Erikson
A GRADUATE SCHOOL IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

FALL 2006

In the Service of Children

40 Years of Impact

Reflecting on Erikson's Contributions

Longtime leaders: Barbara Bowman, Frances Stott (right) and Aisha Ray.

A Word from the President

As I write this letter, that familiar first-day-of-class excitement is in the air. Down the hall, a new group of students is embarking on a journey of discovery and self-reflection.

They may not fully realize it yet, but the journey they begin today will have a profound influence on their lives, personally and professionally. As important, it will have a profound impact on the lives of the children and families they serve.

Exactly 40 years ago this fall, this scene was playing out for the very first time, as founders Maria Piers, Lorraine Wallach, and Barbara Bowman launched this new school with the backing of Irving Harris. I can only imagine what they must have felt as they welcomed the first class of 16 in the Hyde Park Bank Building.

So much has changed since then. We've moved three times and are bursting at the seams of our current quarters. Today we're welcoming the largest entering group of students in our history: 114 new master's students, 3 new doctoral students, and 64 students seeking certificates.

What is most evident, however, is that the mission of the school remains unchanged. From the start, our founders believed in exploring early childhood through the multidimensional prisms of cognition, physical growth and development, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and education. Like Erik Erikson himself, they taught that a child is best understood in the context of family, community, and culture. Programmatically, the Institute was unique in combining classroom theory with practical experience and self-reflection. That multidisciplinary, culturally sensitive, practical focus—frequently imitated but never fully replicated—is at the heart of an Erikson education today.

This issue traces the journey from where we began to where we are today. It includes a roundtable discussion in which Barbara Bowman and other longtime Erikson faculty members reflect on how the institution has influenced the field of early childhood. A glance at the careers of just a few alumni shows how our graduates have put Erikson values to work in the field. It's a fascinating trip through Erikson's history, one I'm sure you'll enjoy.

Samuel J. Meisels
President

In the Service of Children

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Herr Research Center Examines Foster Care and More

Just two months after getting its first permanent director, the Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy is well staffed and fully engaged. Research scientists **Carol Horton** and **Rebecca Shearer** have joined newly-appointed director **Eboni Howard**, Frances Stott Chair in Early Childhood Policy Research. Studies of state-funded prekindergarten, infant mental health policies and services, foster families, and new American families are underway.

Howard, who was named to the directorship in July, is currently examining the routines, challenges, motivations, and unmet needs of foster families. She also oversees a series of studies examining early childhood mental health and prekindergarten education policies and practices in the Great Lakes region.

Horton and Shearer are collaborating with Mathematica Policy Research on a descriptive study of the Chicago early childhood education system. Shearer is also working on a series of studies examining social-emotional development and academic outcomes among low-income, urban children. **Aisha Ray**, a faculty associate in the Herr Research Center, is conducting a study of the early education and service needs of young immigrant children and their families.

On Sept. 18, the Herr Research Center held its inaugural Midwest Policy Conference, which drew legislators, advocates, administrators and funders from the Great Lake region. Following the conference, Erikson introduced Howard to the research and policy community at a lecture and reception. The featured speaker was Joan Lombardi, research professor at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute at Georgetown University and the director of the Children's Project. Lombardi gave an overview of current early childhood policy nationwide and priorities for the future; Howard moderated the lively discussion afterward.

Dan Dry photo

New Herr Research Center director Eboni Howard (center) and research scientists Carol Horton (left) and Rebecca Shearer have launched an ambitious research agenda.

Infant Studies Expands, Online and Onsite

Child care practitioners in Kansas City and Milwaukee are earning an Erikson certificate in infant-toddler child care without ever leaving their hometowns.

The Irving B. Harris Infant Specialist Certificate Program has extended its reach to these cities through a new online cohort for Bounce Learning Network personnel.

The network is a partnership involving the Buffett Early Childhood Fund and Ounce of Prevention Fund that aims to spread the Ounce's Educare Center model to other cities across the nation. Through the network, the Ounce and the Buffett Fund are helping communities create these centers to better prepare disadvantaged infants, toddlers, and preschoolers—and their families—for school. The network now includes Educare efforts in Omaha, Milwaukee, Kansas City, Tulsa, and Denver, all based on the original Educare Center on Chicago's South Side.

Quality programs, however, require highly trained personnel, so the Buffett Early Childhood Fund agreed to sponsor a cohort of the far-flung Educare staff in Erikson's online infant studies program (see related story p.3). Fourteen participants—including two from Chicago—enrolled, logged on, and began collaborative online study in June.

