

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **INFORMAL EDUCATION EXPERTS DISCUSS THE POWER OF FAMILY LEARNING — Association of Children's Museums Convenes International InterActivity Conference in Indianapolis, IN —**

WASHINGTON, DC — A shift in focus is in line for children's museums, which represent the fastest growing cultural institution in the United States. Historically designed from a child-centered perspective, many children's museums are rethinking the way they design exhibits and programs as well as the very manner that they greet their visitors. Children's museum professionals and educators will meet in Indianapolis for InterActivity 2005, to discuss the change, which is to create museum experiences for entire the family. The annual conference of the Association of Children's Museums (ACM) — InterActivity 2005 — will run April 28 to April 30, 2005. The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, the largest children's museum in the world and a leader in family learning, will host the conference.

What is family learning? According to the Institute for Learning Innovation, family learning is the process of social interaction, collaboration and sharing among members of a multigenerational group across the lifespan of the family. Within the context of a children's museum, research and anecdotal evidence strongly indicate that learning is more likely to occur with adult interaction and certain museum environments invite more adult involvement than others.

“The power of family learning is that it creates lifelong memories and transcends economic, cultural and formal educational backgrounds — families are children's first teachers,” said Rice Elman. “This year's conference sessions and keynote speakers will present strategies for what children's museums and communities can do to support parents' and caregivers' ability to learn with their children at children's museums and beyond.”

Children's museum educators believe that children learn best through active engagement and through concrete experiences. Through family support, such as verbal coaching, behavior modeling, physical assistance and dialogue, children are able to make developmental leaps. More than 50 InterActivity 2005 sessions and discussion roundtables will translate and debate important family learning findings. Session highlights include a showcase of family volunteer programs; examples of after-school programs that extend family learning; and information on creating exhibits that maximize family participation.

Over the course of the three-day conference, distinguished speakers will include:

- Samuel J. Meisels, Ed.D., president of Erikson Institute, a graduate school in child development, is one of nation's leading authorities on the assessment of young children.  
[Thu, April 28, 9:30-10 a.m.]
- Mary Catherine Bateson, Ph.D., the Clarence J. Robinson Professor in Anthropology and English at George Mason University is a noted author, anthropologist and children's advocate.  
[Fri, April 29, 9 a.m.-10:15 a.m.]
- Alvin Rosenfeld, Ph.D., child psychiatrist and the co-author of *The Over-Scheduled Child*, is a frequent guest on national TV news programs to talk about parenting and children's issues.  
[Sat, April 30, 11 a.m.-12 p.m.]

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During the Thursday morning keynote session, Meisels will accept the *ACM 2005 Great Friend to Kids Award* on behalf of the Erikson Institute. Initiated in 1991 by ACM, the Award honors individuals and organizations that have made outstanding contributions towards strengthening education and improving the lives of children. ACM selected Erikson Institute for its commitment to expanding the understanding of child development and to generating research that improves the way children and families are served.

During the Friday morning keynote session, ACM and MetLife Foundation representatives will present four children's museums with a *MetLife Foundation and Association of Children's Museums Promising Practice Award*. For the past six years, MetLife Foundation has made it possible to recognize and award innovative and creative practices in United States children's museums. This year, the award will honor programs and practices that demonstrate how children's museums address issues of diversity and inclusion in their institutions. Complete lists of past winners of both the *MetLife Foundation and Association of Children's Museums Promising Practice Award* and *ACM Great Friend to Kids Award* are available at [www.childrensmuseums.org](http://www.childrensmuseums.org).

The InterActivity 2005 conference will be held at The Westin Indianapolis, April 28-30. Members of the press who are interested in attending keynote sessions can arrange onsite access by contacting ACM or The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. Keynote speakers and children's museum experts are available for phone interviews before the conference. Bios and contact information can be found at ACM's online pressroom, [www.ChildrensMuseums.org](http://www.ChildrensMuseums.org).

InterActivity 2005 is supported by Lilly Endowment Inc.; Children's Museum of Manhattan; Superior Exhibits and Design, Inc.; The Children's Museum of Houston; Please Touch Museum® (Philadelphia); Studio Displays, Inc.; National Children's Museum (District of Columbia); Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose; and Architects in Design.

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is the local host of InterActivity 2005. The Museum is a non-profit institution committed to creating extraordinary learning experiences that have the power to transform the lives of children and families. With 433,500 square feet of space, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is the largest children's museum in the world. Situated on 13 acres of land in Indianapolis, it features 11 major galleries and hosts almost 1 million visitors annually.

The Association of Children's Museums is a professional service organization for children's museums around the world. ACM's mission is to bring children and families together in a new kind of town square where play inspires creativity and lifelong learning. Founded in 1962 as a support group for directors of children's museums in the United States, ACM has broadened its services and purpose as an international association. Currently, ACM has 466 members, of which more than 280 are children's museums based in the United States and abroad. For more than 100 years, children's museums have succeeded in their mission of stimulating curiosity and motivating learning in young children. The museums complement efforts in schools, childcare centers, and homes, enriching the lives and education of children. Currently, children's museums represent the fastest growing cultural institution in the United States. Over the last fifteen years, the number of children's museums in the United States has grown by 100%, reaching nearly 30 million children and families in 2004.

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