

ERIKSON
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A Graduate
School in Child
Development

Winter 2006

Erikson Today



**Behind the scenes
at the Chicago
Children's Museum**

Molly Collins partners
with Tsivia Cohen
and Jennifer Farrington
on a recent exhibit.

Letter from the president

ALL AROUND US I SEE EVIDENCE THAT we're launching the Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy at a pivotal moment. In a recent



conversation, the former staff director of the House Ways and Means Committee told me that early childhood issues have never figured so prominently at the forefront of policy-making as they do today.

More than forty states now have state-funded prekindergarten programs; six states are considering making these programs universally available to all four-year-olds. Two—Georgia and Oklahoma—already provide universal pre-K.

Head Start is still in the news as we wait for the Senate to consider the House's version of the Head Start reauthorization bill. We hope the logjam that has prevented Senate consideration will clear soon.

Closer to home, Illinois continues to plan for "Preschool for All" and advocates are hoping that this and other early childhood initiatives in the governor's budget will win approval. Erikson is hard at work helping to shape these state-funded programs and prepare those who will be working in them.

These issues give just a brief indication of the rich policy questions available for study, research, and debate by the Herr Center. We are very excited about the center's potential for affecting the lives of children and families, and we are deeply grateful to the Herrs and the McCormick Tribune, Joyce, and Spencer foundations for their support and confidence in us as we get underway.

Samuel J. Meisels, president

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City Colleges faculty freshen knowledge at Erikson

Nearly two dozen members of the child development faculty at City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) are enjoying unique access to top researchers and new developments in the field through Erikson.

The City Colleges partnered with Erikson in 2004 to develop a two-year faculty professional development seminar series aimed at strengthening the colleges' child development degree courses. The CCC faculty expressed interest in exposure to the latest research, so Professor **Aisha Ray** and CCC executive director of child studies Jana Fleming organized monthly seminars with presentations from nationally recognized experts.

The colleges' entire full-time child development faculty, adjunct faculty, and child development center directors participate. "Most of them have degrees from Erikson, so when we asked who they wanted to collaborate with on a program like this, Erikson was their first choice," explains Fleming, herself a former Erikson senior researcher. "The response to the seminars has been overwhelmingly positive."

The series has explored topics ranging from the role of culture in development to the impact of prenatal drug exposure on children. Each session includes time to discuss the topic informally with the presenters. This year, two seminars have been set aside to allow

participants more time to discuss what they've learned and how to incorporate the information into their classrooms.

"Since the idea is to strengthen the degree programs, some of the course is focused on the art of teaching," Ray explains. "In the community college setting, teachers face some of the most diverse classrooms in the city, with students of many cultures, ethnicities, and ages ranging from 18 to 80. We talk about how to deal with that diversity in college teaching and advising."

In a related initiative, three of the participating CCC faculty members have been paired with an Erikson mentor for more individualized professional support.

Clinical assistant professor **Sharon Syc**, senior instructor **Rebeca Itzkowich**, and instructor **Megan Hilligass** are using classroom observation, monthly seminars, and web-based communication to provide feedback on teaching techniques, style, and content.

The mentoring project and seminar series are part of a larger initiative to strengthen the colleges' child development academic degree programs and child development centers. These efforts are supported with funding from the McCormick Tribune Foundation and the Joyce Foundation.

Behind the scenes *at the museum*

Erikson expertise guides Chicago Children's Museum

Chicago Children's Museum aims to be a community where play and learning connect. So it's not surprising that the museum turns to Erikson's experts on learning through play for solid knowledge to support its mission.

"Now You're Talking: The Story of How Children Acquire Language," a recent major exhibit, was developed in consultation with Assistant Professor **Molly Fuller Collins**. She provided a grounding in the latest research on how young children acquire language skills—and what parents need to know about that process.

"Molly helped us tremendously," says Tsvia Cohen, manager of program development and training at the museum. "We had a very rudimentary understanding of language acquisition. She helped us determine what the essential concepts were and how we might present them."

"As we came up with ideas, we ran them by Molly. We wanted them to be fresh and funny and appealing, but we also want them to be correct. She would let us know if they were a bit off," Cohen adds.

Cohen and her staff translated steps of the language acquisition process into lively interactive demonstrations that are

engaging for young children, but aimed at their adult caregivers. "Sometimes parents don't realize just how amazing children's language development is, and they don't always recognize their potential role in language learning," says Cohen. "Sometimes they are doing more than they realize, or are under misconceptions about what helps."

