

erikson

on children

fall 2015



About Erikson Institute

Erikson Institute is the premier independent institution of higher education committed to ensuring that all children have equitable opportunities to realize their potential.

Recognized for our groundbreaking work in the field of early childhood, we uniquely prepare child development, education, and social work leaders to improve the lives of young children and their families. Our impact and influence is further amplified through our innovative academic programs, applied research, knowledge creation and distribution, direct service, and field-wide advocacy.

Because nothing matters more than a child's early years, Erikson Institute educates, inspires, and provides leadership to serve the needs of children and families so that all can achieve optimal educational, social, emotional, and physical well-being.

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Cover: Erikson Institute serves more than 7,000 families in Illinois.

Photo by Kathy Richland

From the President

Erikson Institute was founded on the conviction that the first years of a child's life provide the greatest opportunity to positively influence lifelong development, resiliency, and well-being. How well we nurture and teach our children in this brief window of time is critical to them, their families, and to the health of our communities and society as a whole.

Erikson's new strategic plan, *Impact and Influence*, draws its inspiration and energy from this knowledge. Based on a nearly yearlong process of reflection, inquiry, and lively debate among our faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni, this plan provides a roadmap, directing our energies and resources toward four specific "Grand Challenges" in the early childhood field that we are uniquely—and powerfully—qualified to address. (You can find our Strategic Plan at www.erikson.edu/strategicplan2016.)

I am equally thrilled to announce that Professor **Jie-Qi Chen** is our new Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty. A member of our faculty for 21 years, Jie-Qi is a well-established scholar and a gifted leader. Jie-Qi follows in the footsteps of Professor Aisha Ray, who has led Erikson's academic affairs with wisdom and foresight since 2009.

Our second annual **Children at the Forefront** luncheon, held in October, was a resounding success. Gathered together was a strong community of individuals and organizations committed to Erikson and to our work in the service of children, their families, and communities. You'll find photos from the event in the pages that follow.

In this issue, we are proud to publish our yearly Honor Roll. I want to extend my deepest appreciation to each individual, corporation, and foundation listed. Your generous support makes our work possible.

Sincerely,



Geoffrey A. Nagle
President and CEO



Erikson's unique partnership with China includes in-person and online programs, here and in China.



Erikson in China

When **Lisa Ginet** traveled to Beijing last summer to lead intensive professional development workshops for early childhood educators, she was concerned that her ideas might not translate.

Ginet, the assistant director of instruction for Erikson Institute's **Early Math Collaborative**, centers her teaching on interactive activities that encourage children to become mathematical thinkers, as opposed to relying on drilling and memorization.

“If math is about thinking, you can't give teachers a set route to teaching it. You have to get adults thinking about math,” she says.

But how would these ideas be accepted in China, a country with an educational system that emphasizes a pathway of adults delivering knowledge to children?

“A lot of people warned me that this would be a very unusual idea for the Chinese teachers,” she recalls.

Ginet traveled to China as part of the groundbreaking partnership between Erikson and one of China's largest private early childhood education and care providers, the **Red Yellow Blue Education Technology Development Company (RYB)**.

Launched in May of 2015, the five-year partnership offers more than 1,000 RYB professionals the opportunity to join with Erikson to learn about early childhood teacher training practices and theory in the United States. Erikson staff are able to share best practices and learn from RYB partners as well. Through a combination of online and in-person programs in both Chicago and China, the partnership will make it possible for RYB educators to earn graduate certificates in infant studies or preschool teacher development. The online training certificate program in infant studies with RYB launched in November, making this Erikson's first international online program.

[Investing in early childhood](#)

Early childhood education has become a priority in China as, over the past few years, the Chinese government has invested 100 billion yuan (\$157 billion) in public preschool education and professional development for teachers.

But that amount is still not enough to meet the growing needs of educated, upwardly mobile young families who have settled in urban centers, away from

the grandparents who traditionally provide early childcare. Add to that the recent relaxation of the one child per family policy, and experts predict an urgent need for more quality preschools and well-trained teachers.

