

Dr. Christian Jacobs

Welcoming Remarks

Jacobs Foundation Conference 2008

“Early Childhood Development and Later Achievement”

Marbach Castle, 2-4 April 2008

Dear Professor Pauen,

Dear Professor Heckman,

Dear Conference Participants,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Jacobs Foundation I welcome you to this year's Jacobs Foundation Scientific Conference on “Early Childhood Development and Later Achievement” here at Marbach Castle. By annually organizing scientific conferences, the Jacobs Foundation wants to give excellent researchers a platform for an exchange of knowledge on a specific topic. The conferences aim to bring first-class scientists and their knowledge together and to build a bridge to real-world applications. The main objective of the conferences, thus, is to exchange relevant research findings in the field of Productive Youth Development. In addition, however, approaches to prevention and intervention, and the efficacy of different policies and practices have always been in the focus of the conferences.

Putting the successful outcomes of the programmes into practice reflects the Foundations mission to use consolidated scientific findings for projects that aim to have the best possible practical results. Gathering outstanding scientists, young scholars and also practitioners at the Marbach Castle Conferences will hopefully create a productive forum for discussion.

The interdisciplinary collaboration and the international perspectives this forum offers are of great value to the Jacobs Foundation. Taking the remaining research challenges and opportunities into consideration, the conferences have two main objectives: to help us as a Foundation to gain an understanding of the implications of research findings for our work and future funding; and to help researchers themselves

broaden their concepts and extend their strategies so as to better tackle the remaining research challenges.

Therefore, before handing over to the organizer of this conference, Sabina Pauen, who will give you some more information and introduce this afternoon keynote speaker James Heckman, please allow a few more sentences on the relevance of the topic of this conference to the Jacobs Foundation.

From our perspective, the main objective of the conference is to gain an up-to-date understanding of current issues and debates regarding early childhood development and, in particular, regarding its implications for the later development of human beings. Bringing together scholars from different backgrounds, covering a wide range of fields such as economics, cognitive science, sociology, education, neuroscience, pediatrics, public policy, social policy, and most prominently developmental psychology it is anticipated that this conference will create synergy and new insights by compiling evidence from different sources, advancing and consolidating current knowledge, outlining questions and research directions for the future, and informing the conception and development of social policies and interventions.

Therefore, from the perspective of the Jacobs Foundation, some key conceptual questions to be addressed during this conference could be:

1. What do we really know about domain specific early knowledge development and, more importantly, what are its implications for later achievements and educational programs?
2. What are the implications of inter-individual differences and early experiences for school transitions and later achievements?
3. What are the costs and returns associated with increased support of early childhood educational programs?
4. What can, what should policymakers do in our respective countries to foster early childhood development and later achievement?

Due to the value chain paradigm applied by the Jacobs Foundation – connecting research, application and societal roll-out in all our fields of activity – a particular emphasis should be put on the last question: namely on the development of possible policy measures and interventions. Thus, besides answering the key scientific

questions Sabina Pauen has provided you with, we would like to ask you to also have questions regarding practical implementation of your research in mind. Therefore, final discussion on Friday afternoon chaired by Alexander Grob should also be used to jointly develop a “Jacobs Initiative”, i.e. a framework for future funding through our foundation – be it in research or in intervention. I am happy to announce that in addition to his keynote speech in a few minutes Professor Heckman has agreed to talk about the *Perry Preschool program*¹ during this final session as a successful example as a basis for our discussion.

In other words: the Jacobs Foundation wants to learn from you. Therefore, the complete Board of Trustees as well as the Foundation’s staff will be present during this conference. We all will be happy to engage in discussions with you – and I hope there will be plenty of room and time for informal exchange.

To conclude, let me thank Sabina Pauen and the Jacobs Foundation management for their work in gathering this impressive group of scholars and for compiling an excellent program.

I am particularly pleased to see a qualified group of young researchers among us. Let me briefly remind you that the participating Young Scholars will be encouraged to submit a proposal for a Research Grant within the topic area of the conference. Projects judged to be of outstanding quality will receive funding in the range of CHF 10,000 to CHF 30,000 from the Jacobs Foundation. Joint projects from up to three young scholars are also possible and will receive funding up to CHF 90,000. Projects would be scheduled to begin in fall 2008. Maybe new research collaborations between some of will emerge from this conference? At least that is what we hope!

On behalf of the Jacobs Foundation I wish us all a demanding and rewarding conference with fruitful discussions and a creative exchange of ideas and thoughts.

¹ <http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=63>