Collins adds, "The display shows how important it is just to talk with children in everyday settings such as mealtimes. Just listening and being responsive are critical."

The exhibit, which was sponsored by the McCormick Tribune Foundation, ran from late spring through mid-November.

Collins's work with the museum is just the latest example of fruitful collaboration that goes back several years, says Professor **Frances Stott**, vice president and dean of academic affairs. Erikson has presented several professional development programs for museum staff. More recently, the museum recruited Erikson as a key player in a two-year benchmarking study aimed at making it a model of its kind. The study culminated in *Standards of Excellence*, a comprehensive 2005 report on best practices that guides every aspect of the museum's operations and growth.

Erikson's role was to provide the theoretical grounding in play and learn-

ing. The project team included Stott, President **Samuel J. Meisels**, **Leslie Mitchell Bond**, '88, and **Emily Beckstrom**, '04, then an Erikson student with professional experience at children's museums. The team conducted a rigorous literature review that resulted in two position papers. "We brought the relevant research to the table and helped frame the variables, like how you define play," recalls Beckstrom.

The Erikson team also crafted interview questions to elicit input from experts in many fields related to child development. From this feedback, the team identified themes, philosophies, and best practices that could be incorporated into a model for the museum.

The project goals were ambitious and the study team was large; Gyroscope, Inc., a museum consulting firm, and Civitas, a producer of educational tools for adults who care for young children, also participated. "We were the 'process people' who provided structure for the project," Beckstrom adds.

The resulting document is a guide, resource, and inspiration not just for the Chicago museum but also for peer organizations throughout the country.

One finding of the study was that it was important for the museum to continue to collaborate with research institutes like Erikson. "Over the past three years, we've worked with Erikson Institute on a variety of projects," says Jennifer Farrington, the museum's chief operating officer. "The results of the *Standards of Excellence* effort confirmed what we've learned through our partnership: CCM is ideally suited to partner

with organizations of higher learning and we look forward to growing our relationship with Erikson Institute."

Erikson has also advised the Museum of Science and Industry, Field Museum of Natural History, DuPage Children's Museum in Naperville, and Kohl Children's Museum in Glenview. "Working with these museums is a wonderful role for an academic institution," says Stott. "Part of Erikson's mission is community engagement, and this is a way to bring our expertise to the community. And we take something back to the academy as well. The museums give us a real-life arena in which to understand children and parents and their interaction."

Bond, an expert on play and mother of three, enjoyed "making the museum a place that's not just a tourist attraction, but place where people will really see play and learning connect in a way that supports child development."

For Beckstrom, the project "was a unique chance for me as both a graduate student and someone with experience in museums to marry those aspects in an exciting way," she says. "It was a huge growth experience."

Save the date

Erikson's annual Prism Ball
is Saturday, May 13,
at the Museum of Science
and Industry.

Make your reservations at
www.erikson.edu/prismball

Foundations grant \$1.65 million to Herr Center

Three Chicago-area foundations that share Erikson's mission of improving early childhood care and education have demonstrated that commitment by investing a total of \$1.65 million in the newly expanded Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy.

The McCormick Tribune Foundation has awarded Erikson a \$950,000 grant to support the center. The Joyce Foundation provided \$500,000 and the Spencer Foundation \$200,000.

Supported by a leadership gift from the Jeffrey Herr family, the center extends Erikson's existing research to include a focus on public policy. With the additional foundation support, the center will conduct more applied research and channel the findings to policy-makers in the Great Lakes states of Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

The Herr Center's combined focus on policy and research aligns perfectly with McCormick Tribune Foundation's goals, according to Sara Slaughter, education program director at the foundation. "We're interested in making systemic change," she says. "Good public policy is grounded in solid research. The McCormick Tribune Foundation has a longstanding relationship with Erikson and respects its work. We felt the Institute was uniquely positioned to combine policy activities and original research to leverage support for public investment in quality early care and education.

"Few advocacy groups are staffed to do extensive, original research; few academic institutions have practical, hands-on involvement in programs," Slaughter notes. Erikson, with a strong reputation for applied research that is firmly rooted in real-world early childhood practice, brings both strengths to the initiative. "This center complements the foundation's goals as well as the work of advocacy groups throughout Illinois," she says.

The Spencer Foundation funds research that investigates the best ways to improve education. "We believe



Dan Dwy photo

The Herr team
Professor Aisha Ray has been named acting director of the Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy, and Eboni Howard (right) joined the center in January as an associate research scientist. Howard has extensive research experience in a range of child and family policy issues.

if there is actually going to be improvement, the research data has to be communicated to those who set policy and shape education," says Mary Cahillane, chief financial and administration officer.