“Many of these young parents living in cities far from their hometowns are not as confident about child rearing,” says **Yinna Zhang, Ph.D. ’15**, director of the **China Initiative** at Erikson. “They realize the first three years are very important for children and want to invest in them, but they want to know more about how to do this.”

The Chinese government does not have the capacity to provide formal programs for all children, leaving individual families to pursue options such as RYB, which serves children up to age six in 800 learning centers and 200 preschools in more than 300 cities across the country.

“RYB partnered with us because, even though there is a huge need, many early childhood professionals lack a basic understanding about child development due to how training programs are designed in China,” Zhang says.

Chimin Cao, chairman of RYB’s board, agrees.

“This is a win-win partnership,” he says. “Erikson represents the highest quality of teacher training and development.”

Translating the big ideas

Ginet was greeted with a sense of openness from the 60 educators who took part in her course in Beijing.

“They were very receptive to the possibilities and very responsive to the kinds of activities I was offering them as adult learners,” she says.

Zhang, who also traveled to China for the project, saw the same willingness.

“We brought something very new to early childhood educators in China. They were expecting us as the ‘experts’ to give more lectures and tell them the right thing to do so they could follow it,” she says. “But when we design programs, they are more about parallel learning.”

Erikson’s programs are interactive, offering participants basic facts but asking them to give their own opinions and solutions.

“It’s something very new to them,” Zhang says. “For the first three days, they were shocked. But between the third and fourth day they loved it. They really got it.”

Changing traditions

Jie-Qi Chen, executive director of the China Initiative and now Erikson’s Senior Vice President and Dean of Faculty, recognizes the power of teachers learning from one another.



On a recent visit to Chicago, Erikson faculty took the teachers from China to Christopher House so they could observe and ask questions about the early learning experience.

“I think people who have worked with children long enough have a sense of what good education looks like,” she says. “These educators have worked with young children for years, sometimes in a tradition that they don’t know how to change or even know that there is another way. But as soon as they see it, they get it.”

That doesn’t mean change will happen quickly, Chen says.

“Teacher professional development is a long, ongoing process. You can’t expect people to change their practice by going to one workshop,” she explains. “Teachers learn, try things out in their practice, then come back and say, ‘That didn’t quite work. Let’s think about it again.’ It’s reflection and revision and learning it again.”

Cultural exchanges

“The world has become flatter and flatter,” Chen observes. “America and China are both major players in world affairs, so this is an opportunity for a cross-cultural exchange and a chance to understand child development in different cultures.”

One example is the teacher-student ratio, which is closely monitored in America.

“Student-teacher ratio is an important issue, but in China it will always be much larger than what American teachers are accustomed to. The challenges teachers face in China are different than they are here,” Zhang says. “We won’t necessarily have all the answers, but it will better facilitate

our understanding and thinking. We’re not the only ones delivering the knowledge—early childhood educators from China can teach us something new and help us to reflect.”

From Chicago to Beijing

When the first group of RYB educators visited early childhood programs in Chicago earlier

this year, one of their stops was at Christopher House in the Belmont Cragin neighborhood.

“The visit gave us the chance to see what we’re doing really well and the areas where we need to grow,” says **Elizabeth Tertell**, former associate director of Christopher House. “It was also a chance for our teachers to have their wonderful work cemented. We have been developing collaborative planning and teaching for a long time, but I’ve never had a group be more thankful and respectful as the RYB visitors. It was such a gift for the staff at Christopher House to be part of it, and it was very much a two-way street.”

For **Yu Diao**, a teacher from RYB, each day was a learning experience.

“This is exactly the type of inspiring and magical teaching that we should provide for our students,” she says.

Erikson faculty are quick to point out that the biggest gift will be to children and families.

“As one of the largest early childhood providers in one of the most populous countries in the world, RYB impacts the lives of so many,” Zhang says. “Because Erikson is working with their educators, we’re going to further impact the next generation, and their parents—which is enormous.” **ii**



For more information, visit www.erikson.edu/ryb.



A conversation on mindfulness

Erikson professor **Amanda Moreno** recently talked with University of Wisconsin–Madison professor and renowned neuroscientist **Richard J. Davidson**. They spoke about the importance and implications of teaching mindfulness practices to young children and the neurological bases of why those practices can help children succeed in school.

