



Laudatio Hirokazu Yoshikawa door Paul Leseman

Professor Yoshikawa is a world leading scientist in early education, child development and community psychology. In his work, he combines cutting-edge research on child development in controlled laboratory and field experiments, including neuroscientific research, with rigorous large scale intervention research aimed at improving family conditions and early education and care programs for children living in poverty. He has this rare ability to bridge between the laboratory and the field. He is a psychologist, but easily transcends to other disciplines to address the multisystemic and multilevel complexities of current societies. He has made us aware of the contextual embeddedness of child development and the critical role of society's national public policies and institutions. And he has made us aware of the importance to go outside to the real world, to scale-up and to change systems. Yes, to dare. One of his first publications, back in 1994 in *Psychological Bulletin*, I remember very well. It addressed the necessity to provide coordinated services to families as one of the few effective means to prevent behavioral problems and delinquency in children and youth. Reviewing a large body of evidence, his synthesis was a clear invitation to public services all over the world to join forces, to collaborate, to cross disciplinary boundaries and to work in integrated ways to the benefit of families and children. This is still an urgent challenge in many countries facing increasing disparities by social class, migration and racial background.

Professor Yoshikawa started his academic career with a bachelor in English literature. He then completed a master's in music at the famous Juilliard School in New York and – as rumors go – he is still an excellent pianist. As a member of a cultural minority, he was awarded grants to continue his studies in psychology where he received a PhD in clinical psychology in 1998. His star rose quickly. In only a few years, he was appointed professor of psychology at New York University and still a few years later he was invited to join Harvard University, where he was appointed professor of education and, later, academic dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. With a team of Harvard, professor Yoshikawa initiated a large scale program to improve preschool education in poor areas in Chile. This project, *Un Buen Comienzo*, "a good start", is an outstanding example of a culture-sensitive, collaborative, and empowering intervention at scale in a low income country, covering all essential facets of a system-wide improvement, from curriculum and pedagogy innovation to the professional development of teachers. And yes, it was well researched also. The social impact of the project, how it improved the lives of many children, cannot be underestimated and so can the scientific yield. Many

scholarly papers resulted from the project and they now constitute a solid base of evidence on which researchers, policymakers and practitioners elsewhere can build. One may wonder how he did it, how he, in successive publications always was ahead, scholarly and methodologically. I have anecdotal evidence. One of his former doctoral students confided that, at the institute, they used to say that he was capable of learning a new complex statistical method in detail "by just sitting next to an expert on a bus". So, occasional bus riding does the job?

In 2014 professor Yoshikawa returned to New York University to direct the newly established Global TIES for Children Center at NYU Steinhard. This center has since then initiated several large scale programs in low and middle income countries around the world. Characteristic is the full engagement with local communities, on the one hand, and the rigor of the research methods applied to ensure the effectiveness of the projects, on the other hand. There is no trade-off between social impact and scientific relevance, not in professor Yoshikawa's work. In recent years, he led research to provide early childhood programming for Syrian refugee families in Syria and Rohingya refugee families in Bangladesh. In the USA, professor Yoshikawa took up the challenge to give voice to undocumented families and children living in the US, respectful documenting and again rigorously researching how parents try their best to give their children a head start in life against all odds. The book *Immigrants raising citizens* is a sensitive, respectful and optimistic book and a must-read for students of child development and education. Recently, he, together with colleagues from neuroscience, education and economics, initiated a large scale study to investigate the long-term benefits of cash transfers to poor families. The project is a follow-up of a large neuroscience study revealing strong detrimental effects of poverty, stress and parental low-education on young children's brain development, with irrevocable consequences for later school achievement and behavioral adjustment. No doubt this ongoing study on cash-transfer will have profound impact on the international scientific community, on policy makers around the world, and in the end on children.

Professor Yoshikawa served on advisory bodies to the government in the USA and many other countries. He was advisor to the European Union's Taskforce on Early Childhood Education. He was consulted by Pope Francis for the Catholic Church initiative *Education: the Global Compact*. He developed roadmaps for combatting poverty, always with a strong plea for investing in early child development. The impact of his work on societies around the globe, benefitting the lives of many, many children growing up in difficult circumstances and conflict zones, is beyond dispute. His country is currently at a cross-road. As far as children's welfare is concerned, professor Yoshikawa

never hides away from the toughest challenges. Thus, it is unsurprising that he is member of the Biden-Sanders education task-force putting ECEC on the frontline. We are hopeful.

I would like to end with a more personal note. Professor Yoshikawa is not only an eminent, internationally renowned and highly cited scientist of child development and early education, and a world leader in implementing large scale programs for supporting children and families in the most deprived and stressed environments, in the microsystem of university education he is also an engaged teacher and pedagogue. As one of his former doctoral students noted: "From my perspective this is where he excels beyond any measure - in his tutoring and mentoring."

Professor Paul Leseman