The certificate program has also hit the road to educate new groups in Chicago. The city's Department of Children and Youth Services has sponsored a cohort for its Head Start staff. Erikson faculty will be teaching most courses onsite in DCYS facilities. Sixteen participants are enrolled. In the fall semester, a similar cohort of staff from the Chicago Public Schools' Early Childhood Community Partnership Programs entered the certificate program.

The bottom line is a fivefold increase in certificate program enrollment.

Keep Kindergarten Test-Free

Don't let the testing mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act trickle down to early childhood education programs, **Samuel J. Meisels** advised a commission created to assess the impact of the act.

Erikson's president was among five experts invited to participate in a roundtable discussion hosted by the Commission on No Child Left Behind in July. The commission is an independent, bipartisan panel convened to analyze the NCLB and make recommendations to Congress on how to improve its impact in closing the academic achievement gap.

NCLB's push for school accountability measured through achievement tests is causing "academic trickle-down," Meisels told the commission. Curriculum is inevitably shaped to fit the tests; under pressure to maximize scores, schools are now teaching what students need to know in third grade a year earlier in second grade—and so on back to kindergarten. "That influence is being felt more and more in early childhood programs," he says. "I told the commission I hoped that it would not recommend that testing be moved down to kindergarten from third grade, because testing children that young is unreliable. There are ways to set standards for learning without using inappropriate assessments."

Best in the Nation

Liz Russell's state-funded pre-K classroom at Bret Harte School on Chicago's South Side weaves math into everything from circle time to the "question of the day." For that, *Nick Jr. Magazine* named the 1998 Erikson graduate one of the top preschool teachers in the nation. She was among 10 teachers across the country to be cited for their power to "engage, inspire, and excite students, parents, and colleagues." When Russell is not changing lives in the classroom, she's changing the classroom itself. In addition to teaching, Russell is a member of the Illinois State Teacher Advisory Council, which helps create policies within the Chicago Public Schools.

Maeroff Kicks Off Book Tour

New York Times contributor Gene Maeroff, senior fellow at the Hechinger Institute, Teachers College, Columbia University, came to Chicago Oct. 4 to discuss his latest work, *Building Blocks: Making Children Successful in the Early Years of School*.

Erikson and the McCormick Tribune Foundation, which cohosted the event, helped Maeroff identify early childhood classrooms in Chicago that served as the basis for his study, which examines PK–3 education in America. PK–3 is a new approach to early education that stresses curriculum alignment among and within grades, parent involvement, and teacher education. Several faculty members, among them Samuel Meisels and **Patty Horsch**, acted as resources for the volume.

Up Close Makes it Personal

Oscar Moresi photo

Ultrasounds are a routine part of modern prenatal care. But just six to seven additional minutes with the sonographer can result in mothers-to-be feeling more attached to their growing babies, according to research by Erikson's **Zack Boukydis**. His study, published in the June issue of *Journal of Ultrasound in Medicine*, showed that mothers who received the extra time showed a 20 percent increase in feelings of attachment and a 30 percent decrease in anxiety. The study, which made the news from Baltimore to L.A., is just one of several that Boukydis has launched. Currently he is looking at ultrasound consultation's effects on depression during pregnancy and developing training materials for sonographers and obstetricians.

In Memoriam

Carol Gibb Harding, a long-time Erikson instructor who pioneered the Irving B. Harris Online Infant Specialist courses and taught other faculty members to lead them, died Sept. 3, 2006.

When Erikson established its doctoral program with Loyola University Chicago in 1986, Harding—then a faculty member in education and psychology there—was the Loyola liaison to the program. Later, she became chair of educational psychology at Loyola. She served on many doctoral students' dissertation committees and taught language development in Erikson's master's degree program. After retiring and moving to North Carolina, she continued to teach online courses and in Erikson's interdisciplinary child law class offered through Loyola's law school as well.

"Carol was an outstanding professional. She always poured herself into whatever she did, and did it well," recalls Frances Stott, vice president and dean of academic affairs. "She was also a fabulous colleague and friend who always had a great appreciation for all of life's complexities."

She is survived by her husband, Art, three children, two stepchildren, and two grandchildren.

The Erikson Impact

"Some things we know work. One of them is early childhood education, and Erikson Institute is a leader in the world of education. Everyone here is a hero ... You are people who really make a difference."

— Columnist Clarence Page, member of the editorial board of the Chicago Tribune, addressing graduates at Erikson's 21st commencement, 1988

thank you!

Erikson gratefully acknowledges these recent gifts and grants. With this vital support, we are improving the lives of more children and families in Chicago and beyond.

The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
granted $1.16 million to the Fussy Baby Network.

The Irving Harris Foundation
gave $250,000 to the Fussy Baby Network.

The McCormick Tribune Foundation
granted $14,000 for faculty development and $185,000 for the Chicago Public Schools Program Evaluation Project.