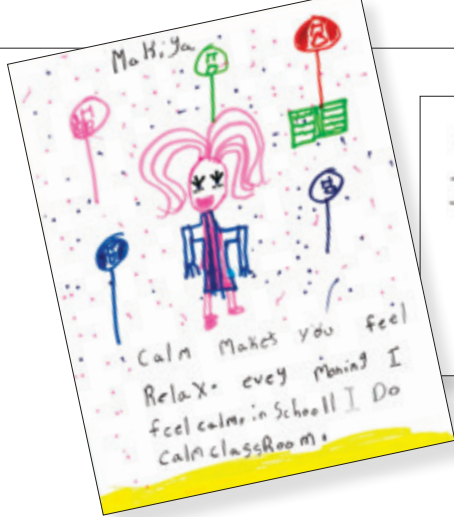
At Erikson, Moreno directs a four-year project aimed at exploring if mindfulness strategies can help Chicago Public School students manage the toxic stress often associated with socioeconomic disadvantage, to help them be ready to learn. The project will reach 3,000 students in kindergarten through second grade and was funded with a \$2.5 million i3 grant from the U.S. Department of Education. It was the highest-ranked proposal in the country that focused on social-emotional learning.

Davidson runs the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds at the Waisman Center in Madison. He presented the keynote address at Erikson's recent Children at the Forefront luncheon.

Moreno: You and others have offered evidence that clearly shows mindfulness practices actually change the brain in beneficial ways, but my question is *why* you think this works. How could it be that this successfully addresses such diverse human challenges from the development of self-regulation skills in children, to restoration of cognitive function in Alzheimer's patients, to post-traumatic stress in war veterans? What's the theory of action that you think is going on?



University of Wisconsin–Madison professor Richard J. Davidson and Erikson professor Amanda Moreno talk about mindfulness and children.



Students in a first-grade class at Chicago's Langford Academy expressed what calm feels like in drawings. Teachers lead students through mindfulness exercises as part of professor Moreno's project.

Davidson: It's important to point out that these practices have been around for more than 2,500 years, so they've undergone a lot of trial and error. It's not like they're just being invented.

This is really a basic form of skill building, not dissimilar from physical exercise. If you strengthen a muscle over time with practice, it will indeed show changes. We can demonstrate that if you practice paying attention, if you practice tasks that involve the regulation of emotion, those circuits in the brain will change and there are corresponding changes in behavior that will follow.

Moreno: A lot of the interventions to enhance young children's self-regulation skills haven't worked and I think one reason is that, with traditional approaches, you're trying to help children be good at something, like school, that requires cognitive skills of the highest order. In order to do that, you ask them to do something *else* that itself requires higher-order cognition, like telling them how they should behave and *think about* emotionally charged situations, then expect them to be able to make that translation.

It seems this is a case where a little bit is *not* a dangerous thing. Taking a moment to be still and to pay attention only to the smallest sensations is so radically different from the typical rushing around in "automatic pilot" we experience in life and in school, and therefore is potentially more powerful.

Davidson: I think that's all true. One of the other differences that's directly pertinent is the distinction that we, as neuroscientists, make between procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge.

Declarative knowledge is about stuff, so we can teach kids it's important to pay attention and to be kind. But that doesn't help them to be kinder people or to be more present! What helps is embodied learning, which is procedural. Learning how to ride a bike is procedural—you cannot read a book and learn how to ride a bicycle, you need to practice.

We want to change the cultural meaning around a very simple idea—that well-being can be learned. Well-being is best regarded as a skill.



Moreno: You mention the idea of being present, which is clearly a focus of these types of practices, as well as kindness. How have you helped children make that jump from being able to focus on the present to how we treat others?

Davidson: At the root of a lot of suffering is self-focus. We have all these expectations for ourselves and when those are unfulfilled—they clearly can never all be fulfilled—we suffer. We often focus on external things that somehow we think will enhance the self.

