

Erikson Institute 40th Anniversary Celebration

Friday, March 23, 2007

Samuel J. Meisels introduction

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to welcome you to this special symposium in honor of our 40th anniversary. I want to thank you for joining us today and I want, especially, to thank our presenters for taking time to be with us and sharing their thoughts today.

I always think that anniversaries should begin with a recollection of where things began. In Erikson's case, the "creation story" of the Institute is quite interesting and particularly relevant to the subject of this symposium. Although some of you may have heard it before, I'm going to take a few moments to share it with you.

The motivation to create Erikson Institute began to form a little more than 40 years ago when Maria Piers, a child psychologist, and Irving Harris, an investor and businessman, met in Piers's Hyde Park apartment to talk about a daring federal experiment that was just getting underway. President Johnson, as part of his War on Poverty, had just launched Project Head Start to provide child development and family support for children living in poverty. Envisioned at first as a brief, 8-week summer experience, it quickly became a year long program that grew from just a few thousand preschoolers in 1965 to more than a million children, birth – age 5, today.

But as the planning for Head Start got underway Maria Piers became deeply concerned that so few teachers were prepared to work with these children. She went to Irving Harris for help because she knew that he was a man who was impatient with the waste of resources. And the greatest waste, from Irving's perspective, was that of children's lives. Irving understood the promise of beginning early, helping children experience success, halting the cycle of poverty, and doing something about the corrosive effects of school failure. These were among the goals of Head Start, just as they were part of Irving's personal credo. But both he and Piers understood that these goals would never be attained unless qualified teachers could be found, prepared, and hired to work with these extremely vulnerable children, as well as other, more fortunate preschoolers.

From this conversation, Erikson Institute was born. To make it into a reality, Piers enlisted the leadership of early childhood educator Barbara Taylor Bowman and social worker Lorraine Wallach. Irving promised to go to Washington to speak with his former college roommate, Sargent Shriver, then head of the Office of Equal Opportunity, to ask him to fund the institute. Irving went to DC but Shriver never sent a check. Fortunately, Irving did. Beginning with 16 students, today Erikson enrolls over 300 master's, doctoral, and certificate of advanced study students from all over the U.S. and thousands more through on-line and professional development courses. In 18 months we will take possession of the first facility that we have ever owned—three floors in a 10-story building being built at the corner of LaSalle and Illinois that will more than double our current space. The interests of our students and faculty have also grown to include all

aspects of child development, from schools to social work, from child care centers to hospitals, from infancy to third grade, and from research to policy.

Much has taken place in the field of child development during these 40 years and I'm very proud that Erikson has been part of it. Today the Head Start budget is approaching \$8 billion per year; 40 states have state-funded pre-K programs; and the federal government supports programs beginning at birth for children at-risk and those with disabilities. In Illinois, Governor Blagojevich has been one of the nation's leading supporters of pre-K, adding nearly \$150 million to the budget for children below age 5 since his election in 2002. In his most recent budget he is proposing a \$61 million increase to expand pre-K access to 12,000 more children and another \$10 million dollars for improvements in pre-K facilities. According to the national clearinghouse, Pre-K Now, Illinois is on track to be the first state in the nation to offer high-quality, voluntary pre-K to all three and four year olds.

But despite these and other positive steps, much of Maria Piers and Irving Harris's dream remains unfulfilled. For example,

- The number of children at risk for school failure and developmental harm in our society continues to remain high, with estimates of the percentage of children not prepared to enter school ready to succeed ranging from 20 to 49 percent.
- Recent studies show that 30 to 40 percent of programs serving infants and young children are of such poor quality as to jeopardize children's health, safety, or development.
- The latest scientific findings confirm that the better prepared the practitioner, the greater the child's progress. Yet, child care and early education remain marginalized in our society in terms of status, income, and employment prospects.
- Although families are central to the lives of young children, the U.S. Department of Education reports that low-income children are at least five times more likely to have only one parent and nearly half live in three different homes by the time they enter kindergarten.
- The U.S. has become a multicultural, multilingual nation and is growing more so every year with one in five U.S. children (31 million) foreign born. But our teachers are not prepared to work with these diverse groups of children.