The Gustafson Family Charitable Foundation
granted $30,000 for a planning study for an early learning and assessment center.

Donor

Infant Specialists Everywhere

Buffett Early Learning Fund Supports Distance Learning

THE CHILDREN OF WARREN BUFFETT KNOW A THING OR TWO about investing wisely—and giving generously.

So when Susan A. Buffett grew interested in educational philanthropy, she decided to focus on the very young. "Initially Susie was interested in K-12 education, but when we looked at what the smartest investment would be, all roads pointed to early childhood," says Dan Pedersen, president of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund.

She also learned that quality programs for young children require highly trained staff. And when it comes to investing in the skills of those who work in the early childhood field, the best option is an Erikson education.

For many, that option is beyond their reach, geographically and financially. That's why the Buffett Early Childhood Fund—backed by Susie Buffett, her brother Peter, and Peter's wife Jennifer—is helping the Institute extend its reach and prepare top-notch infant specialists all across the country. The fund has pledged $162,000 to help build Erikson's distance learning capabilities and also sponsored an online cohort of students in the Irving B. Harris Infant Specialist Certificate Program.

Cohort members are drawn from the staff of new Educare Centers launched in Milwaukee and Kansas City with the support of the Bounce Learning Network. The Buffett Early Childhood Fund and the Ounce of Prevention Fund are key partners in this network, which is establishing programs across the country based on the Ounce's original Educare Center on Chicago's South Side. Educare Centers offer a mix of high-quality infant and toddler care, preschool, and family support services, provided by highly-trained, credentialed teachers and caregivers. Erikson was tapped to develop that skilled staff by providing consistent, quality long-distance education.

"We know this is not babysitting. This is the toughest job in education, and it requires the strength of Erikson Institute to lead the way in preparing professionals for it," Pedersen says.

"There is not an Erikson in every state; there is only one Erikson," he continues. "This really arose from me sitting down with [Erikson president] Sam Meisels and asking him if he could figure out a way to export Erikson's intellectual capital in way that would help the network prosper and raise the bar. This is part of the solution to professionalization of the field."

Erikson is an ideal educational partner for the Bounce Learning Network efforts because the Institute's infant studies expertise is essential for Educare staff—and not readily available elsewhere, Pedersen says.

"We certainly believe that what happens in the first three years of life is critical. If we don't have strong focus on the first three years—zero to three, as we call it—in our program model and credentialing, we don't reap the dividends that come in that period of greatest opportunity. Yet it's hard to find that four-year degree credential in zero-to-three. In some states, programs offering that kind of preparation don't exist," he notes. "What we need the most, we have the least of. That needs to be changed. I'm confident Erikson is going to be a great partner to help change that." ■

40 Years of Impact

Barbara Bowman, Aisha Ray, and Frances Stott, with Joan McLane and Robert Halpern participating by phone, discuss Erikson's effect on policy and practice.

What would the world of early childhood be like if Erikson had never been founded? To mark Erikson's 40th anniversary, *In the Service of Children* gathered a group for a lively and thoughtful discussion of the Institute's impact on early care and education in the U.S. over four decades.

The roundtable included Erikson founder and professor Barbara Taylor Bowman; vice president and dean of academic affairs Fran Stott; Robert Halpern, a professor who has examined the history of child care in America; and professors Joan Brooks McLane, '69, (now retired) and Aisha Ray, '72, who began at Erikson as students and graduated to the faculty.

Q. Erikson Institute was started 40 years ago to provide advanced training to preschool teachers. What has changed about preschools, and what role did Erikson play in the change?

Fran Stott: More preschools have better qualified teachers than they did then.

Aisha Ray: That's true, but if you think about it, there weren't as many children in preschool 40 years ago. We know that Erikson has led the field in arguing that children need highly qualified teachers, and we've had an important influence, but in terms of increasing the actual numbers of kids who *have* highly qualified teachers, that's still a struggle we're engaged in.

Barbara Bowman: When we began Erikson, it wasn't even considered necessary to have a college degree, much less a master's degree. Very few early childhood teachers had them, and very few schools offered them. We really led the way, and we have brought forward a large number of institutions that now confer master's degrees in early childhood education. Those teachers are working largely in preschool settings where they do make a difference, but as Aisha pointed out, because we've had such an increase in the number of children who are in preschool we're not keeping up with the demand by any stretch of the imagination. Some states are better than others; Illinois happens to be one of the better ones, and I think that might have something to do with our influence.

AR: Another change is that high-quality early childhood programs now recognize that family and cultural context is critical to understanding children. That was something that was not recognized as much 40 years ago, and Erikson has had a role in that change.