Ultimately, the motivation for practice is gradually taught to be an “other focus,” not a self-focus. When it’s taught in a way that’s authentic, the practice of mindfulness is a radical act of generosity for those around us. When a child has a calm mind and more of an open heart, it’s going to totally influence his interactions with others.

Moreno: I work in early childhood and some in that field might wonder whether this is truly the best way to reach social-emotional pathways with kids. Is it an ethical use of the children’s time? For example, why not just let children explore nature or play freely in the presence of a caring adult? In the most cynical way of looking at it, is it grown-ups who just want the kids to be quiet and still?

Davidson: I wouldn’t necessarily say it’s the best way and I would be skeptical of anyone who says that. However, I think there’s very little downside to this. It doesn’t require any special equipment or instrumentation. These practices have been around for thousands of years and the fact that they’re still with us is a testament to their enduring quality. They’re like a classic that’s always going to be relevant. But we shouldn’t regard them as the cure-all for all children.

Moreno: I met with a principal last week and when we talked about her concerns about the social and emotional life of the school, she told me that her students come from toxic environments. They may be exposed to violence. There are lockdowns at the school itself. There are teachers who've been hurt.

I wonder what you would say about what I look at as an existential crisis: By teaching acceptance of the here and now without judgment, are we asking children to accept the unacceptable?

Davidson: That's a very important question that's at the heart of these contemplative traditions. You can, simultaneously, work on behalf of change

while accepting the conditions that exist, without being completely debilitated by them.

The Dalai Lama is a good exemplar of this, someone who accepts the reality of China and certainly advocates non-violence and peace, and at the same time works indefatigably on behalf of change.

We can do the same thing in the domain of education. We can work to change these conditions that we know can cause suffering, and at the same time we can change our

relationship to the current reality so that it's less distressing and less toxic.

Moreno: That's such an important perspective to keep in mind. I tell the schools involved in our project that our purpose is neither to pretend that everything is fine, nor to squash a child's "animal instinct." Sometimes you need anger or fear to get your needs met. Sometimes you need to protect yourself or your loved ones.

A practice like this simply helps children have more discernment and control over *when* each type of response is appropriate.

Davidson: We've developed a mindfulness-based curriculum that was initially designed for children four and five years old, because we know there's a sensitive period of development right at the onset of schooling when the brain undergoes massive reorganization and is particularly susceptible to external influences.

Children are taught very simple mindfulness exercises that involve cultivating attention to sounds and to their breathing and a set of activities associated with gratitude, cooperation, and altruism.

We just published the first scientific paper to come out of a randomized controlled trial evaluating its impact in preschool children. We showed



significant gains for kids who went through it on a number of dimensions. Students in the curriculum were reported by their teachers to excel on a number of levels more than their counterparts assigned to a standard curriculum.

Moreno: Our mindfulness-based intervention focuses on kindergarten through second grade, so we're looking at the point in school when content gets much more structured and cognitively challenging. We're interested in seeing how mindfulness can help with that intersection.

We have also added an element called the *Calm Spot*, based on attention restoration theory, which says you can focus on cognitively difficult things better if you focus on something easy first—called “soft fascination.” Nature imagery has been



shown to elicit soft fascination and improve cognitive performance in both children and dementia patients.

Each classroom will have an area with bean bag chairs and tablets with the *Calm Spot* app we developed, which displays a randomly selected video clip of a visually stunning, real nature scene. With headphones and the real nature sounds preserved, it provides quite an immersive experience. But it's brief and structured, with protections built in so children can't use it again for an hour, and can't use it more than four times a day.

Teachers will allow students to use this even in the middle of instruction. As it is now, most children zone out or become disruptive when their attention span runs out, whereas this “brain break” with the *Calm Spot* is restorative.

I see the app as a bridge—an external support to self-regulation that can help children while those skills are not yet fully internalized. **ii**



For more information about the mindfulness project, please visit www.erikson.edu/calmclassroom.

Matching funds were required to secure the Investing in Innovation grant.

Erikson would like to recognize The Chicago Community Trust, the Luster Learning Institute, the Pritzker Children's Initiative, the Steans Family Foundation, the Stranahan Foundation, the James Tyree Foundation, and other individuals who helped us rise to this challenge.