"However, we know that it often takes a long time for relevant research to find an audience and have impact," she adds. "We see Erikson Institute playing a great role in that communication. Erikson can be a voice for quality research."

\$75,000 challenge sparks Erikson Fund drive

Erikson's annual fund drive got a big boost this year from three close friends of the Institute who provided a \$75,000 matching gift challenge.

To help reach the fund's \$350,000 goal, these three—Susan and Richard Kiphart, the Joy Foundation, and the Circle of Service Foundation—made the pledge to match new or increased gifts.

"A challenge like this one really encourages people to give just a little more or to consider a first-time gift," says Claudine Larocque, who was named Erikson's director of special gifts in April. "The challenge is working. As



Erikson photo
Claudine Larocque

of mid-February, we have raised \$255,397 and we've exceeded our challenge, with more than \$88,000 in new dollars."

In 2005, the annual fund drive also got a new name—the Erikson Fund—to emphasize how vital this support is to the Institute's work. Year after year, the fund allows Erikson to carry out its mission of improving the way children are taught and cared for.

The Joyce Foundation, which supports efforts to strengthen public policy in the Great Lakes Region, sees the Herr Research Center as an important ally in its early education initiative to make preschool more accessible, according to Gretchen Crosby Sims, education program manager.

"We're at a pivotal moment in time. Advocates in the Midwest in general and particularly in Illinois have been very successful at creating momentum for universal preschool. There is a strong policy interest, but a real need for information to help guide implementation of programs," says Sims. There are many practical questions about how to organize, fund, and assess such programs, but "not a lot of workable models out there," she explains.

"Now the rubber hits the road; states have to figure out how we actually do this. Given its expertise in child development and strong track record of research and involvement in this area, Erikson seems well-poised to bring that knowledge to bear in the development of workable state and local models."

Recent support from the Children's Initiative, a project of the Pritzker Family Foundation, provides an additional boost to the center's early efforts.

In the last year alone, Erikson

- educated 30 percent more teachers and early childhood professionals;
- helped develop curricula and strengthen teachers' skills in more than 50 area schools; and
- improved the evaluation of children in foster care in Illinois.

Your generous gifts make this critical work possible. If you've given to the Erikson Fund this year, we thank you. If you have not, please consider a gift.

THE
Erikson
FUND

News from Erikson

Study asks: Does math knowledge, discussion add up?

How do preschool teachers think about math content? Does a teacher's math knowledge determine how often mathematical concepts are discussed in the classroom? Does a math-rich classroom environment lead to greater gains on math achievement scores?

Doctoral candidate **Jennifer McCray, M.S. '99**, will pursue the answers to these interrelated questions in a study involving 60 Head Start teachers in Chicago-area programs. In October, McCray was



McGraw-Hill photo

Leader in learning Erikson cofounder Barbara Taylor Bowman joined the ranks of illustrious winners when she received the 2005 Harold W. McGraw, Jr., Prize in Education in September. The prize recognizes outstanding individuals who are leaders in early childhood education and teacher preparation. Terry McGraw (left), CEO of McGraw-Hill Companies, presented Bowman's award at a ceremony in New York. Past winners have included former U.S. Secretaries of Education Richard Riley and former First Lady Barbara Bush, founder of the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.

awarded a \$50,000 Head Start Graduate Student Research Grant to support her study.

Previous elementary education research shows that teachers' understanding of math correlated with student outcomes. Other studies in the preschool setting found that the more teachers talked about math in the classroom, the better their students scored.

"There are a lot of interesting reasons why what we talk about in the preschool environment is really important, especially with math," she says. "What language can do is make a connection between concrete experiences and generalizable, abstract concepts."

"We've done a pretty good job about getting teachers to talk about literacy concepts in preschool. There also has been a lot of focus on social-emotional issues. That's hugely important, but there are a lot of other things that we could present to them, including math concepts, which are a precursor to science," she says.

McCray's observational study will reveal areas where teachers could strengthen their content knowledge; these findings could provide the basis for developing new teacher training programs. With that opportunity in mind, the Chicago Public Schools has provided an additional \$25,000 to expand the size of her study to produce more significant results.