High-quality early childhood programs now recognize that family and cultural context is critical to understanding children.

Q. Would it be fair to say that Erikson professionalized the role of the preschool teacher?

BB: Absolutely. Part of the reason people didn't even consider getting a master's degree is that there weren't any *jobs* for people who had that kind of background.

AR: I remember when I was thinking of applying, I came and talked to Barbara and we had conversation about the perception of the field as babysitting. Back then, there wasn't really a perception of a "field"; there was a perception of this job. If you worked with young children you were considered essentially a babysitter. You were a "glorified" babysitter if you had some training. The perception was that just anyone could do this as long as you felt good about kids. Erikson argued that there was specific knowledge that people had to have.

FS: And Erikson helped set standards. Barbara, through Erikson, was *very* influential at the national and at the state level in setting standards for early childhood teachers.

BB: We had a consortium that got the legislation through that funded preschool education — the first preschool grant — [with Illinois Rep.] Barbara Flynn Currie.

AR: And you had one of the early grants for the development of the Child Development Associate Program.

BB: Yes, we were on the committee that developed the standards for the CDA credentialing program.

FS: And an Erikson alumna carried that work forward, establishing the Council for Professional Recognition, which the federal government chose to oversee and administer the program. The fact that there is now a child care credential that every provider should have is a huge advance, due largely to Erikson.

AR: I also think that Erikson's ongoing focus, from the beginning, on developing early childhood professionals of color as part of its mission was important for both the Institute and for the field at large. There really is a cadre of, in particular, African American early childhood educators going back to the very first years of Erikson up to the very present, and a growing cadre of Latina graduates as well. I think that is part of our legacy, one that is absolutely essential to continue.

Barbara Taylor Bowman is widely acknowledged to be one of the nation's most respected and effective advocates for early care and education. More than 40 years into her career, she still spends nearly a quarter of her time crisscrossing the country on behalf of young children.

BB: One of the most important contributions Erikson has made is to change with changing times. We're not the same institution we were when we started. We have adapted as the field has gotten larger. We have educated more teachers. As the educational needs of kids have increased, we have put content into curriculum for young children. As we became more aware of differential quality of programs available to minority kids, we've focused more and more on leveling the playing field for children.

FS: We've also expanded the ways in which we work with young children. For example, we were probably the first to offer infant studies, a program we developed on the heels of a plethora of infant research in the '70s and '80s. We've made a *lot* of difference in that area. We're nationally known for having *two* certificate programs, one in infant studies and one in infant mental health, and a specialization in the master's programs. With each explosion of knowledge, we've adapted our curriculum, creating professional specializations—administration, infant studies, bilingual ESL, social work.

Also, Linda [Gilkerson, professor and director of both the Irving B. Harris Infant Studies Program and Fussy Baby Network] has had a huge influence on changing the early intervention system in Illinois, both in terms of setting standards for professionals and in drawing attention to the social-emotional development of babies. She got the state to change. Because of her work, providers around the state now pay attention to the social-emotional development of infants.

AR: In policy, we've influenced infant mental health from the top down. In practice, with our alumni, we've influenced it from the bottom up.

BB: We moved infant studies knowledge from research into early intervention, but we haven't really moved it a long way into child care, unfortunately. We've done some training—we're doing some right now with Bounce Learning Network, the Chicago Department of Child and Youth Services, and Chicago Public Schools—but there is so much more to do. If you look at the number of infant programs that are available to families, and you look at the amount of infant studies training the professionals who staff those programs are receiving, by and large there is very little. The people who run infant programs tend to be the people who run preschool programs, particularly the commercial groups, who are probably the largest providers of infant programs.

Robert Halpern: There is a difference between talking about how we've contributed directly to the well-being of some number of children and having contributed intellectually to both a profession and a set of policies, which has been a more indirect kind of emphasis. Social policy and practice improves and changes slowly over time as a result of a whole variety of influencing factors, and Erikson has been among those factors. We've translated knowledge, but we have also embodied certain ideas and principles in public.

BB: We make ripples.

Q. All right, what about in education? To what extent has the Erikson approach to education—grounding learning in relationships and teaching practitioners to be self-reflective—influenced teaching at other colleges and universities?

AR: There are two questions here. One is to what extent Erikson's approach has permeated the practice of teaching early childhood professionals. The other is to what extent people agree that this is the way early childhood professionals should be taught. I think there is pretty widespread agreement that how we do it is how it's *supposed* to be done.

Joan McLane: I was thinking about how hard it is to explain the Erikson approach. People think there is one thing you can do with children or one method you should use, and we know there isn't. So we have to prepare students to engage in an ongoing process, applying what they know and getting feedback, staying flexible, altering the course. This is a complex business. We introduce our students to the process of interacting with complex systems and prepare them to keep the process going once they've graduated.