Erikson Institute raises \$1 million at Children at the Forefront luncheon

More than 540 friends of Erikson Institute came together in October to celebrate the impact we are making to improve the lives of young children and their families.

At the second annual **Children at the Forefront** luncheon, leaders from Chicago's civic, business, and early childhood communities joined our extended Erikson family to rally around our work that for nearly 50 years has influenced best practice in the early childhood field.

The event helped raise more than \$1 million to support our expanding efforts to improve the lives of young children and their families through education, research, service, and advocacy.

"It's only when we all speak up and speak out on behalf of young children and the early childhood experience that we are truly able to keep children at the forefront," said Geoffrey A. Nagle, President and Chief Executive Officer.

"Erikson can't do this alone. Together, we will make a great impact."

Michelle L. Collins, Erikson's board chair, welcomed all to the mid-day gathering, which was co-chaired by trustees Sabrina Gracias, Cari Sacks, and Sandy Sterling.

The generosity of attendees was enhanced with a challenge grant from The Sun-Times Foundation and The Chicago Community Trust.



From left: Geoffrey A. Nagle, Sandy Sterling, Cari Sacks, Carol Brunson Day, Sabrina Gracias.



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1. From left: Penny Smith, Candace Williams, Tamara Mills, Sergio Hernandez, TeeNeka Jones-Gueye, Aminah Wyatt-Jones, Angela Hubbard. 2. Barbara T. Bowman and Carol Brunson Day. 3. From left: Rakhee Dodia, Mattie McLaughlin, Gillian McNamee. 4. From left: Carol Brunson Day, Geoffrey A. Nagle, Michelle L. Collins, Richard J. Davidson.



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1. From left: Ikram Goldman, Sandy Sterling, Ashley Netzky, Cari Sacks.
 2. Ann Collins and Michelle L. Collins.
 3. Matthew Piers, Jessie Rasmussen, Geoffrey A. Nagle.
 4. Standing from left: Gil McNamee, Mattie McLaughlin, Michel Frendian, Amy Shinohara, Sarah Becker, Patty Maleczka. Seated from left: Stacey Grieff, Mollie Bunis, Rakhee Dodia, Mrs. Marjorie Pelino.



1. Geoffrey A. Nagle.
2. From left: Kathy Richland Pick, Stephen Burns, Kate Neisser.
3. More than 540 friends of Erikson Institute attended the luncheon event.



4. First row from left: Arleen Prairie, Mary Sextro Black, John Harris, Shirlen Triplett, Bela Moté, Marion "Sparkle" Stewart Parrott, Irene Podrobinok; Back row from left: Yinna Zhang, Anne Lidgus-Inwood, Mary Pat Martin, Helene Block Fields, Jeanna Capito, Stephanie Bynum, Alexandra Foley Altman, Casey Amayun, Maria Kontoudakis.
5. From left: Sandy Killion, Sasha Earle, Basak Notz, and Sandy Sterling.



Partners at the Forefront

Erikson Institute thanks the generous supporters of our 2015 Children at the Forefront luncheon.

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Leading the field

Carol Brunson Day, M.Ed. '69, grew up on Chicago's South Side, where her mother taught kindergarten and first grade in the neighborhood.

"By the time I got to college, I felt like I had already done my teaching because I helped her grade papers, make charts, cut out flowers," she says with a laugh. "I decided then that I didn't want to be a teacher but, since I loved children, I wanted to work with them."

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin–Madison with a bachelor's degree in psychology, Day was offered a job as secretary at *Psychology Today* magazine.

"I wasn't a psychologist, so this is the job I could get," she says, "but I wasn't working with children."

Day's aunt knew Erikson Institute co-founder **Maria Piers**, and Day learned that the newly founded institute was recruiting its first class of master's students.

"**Barbara Bowman** interviewed me and assured me that while the coursework would prepare me to teach, it really focused on child development," Day recalls. "To me, that sounded like child psychology, so I said I would do it."

