

# In Remembrance of Richard P. Brinker

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On September 20, 1993, Rick died from an overwhelming lung infection. He was 44 years of age. Rick's death has left his family and friends struggling to understand and accept this very personal loss. Losing a friend is never easy because such relationships have required time, effort, and genuine caring about the friend's well-being. When that friend is gone, a permanent void remains. For many of us, Rick's death has left such a void.

Beyond the personal loss Rick's friends and colleagues are experiencing, the field of early intervention/early childhood special education has lost a major contributor. This remembrance is dedicated to Rick and his professional contributions.

Rick graduated magna cum laude from Notre Dame in 1971. Shortly thereafter, he entered the Psychology and Human Development Program at Peabody College and received his PhD in 1975. I remember Rick well as a doctoral student. I remember his passion for helping young children with disabilities and their families—a passion that never dissipated throughout his life. I remember his keen intellect, which led to cogent analysis and spirited debates with his fellow students and faculty members—an intellect that continually questioned and created alternatives to challenging problems. And I remember his humor—an ability to laugh at the pompous, the incongruous, the inconsistent, and, most importantly, at himself.

When Rick began his graduate education, the development of comprehensive services for young children with disabilities and their families was more a hope than a reality. At Peabody he was instrumental in helping to refine one of the earliest formal attempts to develop a center-based early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities. This program, called The Toddler Research and Intervention Project, was probably the first formal attempt to offer a developmentally integrated program with structured intervention efforts for very young children with disabilities. During this period, Rick developed his abiding interest in how to successfully integrate young children with disabilities into programs and activities created for nondisabled populations and in efforts to enhance the communicative abilities of young children who experience language problems.

After completing his PhD, Rick was offered a position as a research fellow at the Hester Adrian Research Center at the University of Manchester in England. During his 3 years there, Rick became intimately involved with the Anson House Preschool, a research and intervention project of the Hester Adrian Center. The knowledge, experience, and data Rick gathered from 1975 to 1978 served as the basis for a variety of journal articles and book chapters focused primarily on assisting young children with disabilities in the acquisition of important communicative skills. A reading of his work done during this period clearly shows that Rick helped move our field toward current best practice, particularly in the areas of communicative intervention and designing intervention activities to be real and meaningful for young children.

Although Rick's stay in England was professionally productive, he missed his home, his family, and his friends, and we missed him. In 1978 Rick accepted a position as a special education faculty member at the University of Nebraska and as director of the Nursery School and Multiply Handicapped Program at the Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute. While in this position, Rick continued to devote time and attention to formulating communicative interventions that were fun and interesting as well as effective for children and to work on strategies for the successful integration of children with and without disabilities.

In 1979 Rick accepted a position as a research scientist at the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, New Jersey. Resources available at ETS permitted Rick to undertake a new line of investigation focused on contingency intervention with infants and the general use of computers as educational intervention tools. He published a number of papers pertaining to these topics. He was also awarded a major research project to study integration efforts focused on children with severe disabilities in public school settings. This project, which required a herculean effort to collect data from 245 children in 13 school districts, helped many of us understand how little genuine integration of children with severe disabilities was occurring in our public schools.

Rick's final professional move was to Chicago. In 1984 he joined the University of Illinois at Chicago as a faculty member in the Special Education Department and became the director of the Early Childhood Research and Intervention Program for the Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities. Although Rick was always productive, during these last 9½ years, his contribu-

tions to the field grew significantly. His writings from this period clearly reflect the cogency of his analysis and his grasp of the complexities surrounding effective intervention approaches. His death was indeed a terrible loss for all of us committed to understanding and improving intervention efforts for infants and young children and their families.

Much of Rick's importance to our field was his interest—no, passion—for improving the lives of fellow humans, particularly those who were disabled or were at significant risk of becoming disabled. To this end, Rick entered into Chicago politics to develop better, more comprehensive services, particularly for poor children with disabilities. He worked with the Chicago public schools, with community agencies, with health care centers, with churches, and with political organizations when necessary. His goal was always to expand and improve services. Although this commitment would have been enough to ensure Rick an important niche in our profession, it was his devotion to theory and to sound empirical work that made him one of a few special leaders that every field must have to ensure progress.

Rick was hitting his stride. He was aware of the significant challenges facing our field, and he had much to say and do in addressing these challenges. He read widely and was constantly synthesizing information from other disciplines. For example, in a recent article he applied an ordinal pattern analysis to attempt to describe more accurately the interactions between mother–infant dyads (Brinker, Baxter, & Butler, in press). In another recent article, Rick and his colleagues discussed the complicated interactions among socioeconomic status, parental stress, and child outcomes (Brinker, Seifer, & Sameroff 1994). His most recent writings on families provided an incisive analysis of the complexities associated with family involvement in early intervention, the extent to which accepted positions need careful evaluation, and a call to action:

I believe wisdom regarding our relationship with a wide diversity of families will be achieved only in the context of both affirmation and continued acquisition of knowledge of who we are. The self in this context is a system rather than an individual in much the same way that a family is a system and not a mother. The interventionist's self is typically a team of professionals. Just as husbands and wives and grandparents and siblings bring different

representations to the family based on their previous experiences of family, so also do different professionals bring different expertise and expectations about the nature of intervention to the program. It would be a serious mistake to replace all these different faces with mirrors fit to each face. Although the mirrors might better reflect back to the family their own concerns and wishes, mirrors will prevent the development of an expert system as represented by the intervention team. The resolution of conflict through negotiation of individually conflicting perceptions and needs will be the basis for the mobilization of team expertise to address family concerns. (Brinker, 1992, pp. 327–328)

Our field, as with most others, can ill afford to lose its leaders in their prime. Rick's death is a significant loss. We have lost one of the best conceptualizers in our field. We have lost a superb analyzer of other's work. We have lost one of the most circumspect thinkers on how to integrate children with disabilities into our communities. We have lost a tireless investigator who had accumulated experience and empirical data on family involvement. We have lost a passionately caring person with an important vision:

If schools were to be redefined as the places from which resources emanated to strengthen the health of children and to bolster the psychological resources of families, then the schools may have greater success in achieving goals of academic excellence as well. Specifically, children would be ready to learn because they and their parents had already developed trust, support and guidance in the early stages of development so that the role of student focusing on academic work would be assumed within existing supportive relationships. The most radical form of this vision would be the dispersal of pediatricians, child welfare workers, family therapists and community liaisons into schools so that they could work as a team with parents to support the child's development and education fully. (Brinker, in press)

And I have lost a true friend.

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