BB: That's something I don't know if the world at large has heard, but it's certainly something we've stood for, and

that is the complexity of taking care of young children and educating them, working with their families, working with their communities, seeing the child as a member of the community.

FS: That complexity is why from the beginning we made a steadfast commitment to quality, which also sets us apart.

Twenty-seven-year veteran Frances Stott championed the clinical social work dual degree, which has changed the field.

Erikson is famous for integrating knowledge and then applying it. … What's the use of it all if you can't apply it?

Q. How has Erikson changed any of the big ideas in the field—or been changed by them?

FS: Certainly we've changed how people look at assessment. And Robert's after-school work has been particularly influential. We aren't talking solely about research here; we are talking about original contributions. I think of *Early Literacy* [by McLane and McNamee, 1990], many of the books that have come from faculty, Robert's books on after-school programs and play.

RH: Joan and Gil [McNamee] helped people understand how activities that are not normally understood to be reading and writing in a narrow sense are critical to the foundations of literacy.

AR: We've been frontrunners in our approach to issues of culture and development, but that approach has changed. At one time, we were very influenced by psychoanalytic theory. At this point, our approach pays much less attention to it. It's more influenced by human development and interdisciplinary studies, bringing in research from other fields such as anthropology and sociology.

BB: I remember Maria [Piers] saying all the time, "It's the *back* part of Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* that has so much to offer that people don't pay much attention to." And that was the part that looked at individual people within a particular social context. I think the anthropologists had been looking at the *group* as a functioning system but had paid little attention to the individual. Psychoanalysis looked at the *individual* but paid little attention to the group. And Erikson brought them together.

JM: That's true, but the whole approach to culture has changed, as well. There was something evaluative about the approach back then—some cultures are better than others, some cultures may be pathological, that kind of thing. Now we take a much more relativistic stance about culture.

FS: You can see it in every class. Theories change. In some ways we mirror the times and in some way we've been trendsetters.

I've got a question. Do you think it's fair to say that over the years we've had more influence on other professions outside of early childhood? For example, we've always had some influence on the allied health professions. A little on medicine: I mean, Zack [Boukydis, associate professor in the infant studies program] may well change the way sonography is taught. Pediatrics has been influenced through our work in child life and early intervention. Now social work is changing, because of our dual degree program.

JM: Also the law.

FS: Right. I've trained a lot of judges. A judge hands down a ruling on visitation. What does it mean? An attorney for DCFS has to decide whether 15 minutes of supervised visitation every three days is better for the child or worse. How on earth can they even frame that issue from the perspective of the child?

Q. In what areas of research or new knowledge can we do more?

FS: Play.

BB: A very naive notion about play is out there. We need to work on that one some more. You know, many years ago when we first started teaching play, Lorraine [Wallach, cofounder of Erikson] would say we don't know what play is. We *still* don't know what play is.

AR: At the early childhood/elementary school border, the battle continues to be waged over what should school

look like for very young children and the degree to which play should or should not be part of school, and whether a certain kind of play is all right, and what that play means. But aside from our own teacher preparation program, I'm not sure we have really influenced early childhood education in terms of play.

RH: But I do think what we've done is make sure that our graduates bring a set of questions, a body of knowledge, and a theoretical stance toward all these issues. That gives them the tools to take leadership roles, and to shape curriculum and practice.

Aisha Ray, professor and graduate, plays a strong role in continuing Erikson's legacy of developing early childhood professionals of color.

JM: The set of questions is important, particularly when there is no one answer. Gil and I talked about the social aspects of literacy, for example, but we also know that kids can become literate without particularly enjoying it. The idealized model of early literacy is great but it's not the only way that kids learn, whether or not proponents of one particular method like it or not.

BB: We've always had internal debate and internal consideration of some of these issues; it's part of how we've moved with the times.

JM: We argue, but I think that fact that we always have argued with each another is extremely valuable.

FS: Absolutely. Debate is healthy. It makes for flexibility. It makes for better teaching. It makes it easier to get the message across to all kinds of people.

JM: And to help people figure out how to apply it in different ways.

FS: Exactly. We do research and develop original ideas, and many of the faculty have made substantive contributions. But more than generating new knowledge, I think that Erikson is famous for integrating knowledge and then applying it. That is no small thing. I mean, what's the use of it all if you can't apply it?

BB: In that way, our work and our message has been not just for early childhood professionals. It also has been for parents and political figures and judges and members of the media and people who do other things with children and families. ■

To hear audio clips of this conversation, visit *www.erikson.edu/40years*.