Meeting the greats

What followed was the "most exciting year of my professional preparation," Day says. At Erikson, Day had the opportunity to meet the biggest influencers in child development research.

"I met Erik Erikson. I met Jean Piaget. I was influenced by all of my professors. It was really an incredible experience for me," she says. "I became an early childhood education person. I was gung-ho to go save the children."

"We had no methods course. Instead, we focused on where the child is developmentally, who the child is, and what the family is like. We learned that it wasn't about teachers feeding information to children, but about children actively engaged in constructing their world. That is still, to this day, my approach to understanding teaching as a creative act."

Photo by Loren Santow



Leading the field

Since her time at Erikson, Day has devoted herself to improving the lives of young children, their families, and the professionals who serve them.

A special moment during Erikson's recent **Children at the Forefront** annual luncheon came when Bowman, one of Erikson's founders and the Irving B. Harris Professor of Child Development, introduced Day, her former student and longtime friend who was receiving the Spirit of Erikson Institute Award.

Bowman fondly described her student as a "spirited young woman who was determined to change the world."

"I was fortunate to find Erikson Institute," said Day, whose career now places her in a leadership role for more than 70,000 early childhood professionals as Board President of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). "I felt the impact of how it feels to have a wonderful childhood," Day told luncheon guests. "I have always felt greatly rewarded by the experience, but more than the experience...Erikson has been a critical support for me all these years."

A few years after she graduated, Day said she was invited to give a college lecture that was announced in a local newspaper. She sent the clipping to her alma mater with this note:

*Dear Erikson Institute,
See Carol.
See Carol work.*

What she received back, she said, today hangs over her desk:

*Dear Carol,
We saw.
We saw Carol.
We like what we saw.
Isn't that college lucky?
Isn't Erikson Institute smart?

Love,
Barbara Bowman*

"One of the things I'm proud of is the work I accomplished to expand the Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing program to the greater childcare community," Day recalls. While she served as CEO of the **Council for Professional Recognition**, the CDA, initially developed for Head Start staff, grew to become accepted as an entry level credential across the early childhood field.

Day went on to serve as CEO of the **National Black Child Development Institute**. Now at the helm of NAEYC, she leads one of the country's most influential early childhood organizations.

Day served on the NAEYC committee that produced "Developmentally Appropriate Practice," widely considered the authority on best practice in early education programs. "We put together a document that said children are the consequences of the intersection of universal developmental, individual, and social influences," Day says. "When it was revised, I made the case that what was missing in the theoretical section was the emphasis on culture as a social influence."

Day also served on the faculty of Pacific Oaks College for 14 years, and says teaching remains close to her heart.

"Teachers of young children are the key to children's well-being," she says. "When teachers are armed with the right information, and when they understand that institutional policy and practice really has to change almost constantly in order to improve the settings where children are learning and living, then they can truly teach with integrity."

Erikson's influence

"As a leader, Carol has been a particularly strong voice in helping the field relate to racial and cultural inequities in society," says longtime friend and colleague **Aisha Ray**, the former Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty at Erikson who has now returned to the faculty. "She is very effective in working across a complex field, and she's also the kind of person who leads others and whom others willingly follow."

Even today, the experiences Day had at Erikson continue to influence her thinking about children and teachers.

"The most important thing I learned at Erikson was understanding development as the basis for making decisions about teaching as opposed to focusing on curriculum or methods for teaching reading or numbers."

Day's term at NAEYC ends in 2017, after which she says she will work as a consultant on early childhood projects through her own consulting firm.

"I mourn the fact that the system today is still not comprehensive and continuous from birth for our children. It wasn't in place when I started 40 years ago and it's still not in place today.

"What do I dream could happen for our kids? I dream that the early childhood system will really embrace children's well-being from birth through third grade, until they get solidly grounded in the basic fundamental approaches to learning to make them truly successful later in life," she says. "This has happened in other countries and it is possible for it to happen here." ii

Erikson highlights

The Erikson community works to improve the lives of children and their families through educating the next generation of leaders, creating new knowledge, and speaking out on the issues impacting the field.

