

## **Tribute to Mentors**

**Chair:** John W. Hagen

**Introductory Remarks:** Edward Zigler

- **Tribute to Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1917-2005**  
Presented by Sharon L. Ramey
- **Tribute to Harold W. Stevenson, 1925-2005**  
Presented by John W. Hagen
- **Tribute to Sheldon H. “Shep” White, 1928-2005**  
Presented by Deborah A. Phillips

Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jacob Gould Schurman Professor Emeritus of Human Development and Psychology at Cornell University, was a co-founder of the national Head Start program and widely regarded as one of the world’s leading scholars in developmental psychology, child rearing, and human ecology—the interdisciplinary domain he created.

Dr. Bronfenbrenner’s ideas and his ability to translate them into operational research models and effective social policies spurred the creation in 1965 of Head Start. In 1979, he further developed his thinking into the groundbreaking theory on the ecology of human development, which viewed children as embedded in larger social structures of family, community, economics, and politics. This theoretical model led to new directions in basic research and to applications in the design of programs and policies affecting the well-being of children and families both in the United States and abroad.

Dr. Bronfenbrenner was also well-known for his cross-cultural studies on families and their support systems and on human development and the status of children. He was the author, co-author or editor of more than 300 articles and chapters and 14 books. His writings were widely translated, and his students and colleagues number among today’s most internationally influential developmental psychologists.

Harold W. Stevenson, a developmental psychologist, began a series of cross-cultural studies of children’s academic achievement in the 1970s. His comprehensive studies in the 1980s were the first to show that from their earliest school years, children in Asia outperformed American children in reading and math often because they simply worked harder. The findings startled Americans who assumed that mathematics skills, particularly, were connected to genetics or intelligence. Dr. Stevenson also found that Asian parents were more involved in their children’s education than American parents. His work illuminated different methods of teaching in Asia that emphasized clear goals, carefully planned lessons, creative problem-solving, and mixing high achievers and low performers in classes.

His influential work was cited often during the early 1990s, as Americans realized their schools and students were no longer the best in the world. His studies were built on hundreds of hours of classroom observation in Minneapolis; Sendai, Japan; and Taipei, Taiwan. Later research included schools in mainland China.

Dr. Stevenson also helped found nursery schools in Texas, Minnesota, and Michigan that were designed so graduate students in education and psychology could observe children in a school setting. In the early 1950s, he and his wife, clinical psychologist Nancy Guy Stevenson, established All-Austin Nursery School, one of the country's first racially integrated preschools, in Austin.

Sheldon H. "Shep" White, John Lindsley Professor of Psychology Emeritus at Harvard University, was a developmental psychologist who was instrumental in the formulation of children's policy and programs in the United States. Widely respected for his creative studies of learning and cognitive development in young children, Dr. White gained national prominence starting in the 1960s as a contributor to major initiatives for children including Head Start, Sesame Street, Follow Through, and programs associated with the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

An acknowledged expert in the fields of child development and education, Dr. White's conviction that research findings should make their way from the laboratory to the classroom led him to integrate scientific and professional values into educational practice. He moved effortlessly from the laboratory to the classroom to the committee chambers of Washington. Dr. White's many publications included works on the history of ideas and practices in child development, analyses of the ethical issues that arise in the course of educational practice, and studies of educational policy. Over the course of his career his interests evolved from the process of learning to a concern for the many other factors, such as social and emotional influences, that may help or hinder learning in the real world.