The Erikson Impact

"Modern research has taught us that the major portion of a child's intelligence is formed by the time he is four years old. Yet our nation's system of teacher education concentrates almost entirely on elementary and secondary schools. We wanted to be sure that at least one institution of higher education would exist where teaching would be based on modern knowledge of child development."

— Irving B. Harris

Going for the Highest Yields

Kathy Richland photo

Irving Harris persuaded many to invest in young children—and in higher education for those who work with them.

"THANKS TO IRVING HARRIS, one of the greatest areas we've influenced is in philanthropy," says Erikson founder and professor Barbara Taylor Bowman. "He was an absolute leader in moving the philanthropic world into funding early childhood programs."

With Maria Piers, Harris went to Washington in 1965 and went to bat for federal funding to launch the Institute. When funding didn't come through as promised, he underwrote the start-up costs himself.

By then, Harris was hooked on the cause and he became a powerful fundraiser, both for Erikson and the early childhood field in general. Passionate and highly knowledgeable about the benefits of early intervention, he persuaded congressmen, state legislators, governors, foundations, corporations, and many individuals to invest in children—and in higher education for those who worked with children.

"He had an enormous influence both on individuals and on foundations," Bowman says. "He played a key role in converting the Carnegie Foundation, the Bush Foundation, McCormick Tribune Foundation, and many others into steadfast supporters of the field."

Harris was a successful businessman with a strong and growing belief that nurturing children well in their earliest years was critical for both the child and society as a whole. When Piers, a prominent child psychologist, approached him in 1965 with the idea of starting a school to prepare early childhood professionals, he was a willing collaborator. "I was sold on the logic of getting to the child early and therefore was quite prepared to help start a graduate school to train preschool teachers," he recalled years later.

From the start, Harris himself gave generously to Erikson, funding everything from new academic programs to public relations activities to technology infrastructure. "I can't stress enough that he made it possible for us to start up and grow because we didn't have to worry about financial deficits; he would cover them," says Frances Stott, vice president and dean of academic affairs at Erikson. "For years, he was almost single-handedly responsible for mobilizing people to support the school," she adds.

Harris's interests grew along with the burgeoning knowledge in the field, and he both pushed and supported Erikson's expansion into areas like infant mental health. "He learned from us. I'm convinced that Maria, at least in the early days, had some effect on Irving, but pretty soon he became as professional and knowledgeable as the institute was. It was hard to say who was leading whom," Bowman recalls with a laugh.

Starting Erikson was just the beginning of Harris's extraordinary career as an early childhood philanthropist. He went on to fund every aspect of the field: community-based service programs; advocacy, training, and support organizations; student scholarships; research; professional development networks; and academic policy centers. He played a founding role in at least a dozen such organizations in Chicago and around the nation, many of which bear his name.

He believed in using private investment to attract public funding, and used his seed money creatively to leverage those public dollars. Organizations he founded on that principle, Erikson included, are flourishing decades later.

Without question, the early childhood field enjoys higher visibility and greater financial support because of Irving B. Harris, and that has changed the lives of children in ways beyond measure. ■

For more on Harris's history and impact, see *http://www.erikson.edu/erikson.asp?file=donor_harris.*

Changing Children's Worlds

In the beginning, Erikson was created to make sure that people who worked with young children had the knowledge, skills, and awareness to help them reach their potential. Today, Erikson alumni amplify Erikson's impact, passing on this knowledge and putting it into practice everywhere that children are found. Outstanding examples abound; here we've selected just a few from the many across Erikson's four decades who have shaped practice, influenced practitioners, and changed the lives of children and families.

Judith Bertacchi, '71

Consultant

Teacher, service provider, program developer, administrator, staff development consultant—Judith Bertacchi has done everything in the early childhood field, and loved it all.

She turned her Erikson internship at Virginia Frank Institute into a full-time job after graduation. There she expanded an intensive therapeutic nursery school program aimed at preventing and intervening in developmental delays; it is still flourishing today. For more than 28 years at Virginia Frank, she developed new programs and partnerships that helped thousands of young children and families deal with developmental and social-emotional delays. "I always said, about both Erikson and Virginia Frank, I never left after a day at either place without learning something. For me that was wonderful," she notes.

In the late 1990s, Bertacchi moved on to the Ounce of Prevention Fund because she was interested in using her knowledge to help families struggling in poverty. Eventually she was named vice president for direct service programs. Much of her work was with staff "to help them understand that they are critical people in the lives of the children. They are agents of change," she recalls.

Along the way, Bertacchi has also helped launch the Illinois Association for Infant Mental Health and served as its second president; taught courses in Erikson's infant studies program and at the Institute for Clinical Social Work; consulted in the area of reflective supervision for Ounce of Prevention's Educare Center and Bounce Learning Network, as well as Erikson's Department of Child and Family Services integrated assessment project and several other organizations; served as an Erikson trustee from 1991 to 2003; and more.