Champions for children

Sixty-five graduates received master's degrees in child development or early childhood education, and three received their doctoral degrees in child development, at Erikson's 48th commencement ceremony earlier this year.

Honorary doctorates were awarded to **Robert Emde, M.D.**, professor of psychiatry emeritus at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, and **Virginia Bobins, M.Ed. '91**, a Chicago civic and philanthropic leader, retired child life and infant specialist, Erikson life trustee and former board chair.

Emde, a psychiatrist and a leader in the field of infant mental health for many years, had two wishes for graduates.

"The first is to value continuing education, in order to keep up with the advancing science that can help while applying your critical thinking."

"Erikson does more than teach knowledge about child development. Earning my degree was one of the best things I've ever done for myself."

Virginia Bobins, M.Ed. '91



Photo by Shawn O'Malley

From left: Virginia Bobins, Erikson president Geoffrey A. Nagle, Robert Emde, and Bruce Huey.

"The second wish is to value reflective supervision, as you have learned at Erikson, and to continue it."

The commencement was the first for Erikson's current board chair, **Michelle L. Collins**.

"I find myself at Erikson, a trustee for an unexpected 17 years, in total and complete

support of all of you who will try to change the world for the better, one child at a time," Collins told graduates. "It is my sincerest wish that you do just that."

Longtime Erikson trustee **Bruce Huey** also spoke to graduates.

"Every child needs a champion," he said. "You have great responsibility and I'm counting on you to make Erikson proud."

Watch the commencement remarks at www.erikson.edu/commencement2015.

At the intersection of technology and child development

Erikson's inaugural **President's Council** program featured a discussion between two experts on the implications of digital media for children and families: MIT professor **Sherry Turkle** and Erikson's Technology in Early Childhood (TEC) Center director **Chip Donohue**.

Turkle said that studies over the last 10 years have begun to show startling numbers of children who exhibit characteristics illustrating a lack of empathy. She noted that toys and apps that attempt to have children express their emotions are a poor stand-in for human relationships.

"There's nothing positive that can come from pretend empathy," she said. "When a child hears a story read aloud by an app, he misses out on the personal connection. What are we taking away while we're giving them more words?"



Sherry Turkle and Chip Donohue discuss the implications of technology on children and families.

Donohue agreed. "The question facing the education community is whether concerns raised about children using devices can also be solved through technology. We have to find the right balance.

"Toddlers don't learn language well or at all from a screen," he said, "but if they're interacting with a grandparent on Skype, they're learning from Grandma, not the screen."

Turkle admitted that it's not always easy to talk to young children, but that's not an excuse for parents to escape into their email.

"You have to put yourself into their world," she said. "If we don't do that, we're denying our children the necessity that they need. Conversation is the most humanizing thing we can do for our children and for ourselves."



Early Math Collaborative receives new grant


Erikson's **Early Math Collaborative** received a \$3 million grant from the **National Science Foundation** to improve children's early mathematics learning in Head Start classrooms in Chicago.

The four-year grant will allow Erikson and the early math team to partner with the city's **Department of Family and Support Services** to narrow the achievement gap by establishing Head Start centers of excellence in mathematics.

Making changes last

"We know through research that students are affected by their teachers' attitudes toward math," says professor **Jie-Qi Chen**, the Early Math Collaborative's principal investigator. "We want to demonstrate the power that mobilizing an entire community has in making a difference to young children."

The intervention program focuses on the "big ideas of early math" developed by the early math team and detailed in a 2014 book for teachers. The approach promotes professional development by concentrating on teachers' content knowledge in math and also on their attitudes and practice surrounding it.

 Learn more at earlymath.erikson.edu



Welcome aboard

Erikson welcomes a new member of the Board of Trustees.

Susan A. Stone is a member of Sidley Austin's executive committee and the co-chair of the firm's insurance and financial services group. She manages a team of 75 attorneys in New York, London, and Chicago, and is responsible for formulating the strategy for and overseeing the firm's global operations. Stone is on the boards of the Chicago Children's Museum, WTTW Public Television, and the Braeside Foundation, and has taught as an adjunct professor at DePaul University College of Law.