Much has been learned since Head Start began and Erikson was founded and much more remains to be discovered. But the barriers to Piers's and Harris's vision 40 years ago are in plain sight. They include greater numbers of children in care, poor working conditions and salaries for caregivers, inadequate preparation of those who work with our children, second-rate facilities and poor quality programs for those most vulnerable, inadequate knowledge about how best to teach and assess young children and support their families,

and absence of will by our policymakers to act on the knowledge of how important the first years of life are.

Today we are fortunate indeed to have with us a remarkable group of leaders who do appreciate the importance of the early years and early relationships. Not only our guest presenters, but our respondents, and you, our participants present in this amphitheater are among those leaders. Many of you are “part of the family”. You are Erikson faculty, staff, students, or alumni. And those of you who are a little more distant relatives still know what Erikson—what the field itself—is all about. It is about reflection, complexity, thoughtfulness, and application of ethical principles, a desire for social justice, and rigorous research. Addressing all these in a single-day symposium is quite an agenda and the faculty members who worked with me to create this program today were fully aware of the challenge we were placing before ourselves and you. The speakers who are here today were invited because each can provide both data and insight on this most complex and contentious of subjects, **Social Justice and Child Development**. They will each have their say about what they value, what we’ve learned from research and practice, and where each of us needs to go next in our work.

We hope that all of you will join us in this journey today by participating in the open discussions that we’ve planned. As you will see, each of our speakers will talk for a half hour, to be followed by a response from an Erikson faculty member for fifteen minutes. After the second speaker this morning and then again this afternoon we will open the floor to questions and comments from you. We also hope that you will carry your conversations on at lunch, which will be served on the sixth floor. My job will be that of a traffic cop, making sure that everyone starts and stops on time. But, like many traffic cops in this town, I do have opinions. I’ll try to hold them until the end of the day – but I’m inviting you not to be so circumspect. I also want to invite you to use the file cards in your pocket to jot down questions raised by the first two presentations. If you can leave your questions about Dr. McLoyd’s presentation with one of the Erikson staff at the break, we’d be very appreciative. By the way, you’ll also notice in your packets handouts for today’s PowerPoint presentations and articles from our featured speakers.

At this point, it is with great pleasure that I introduce our first speaker to you, Dr. **Vonnie McLoyd**. Vonnie is the Stephen Baxter Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. A 1996 recipient of a MacArthur “genius award,” Vonnie was a faculty member at the University of Michigan for many years before going to UNC. We were colleagues for nearly two decades at the Center for Human Growth and Development at Michigan and had many students in common. One of those students – who worked much more with Vonnie than me – is Aisha Ray.

Vonnie’s talk will be commented on by Aisha, who is an associate professor at Erikson and director of our bilingual/ESL teacher training program. Vonnie’s talk is entitled **“Why Race Matters in Child Development: Economics, Context, and Culture.”**

Our next presenter this morning is **Hiro Yoshikawa**. Hiro is a professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, my alma mater. Previously he was a professor of psychology at NYU. He is the recipient of three early career awards and has been a fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford. It is my great pleasure to serve with Hiro on the board of directors of Zero to Three: The National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families, and I know our fellow board member and Erikson faculty member, Linda Gilkerson, feels the same way.

Hiro's presentation will be discussed by Jon Korfmacher, associate professor at Erikson, whose work includes studies of how early childhood intervention programs are experienced by those who work in them and those to whom they are directed.

Hiro's topic, which mirrors the title of his latest book, is **"Making it Work: Low-wage Employment, Family Life, and Child Development."**

One of the people on our program who needs very little introduction is **Frances Stott**, who will moderate the forthcoming discussion. Fran holds the Rochelle Zell Dean's Chair and is Vice President for Academic Affairs. In addition to her administrative duties, Fran has been a faculty member at Erikson for more than 25 years. As a clinical psychologist, she also has been a student advisor, on-site clinician, and mother confessor for all staff and faculty.

LUNCH:

I hope you've enjoyed your lunch, the company of those you were seated with, and the magnificent photos of children displayed here that were taken by our trustee and former board chair, Kathy Richland Pick. I only want to speak to you for a few minutes right now and mainly, I want to use this time to express my thanks.

I want to begin by thanking all of you for joining with us to celebrate our anniversary. I like to think that Erikson's anniversary is something that can be celebrated by anyone committed to children and families, and today I think I'm probably right about that. This is one of those occasions when you don't have to have gone to Erikson to be a part of Erikson.