Erikson helps CPS win, run Early Reading First project

Assistant professor **Molly Fuller Collins** helped the Chicago Public Schools write a project proposal that won \$3.2 million



Lloyd DeGrane photo

Mad, sad, glad Noted children's author Robie Harris (left) signed books and shared reflections on writing about the emotions young children experience in a special Erikson event at Am Shalom Temple in Glencoe November 2. Fran Stott, vice president and dean of academic affairs, followed the talk with advice on how parents and caregivers can deal with those emotions.

in federal Early Reading First grant funding.

About 200 children in 10 prekindergarten classrooms will get extra help with English language literacy skills through the project, while their teachers will receive intensive coaching and professional development.

As a consultant to the project, Collins participated in curriculum selection; she will provide leadership and support throughout implementation. Erikson will provide professional development opportunities for participating teachers.

The project provides valuable service and support to classrooms while answering several questions, Collins explains. "How does this curriculum enhance children's language, literacy, and cognitive skills? What types of professional development are helpful in the early childhood classroom? What types of parent involvement build literacy?"

"The goal is to create centers of excellence in early literacy—models that we could draw upon to transmit all or parts of them to other schools."

Lawmakers listened, tabled NRS

For nearly three years, Erikson president **Samuel J. Meisels** led strong opposition to the National Reporting System, a semiannual assessment of nearly a half-million four- and five-year-olds in Head Start. With other early childhood experts, he argued that the test was not an accurate assessment of what is taught in Head Start or of a child's ability to learn.

Lawmakers listened. In a unanimous voice vote Sept. 22, the U.S. House of Representatives approved an amendment to the Head Start reauthorization bill that suspended use of the test while it is reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences. The bill awaits action in the Senate.

The test "poses some real dangers; it can harm a child's self image, narrow a teacher's perception of a child's abilities, and restrict the scope of what is taught and learned in Head Start," Meisels says. "We have worked hard to point out the risks of the NRS, and we're grateful that our concerns were heard."

Patrick wins 2005 Founders' Award

A committed professional. A creative risk-taker. A leader who never backs down.

These are just a few of the ways that long-time associates describe **Maureen Patrick, '73**.

Patrick has been the executive director for Family Focus; program director of the Infant Welfare Society; and senior early childhood associate at the Early Head Start National Resource Center at Zero to Three. She served as the first governor-appointed chair of the Illinois Interagency Council on Early Intervention. Currently she is a program officer on the Ohio-Michigan Head Start Team, Region V Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family and Child Development.

In all these roles and more, she has been a progressive administrator, inspired teacher, thoughtful ethicist, and a committed advocate for children.

To that list, she recently added a new accomplishment: winner of the 2005

Alumni of Erikson Institute (AEI) Founders' Award. Four colleagues—Diane Pyle, Helen Fleisher, classmate **Peg Callaghan**, and Professor **Linda Gilkerson**—paid tribute to Patrick's influence while presenting the award at the AEI annual meeting in October.

The Founders' Award recognizes an Erikson graduate with a record of accomplishment and distinguished service in leadership, advocacy, practice, teaching, innovation, and contributions to the field. That perfectly describes Patrick's 30-year career.

As the first executive director of Family Focus, "Maureen promised sweeping changes, and she delivered," recalls Pyle. "She brought in a whole new era of accountability, professionalism, and replicability. What an inspiring person to learn from—Maureen never backs down from a fight, yet she always works for consensus."

Callaghan, an AEI board member and classmate of Patrick's, cited an



Erikson photo

Patrick honored Founders' Award winner Maureen Patrick (second from left) celebrates with 1973 classmates (from left) Michael Phair, Peg Callaghan, and Jim Price.

incident at a recent conference that sums up Patrick's long leadership in early childhood initiatives. "People started talking about how Illinois contributed to developing the field of early intervention," Callaghan recalled. "One person would come up and say, 'We did this,' and another would say, 'We did that.' And for every program or project that was mentioned, Maureen could say, 'I was part of that.' I was just astonished by all she had done."

Patrick has also been an active and involved alumna, serving on the AEI board in various capacities. Accepting the award, Patrick noted, "Erikson Institute has grounded me and been my family for all my years in Chicago. I am especially honored because this is coming to me from my peers. You mean a great deal to me—more than I can ever say."

Investing in early childhood makes economic sense.

Every dollar we spend now on *quality* care and education for Chicago's young children yields more than \$10 in benefits.¹

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¹ Gallinsky, E. (2006). *The Economic Benefits of High-Quality Early Childhood Programs: What Makes the Difference?* New York: Committee for Economic Development.