Stone has a J.D. from Harvard Law School and a bachelor's degree from Yale University. Stone is also a second-generation board member. Her mother, Marjorie Stone, was an Erikson trustee from 1985 to 1999.

Reaching Hispanic communities

A two-day symposium sponsored by the **White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics** and the **U.S. Department of Education** at Erikson included discussions on current research and new ideas for policy and practice in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics education; family engagement; dual language learning; and culturally relevant care and teaching.

Professor **Luisiana Meléndez**, director of Erikson's Bilingual/ESL Certificate Program, and professor **Barbara Bowman** both spoke to a national audience of early childhood leaders from across the country.

"The multiple cognitive and educational benefits of bilingual education for all

children are being documented in one study after another," Erikson president **Geoffrey A. Nagle** said at the event, noting the critical importance of reaching Hispanic children through quality early learning programs.

The Initiative's executive director, **Alejandra Ceja**, called the summit an ideal way to engage in a critical conversation about the best ways to integrate the Hispanic community into the early education discussion.



Erikson insights

Our faculty members are respected—and sought-after—voices for children. Each magazine issue, an Erikson faculty member shares insights on a critical issue for children and families.

Promoting Healthy Emotions

By Professor Jon Korfmacher

Emotions are something parents experience with their child every day. But despite their saturation in our daily lives, emotions are not the easiest thing to talk about or explain to our children.

An essential task for young children is emotional understanding and regulation: knowing and labeling their feelings, expressing them “appropriately” (a terrible word), and shifting between feelings as needed. We want children to learn to express their feelings, but within an acceptable range based on the context: playground exuberance is dinner table annoyance.

We usually tolerate a more extreme range of feelings in young children and think of them as notoriously bad at emotional regulation. We recognize young children need help with this. Parents and other caregiving adults scaffold the child’s emotions, to use a fancy term. They help children to modulate and regulate, to downshift when they’re at a higher level, to put a label on their feelings, and to

understand that these feelings are part of life.

But emotions are abstract. Even when externally expressed, they are only internally experienced. This can be challenging for parents. But the recent Disney/Pixar movie *Inside Out* can be a great ally in the parent’s task. It is a rare piece of modern children’s entertainment that offers a real opportunity for learning. By portraying the feelings inside the girl’s head as individual identities, the movie takes a very abstract concept and makes it concrete.

Although this film is a potential tool for your child to understand his or her feelings, its most profound impact may be on adults. Its message is almost subversive, as it goes against so many deeply ingrained expectations we have of young children.

Emotional understanding and expression are something we work on our whole lives. Patience while children begin this process is essential and parents should be open to the emotions their children experience.



About the professor

Professor Korfmacher’s research focuses on differential responses of children and families to early childhood intervention programs. He is interested in understanding what types of services work best for different families under different circumstances. He also studies the training and professional development of early childhood service providers.



Tips to help you develop your child’s healthy emotional regulation:

- Don’t expect children to be in a constant state of wonder and exuberance.
- Recognize the value of the other emotions, especially sadness. Loss and disappointment are simply part of growing up. Even more, sadness can connect us to others and provide the building blocks for empathy.
- Remember that all experiences, including those that provoke anger and fear, are their own opportunities for growth.

Class notes

Ann Gadzikowski, M.Ed. '91, is the author of a new book just released by Redleaf Press titled *Creating a Beautiful Mess: Ten Essential Play Experiences for a Joyous Childhood*. Initial reviews note that she offers a charming book on play with an encouraging perspective that is sure to motivate even the most authoritarian parent.



Lena Marie Pankratz, M.S. '14, had her action research project published in *Voices of Practitioners*, the teacher-as-researcher journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Submit a class note

To share your news—such as a new job, an award, a marriage, or a new family member—email us at AlumniNews@erikson.edu. We would love to hear from you!

Host your event at Erikson

Whether you're planning a large conference, staff retreat, or reception, Erikson can accommodate your needs. Erikson's striking modern building is state-of-the-art, convenient, and affordable. To learn about options and availability, contact David Wilson at (312) 893-7200 or dwilson@erikson.edu.



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