I want, especially to thank and recognize a few very important individuals. First, I'd like to ask all of our faculty to rise, and remain standing;

- now all of our alumni,
- students,
- staff, and
- trustees.

Needless to say, without you, none of this would be possible.

I want to recognize once more the speakers who've joined us today (don't worry, you don't have to stand):

- Vonnie McLoyd
- Hiro Yoshikawa
- Bruce Fuller, and
- Barbara Bowman,

As well as our faculty respondents and leaders:

- Aisha Ray,
- Jon Korfmacher,
- Fran Stott, and
- Robert Halpern.

Let me say as well, that there is no free lunch. This doesn't mean that you have to pay for your lunch; rather, it means that someone else paid for it. Specifically, our sponsors today generously came forward to make this event possible. They are the

- Buffett Early Childhood Fund,
- McCormick Tribune Foundation,
- Polk Brothers Foundation,
- Joyce Foundation, and
- Spencer Foundation.

Present with us today are Don Cooke and Sara Slaughter from McCormick Tribune and Janna Fleming from Joyce. I can't tell you how grateful we all are for your support today and for your phenomenal help through the years.

I have one last thing I want to share, and it relates to the sponsorships. In talking with several foundations I also asked the Foundation for Child Development if they would consider supporting this anniversary. Ruby Takanishi, the president of the foundation, told me that she'd like to help, but of course she needed to give it some thought. To my surprise and delight, what she was thinking about was much more than support for just this symposium. Instead, she and Fasaha Traylor, the foundation's senior program officer, decided to create a graduate fellowship in child development and social justice and to name it after Barbara Bowman. Not only that, they agreed to raise \$100,000 for this endowment.

I'm pleased to tell you that they succeeded in raising more than \$100,000 and the fellowship now holds contributions from the following foundations in addition to their own:

- A.L. Mailman,
- Annie E. Casey,
- Lloyd A. Frye,
- Joyce,
- McCormick Tribune,
- Pritzker Early Childhood,
- Scholastic Inc.,
- Schott,
- William Caspar Graustein,
- J. B. and M. K. Pritzker, and
- W. K. Kellogg.

Fasaha is here with us today. We're very grateful to her and Ruby for their leadership in creating this lasting tribute to Barbara. Also with us is Umni Song, Executive Director of the Lloyd A. Frye Foundation, one of Erikson's long-term funders as well as a contributor to the fellowship.

I'd like to point out that this was an independent and spontaneous gesture of recognition, and it's inspired us to follow suit. We've decided that we'll expand the Bowman Fellowship funding by raising an additional \$900,000. Please join with me in recognizing our sponsors and most of all, Barbara Bowman.

Well, I think I've now thanked everyone who's here. I could go on, after all it is a big city. But don't worry, I won't. Instead, let me invite you to finish your lunch and your conversations and please join me again downstairs. We'll begin promptly at 1:45. Thank you.

Welcome back from lunch. I can't think of anyone who is better prepared to deal with the post-meal, early afternoon doldrums that we are all familiar with than our next speaker. **Bruce Fuller** is professor of education and public policy at the University of California, Berkeley, and director of Policy Analysis for California Education, known as PACE. It would be unfair to call Bruce a professional gadfly or even an iconoclast in our field, but I guarantee that his perspective about early care and education will offer you new insights and keep your post-lunch interest high.

Bruce's talk will be commented on by Professor Robert Halpern. Robert directs our doctoral program and chairs our Faculty Research Council. A long time faculty member at Erikson, Robert's recent research focuses on after school programs and children's apprenticeships.

The topic of Bruce's presentation is "**Standardized Childhood: The Science, Institutions, and Politics of Young Children.**"

It is now my honor to introduce our final speaker, **Barbara Taylor Bowman**. In this crowd, if ever there was someone who needed no further introduction, Barbara is the one. She holds the Irving B. Harris chair in child development at Erikson; she is one of three faculty founders of the Institute; and she served as president of Erikson from 1994 – 2002. While continuing to lecture around the world and teach at Erikson, she is also Chief Early Childhood Education Officer for the Chicago Public Schools. Just telling you what she does makes me tired. Barbara’s topic is **“Educating Our Youngest: Past, Present, and Future.”**