from the McCormick and Joyce Foundations.

The Center's current activities are primarily concentrated in the areas of early childhood education and care, including workforce development and compensation. Issue-focused conferences and events are a core component of the Herr Center's efforts to bridge research and policy.



Jana
Fleming



Juliet
Bromer

Education and care

Illinois Early Childhood Statewide System Evaluation Over the course of several years Illinois has developed an infrastructure and set of practices to promote and support the healthy development of children from birth to age five and their families through the implementation of the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG). The Illinois State Board of Education engaged the Herr Research Center to conduct a statewide system evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs thus funded, including state-funded preschool for at-risk children, universal preschool, infant and toddler programs, home visitation services, and parent training programs. The study, led by center director **Jana Fleming**, represents the first major evaluation of this critically important early care and education system. SRI International, Inc., is the subcontractor.

Family Childcare Network Impact Study In early 2009 the center published an executive summary and policy brief (available at www.erikson.edu/hrc, along with the full report) based on findings from the Family Child Care Network Impact Study. This study, led by assistant research scientist **Juliet Bromer** and sponsored by LISC-Chicago with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, examined the relationship between family child care providers' affiliation with support organizations and the quality of care they provided to children in their homes. The study found that licensed family child care providers who were affiliated with a staffed support network had higher ratings on established measures of quality than those who were



Juliet
Bromer

not affiliated with a support organization of any type. The study also identified combinations of network characteristics and services that are significantly associated with higher quality care. Bromer continues to work with Erikson faculty and both local and national child care policy stakeholders to explore staffed networks as a strategy for improving the quality of care offered in family child care settings, especially in low-income communities where use of family child care is prevalent and where children stand to gain the most from their services. She has presented findings and implications from this study to numerous audiences including researchers and policy makers and Head Start grantees from across the country who are implementing family child care program options.

Evaluation of a Relationship-Based Professional

Development Program for Support Staff working with Home-Based Providers In the fall of 2009, Illinois Action for Children (IAC), a statewide child care advocacy agency, approached researcher **Juliet Bromer** about the possibility of developing a relationship-based model for supporting home-based child care providers. IAC was interested in building on the network impact study findings about effective service delivery for family child care providers and extending these findings to all home-based providers, including license-exempt providers—the most common type of non-parental child care (mostly grandmothers caring for grandchildren and other relatives). As a result, Erikson is currently piloting a year-long, relationship-based professional development program for home



Juliet
Bromer

visitors who work with providers through IAC. Bromer oversees the project and is conducting an evaluation of the professional development program which will examine how the training helps staff gain skills and knowledge to work effectively with providers. The network impact study found that this kind of training was key to quality in home-based child care, but did not examine how relationship-based training is implemented and the processes by which staff gain skills to help providers improve care. Findings from this study will inform replication efforts as well as provide valuable information to the field about effective components of relationship-based practice and training.

Development of Family Child Care Network Assessment and Management Tools As part of a professional development series for Head Start family child care network coordinators who offer support services to family child care providers, assistant research scientist **Juliet Bromer** is conducting evaluation activities aimed at understanding the dimensions of resource and service management, relationship-building, and home visiting with family child care providers. Several management tools will be developed for network staff to use to assess their practices with providers and the ways they deliver services to providers at the network. This work is expected to be initially funded by a contract with Chicago Department of Family Support Services.



Jolynne
Andal



Jana
Fleming



Samuel J.
Meisels

Chicago Preschool Inputs—Children’s Outcomes: What Are the Costs and Benefits? Research associate **Jolynne Andal** is collaborating with the National Institute for Early Education Research on a study to determine the comparative effectiveness of three program inputs in improving Chicago Public School (CPS) preschoolers’ academic outcomes through first grade. Specifically, class size reduction, teacher professional development, and parental involvement activities are being examined to inform school administrators and other educators whether these inputs are cost-effective and critical for success in the CPS system. This is the third and final year of this study.

Illinois Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Planning Initiative In partnership with the Ounce of Prevention Fund and Advance Illinois, Herr center director **Jana Fleming** and Erikson president **Samuel J. Meisels** are leading this initiative on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The overall goal of this effort is to help Illinois adopt a statewide strategy for assessing children’s readiness for kindergarten. This will be done by facilitating the work of the Kindergarten Readiness Stakeholder Committee in developing recommendations to ISBE that will inform a uniform kindergarten readiness assessment process in Illinois. The purpose of the assessment will be to document the skills and achievements of children at the outset of kindergarten. Such an assessment will enable the



Jana
Fleming



Aisha
Ray



Patricia
Garcia

state to be more strategic in its efforts to monitor readiness trends over time, allocate instructional resources, provide professional development to teachers, and begin the process of aligning the early childhood and K–12 systems, thereby enhancing educational experiences for all children in Illinois. A well-designed assessment has the potential to help guide both district- and school-level resource allocation.

Educating Dual Language Learners in Chicago Public Schools

As the demographic characteristics of our communities continue to change, each year public school teachers in Illinois encounter increasingly more children who speak English as a second language, and many of these children are newcomers to school. In Chicago Public Schools (CPS), more than 43 percent of the children currently enrolled in preschool programs have limited English proficiency and are dual language learners (DLLs). While the majority of these children are from families in which Spanish is their first language, the typical CPS preschool classroom is multilingual and multicultural.

In July 2010 Herr center director **Jana Fleming**, Dean **Aisha Ray**, and assistant research scientist **Patricia Garcia** launched a two-year research study in collaboration with CPS to examine the current policies and practices to support dual language learners in preschool programs, and to identify mechanisms to strengthen the educational experiences for children who arrive at school with limited English proficiency. Specific issues to be

examined include What linguistic and cultural supports are available to dual language learners in CPS preschool classrooms? And, What policies and practices are needed to make certain dual language learners and their families receive sufficient supports to ensure a positive school experience?

The overarching goal of the research study is to provide practical information to enable early childhood leaders and program administrators in CPS to target resources and develop a comprehensive and coherent set of policies to ensure preschool teachers are responsive and well-prepared to work with dual language learners and their families. The study is funded by the McCormick Foundation.

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graduate school in child development

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