Looking back on her career, she sees a web of gratifying connections that allowed her to shape the early childhood field in many ways. "The truth is, I loved every one of my roles. For me the treat was providing people with developmental theory. It's so elegant. With this theory, you can understand the importance of the early years of a person's history. Then things start to make more sense."

Elizabeth Najera, '77

Principal, Velma F. Thomas Early Childhood Center

Expand preschool classrooms, Strengthen early literacy activities. Provide support systems for families. Establish a Reggio approach model program.

These are just a few items on Elizabeth Najera's to-do list as she enters her second year as principal of Velma F. Thomas Early Childhood Center.

She oversees a staff of 22 serving 220 preschoolers in a diverse neighborhood on Chicago's Southwest side. The school blends the Reggio Emilio method with other approaches to provide standards-based education tailored to children's needs and interests.

Najera brings to the role considerable experience. In the years since earning her master's at Erikson, she has been a teacher, a coach for early childhood teachers, an assistant principal, and coordinator of early childhood professional development for the Chicago Public Schools. Through it all, she has focused on bridging the distance between school and home, particularly for children and families in the Latino community, where language, culture, and socioeconomic factors can create barriers.

"Some of our parents see the school as an institution, not as an integral part of the community. I want to dispel that notion and have them see us as part of their community and family network," Najera says. To make sure parents are involved in their child's learning, in her first year at Thomas she started an infant-toddler program that includes parents. She implemented drop-in chat sessions for parents who want to talk about their child's development, offered English-as-a-Second-Language classes, and provided training for parents who volunteer in the classrooms. She also is recruiting children for a third, late-afternoon preschool session.

"One of my challenges as a principal is that I want to do everything at once. I like to make a decision and start some action around a problem," she says. "My work as an assistant principal at Little Village Academy helped me see that change takes time. It's sometimes building brick by brick."

Yet the urge to dive right in and get things done has served her—and the community—well. When she came to the preschool, she saw that she had inherited a building that needed some work. With the help of a teacher, she secured a Chicago Cares grant to spruce it up. She found staff and parents willing to participate, and together they rolled up their sleeves and repainted the school.

"Some of our parents see the school as an institution, not as an integral part of the community. I want to dispel that notion and have them see us as part of their community and family network."

Recognizing all the demands that can encroach on teachers' priorities, she tries to help her staff by protecting their teaching time. That kind of support from the top makes them willing to join her in a push for change. "It isn't an easy thing to set the bar higher and say, 'Let's look at how we can be better.' I was amazed when we sat down last summer and went over all the things we'd been through—it was just one big thing after another—and the staff was right there saying, 'What comes next?'"

Planning for the future and taking the long view come easily to Najera. Herself a lifelong learner—before coming to Thomas she participated in a rigorous yearlong boot camp for aspiring principals—she knows that lasting change requires long-term effort. Her goal is to make sure that the preschool classrooms in her center are just the first of many steps along a path that will stretch to college and beyond.

Ultimately, Najera would like to use child assessment profiles and other tools to track her students after they move on to kindergarten and later grades to chart the effects of a good start. "I want to be sure we're giving children many ways to express themselves, to use good literature, and to learn to think through a situation logically. If we build a strong foundation when they are here and preserve the joy and wonder of learning for them, we will have gone a long way in helping them to be successful learners."

Cathy Blanford, '81

Program developer

Sonja Hall, '81

Infant mental health consultant

As mothers, preschool teachers, and fellow Erikson students, Cathy Blanford and Sonja Hall were well aware that modern life left stay-at-home mothers increasingly isolated. Without family or neighbors to lend support, that isolation could lead to child abuse.

That's what gave Blanford the idea to start a parent-child center in Oak Park. She asked Hall—a friend since their preschool teaching days—to help. "I said, 'Sure, I'll help, I think we can do it,'" Hall says today.

The pair used their Erikson internship to do a needs assessment, secure start-up funding from Irving B. Harris, find a church to house the program, and launch Parenthesis—and the parents came streaming in. Blanford ran support programs for parents, including teens and fathers, while Hall provided high-quality on-site child care for participating families.

"The primary idea, inherent in the name, was that all parents have their

Together and individually, Sonja Hall (left) and Cathy Blanford addressed the social-emotional needs of parents and children.

"It has been exciting to be on the ground floor of all these projects and see them grow."

own thesis, their own ideas of how to parent," Blanford says. "If we could bring parents together in a place where they could have some respite and share those ideas, their parenting would be strengthened."

Their idea was immediately successful, and within a few years, both Blanford and Hall had moved on to focus more on the child side of the child-parent dyad.

Blanford has spent the last 10 years developing support groups and services for grieving children. "I went to work at a hospice for a while, and I saw that children were neglected mourners," she says. "Children don't always let us know how they feel. Grief looks different in them, and that makes it easy for us as adults to believe that they really don't understand loss. From my background at Erikson, I was able to see what they were going through."

She has started two suburban groups where children can come together "with other children who get it." "I can't tell what that does for them. It's absolutely huge," she says. "It gives them a safe place where they can tell their story and get some control over the issues. We work to legitimize their anger and guilt and then go on to memorialize and commemorate their loved one. The final thing we do is to give permission to go on living and be happy." These groups have served about 300 children.

Blanford has also expanded a hospital grief group for new parents who have lost infants to include siblings, taught preschool teachers and parenting groups how to handle grief issues, and consulted for a new camp for grieving children. "It feels good to be passing on what I know," she says.

Hall, meanwhile, developed an infant mental health program within a community mental health center. In 2002, she was part of the pilot program headed by Erikson professor Linda Gilkerson to provide social-emotional consultation and reflective supervision at early intervention sites throughout the state. She retired from her consulting position in August, but continues to supervise students in Erikson's infant mental health certificate program.

"It has been exciting for me to be in on the ground floor of all of these projects and to see them grow and develop and stick," Hall says. "I love watching students grow and learn, with the same frame of reference and same excitement about babies that I have.

"Most of all, I am grateful for what the babies and their parents have taught me over the years. I learned to trust in families. Many do figure things out, and it's amazing how resourceful they can be. I would get letters back from families wanting me to know how well they were doing and saying that my trust in them made a difference. That's what amazes me: the capacity for human growth."

Meanwhile, the duo's original brainchild is thriving. Parenthesis just celebrated its 25th anniversary and both founders were there to cut the birthday cake. "It's flourishing beyond my wildest dreams," Blanford says. "I feel like a proud grandparent."

Katari Coleman Daniels, '99

Chair, Human Services Department
Kennedy King College

Katari Coleman Daniels is opening the eyes of young students to rich knowledge and new career opportunities in early childhood.

A faculty member at Kennedy King College for five years, she was recently promoted to chair of the Human Services Department. With four full-time faculty (three are Erikson alumni) and 15 adjunct instructors, the department serves up to 400 students a year.

"A lot of our students come in thinking that they will work in a home day care or as an aide in a Chicago Public Schools pre-K or Head Start program. They are not aware of opportunities in early intervention, for instance," Daniels says. "Once we open their eyes to so many opportunities, they come back and talk to us to find out more."

When they do, Daniels encourages them to continue study beyond their associate degrees, and many do. At National-Louis University, so many Kennedy-King students have enrolled in four-year programs that the university decided to offer additional support and incentives to continue the flow. After finishing their bachelor's degrees, some students come back to Daniels, still hungry for more knowledge; then she encourages them to study at Erikson.

"We see students who have a true interest at heart in learning more about child development. In some percentage of the class, they are interested in more than practical work and want to pursue knowledge at a more theoretical level. We encourage them to go on to get a bachelor's and then a master's."

It was an Erikson alumna who encouraged Daniels to teach at the

Katari Coleman Daniels introduces city college students to early childhood career opportunities.

"We see students who have a true interest at heart in learning more about child development … We encourage them to go on to get a bachelor's and then a master's."

college level. She had done a lot of training in child development as a facilitator for a teen parent program through the Chicago Public Schools, yet she didn't feel confident taking her teaching beyond those workshops. Arleen Prairie, '75, IS '97, then an instructor at Harold Washington College, "told me I should go into that area and encouraged me to try," she recalls. Daniels started as an adjunct instructor at Harold Washington before moving to Kennedy King.

Now pursuing a doctorate in educational history and policy studies, Daniels continues her practice as a developmental therapist in the early intervention system. "I love both teaching and practice. Working with children and families helps keep me connected to the issues my students will be dealing with in their work." ■

For more about these alumni and others, please see *www.erikson.edu/40years*.

The Erikson Impact

"Erikson-educated teachers make a huge difference in the lives of the children and families they touch. They engage the children. They support the parents. It is important that we, as a community, support Erikson students who are willing to dedicate their lives to the early years of our children's lives."

— Trustee Sara Crown Star, commenting on a Crown family gift supporting scholarships

The Erikson Impact

5,000 → 1

Illinois families were served in 2005 by a network of programs established by

Erikson graduate

75%

of everything a preschooler learns is absorbed while he's sitting on a lap snuggling up.

— Erikson founder Maria Piers

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