

Carol Pinto:

I first met Magda ten years ago when my daughter participated in a pilot infant program that she innovated and directed at the (unknown) school. That was a very unusual program at that time because there were few infant programs at all and also because it combined “normal” with children who are at-risk. Since then she has become my teacher and friend. I have watched her hold tenaciously to her philosophy in the face of many faddish approaches. She was Dr. Pikler’s associate in Hungary and has had over 20 years experience in the United States working with infants and families and in group care settings. She is also a child therapist. She is the co-founder and director of Resources for Infant Educators and she will speak today on the Loczy approach. Is it applicable to infants in families and group care settings in the United States. Magda.

Magda Gerber:

Dr. Pikler has spoken about the Loczy approach. I’m going to speak about the RIE approach. I hope by now you know what RIE stands for. They are initials for Resources for Infant Educators. And basically the RIE approach is an attempt to put what is applicable of the Loczy approach into practice here in the United States.

I do not like to read but I am going to otherwise I cannot keep myself within the time limit that I have. We all know that there are many ways to raise infants. At this conference however, you will be exposed, as I’ve said, to the RIE approach. It has been called the Pikler approach, the Gerber approach, the Forrest approach, and the dip approach so if you’ve heard some of the others you will know it all means the same. DIP, referring to the Demonstration Infant Program in Palo Alto.

2:53 - Are we adding one other to the endless lists of child rearing practices? Yes we do. Because we believe that our philosophy is different, our role is an authentic human being and our actions are guided by respect.

It is easy to use big words such as authentic or respect. It’s difficult to put them into practice especially under the pressure of everyday life. RIE has developed a methodology which allows you, whether you are a parent or a professional caring for infants, to become aware of infants needs and how to meet them. And in the process you will hopefully become aware of your own needs and of how to synchronize those two. This is the goal of RIE, the goal of RIE training, and you will get a taste hopefully during this conference. Before focusing on my topic however, I want to invite you to an imaginary journey.

4:41 – Where will we go? A place a time we all have been. A place a time we do not remember. A place a time that something’s called as paradise or hell. A place a time filled with (unknown)

other people's memories, photographs, home movies, family mythologies. A place a time as infancy. Is infancy a virgin island or is it an over invaded territory? Both. We all have been there yet no one remembers it. We've tried to study it but what we see reflects the view in the eye of the beholder. The investigator who studies this forgotten country doesn't speak or understand the language or custom of the natives. He's informed by other interpreters (Unknown). But the investigator chooses to study what he will see and understand, how he will interpret it, will be influenced by his, (unknown) for example, ecological, psycho analytic, developmental learning theory, et cetera, or his profession, parents, commission, researcher, caregiver, et cetera.

6:40 – The infant has endured being regarded and treated as a miniature adult, an empty vessel, a bundle of confusion, a responsive organism, ignorant, competent, the helpless manipulated, and the active manipulator. His needs were interpreted and explained. He or she needs to be tightly swaddled, to prevent him from moving, kept naked to have skin contact, tied to a board to be straightened, carried on the mother's body to thrive on her heartbeat, propped up in infancy to see more, put in a walker to move more, left in a crate not to be spoiled, stimulated from birth not to get bored. Parents were told breastfeed, bottlefeed, wean abruptly, wean gradually, start solids at birth, breastfeed for years, feed according to the clock, feed according to demands, to give a pacifier but pull out the thumb, to allow the thumb not give the pacifier, both, neither. To sleep with the infant in their bed, to let him sleep alone in his room, to toilet train in less than a day, to just wait and not train at all, to teach your baby and accelerate his learning, to let him unfold at his own pace, to stimulate him in a daycare center or nurture him at home. And the infant, what does he or she say?

8:36 – She adjusts or he revolts. When he adjusts and stays quiet, it is taken as proof that what we did was good for him and when she cries the circle begins. We put her down or pick her up, we rock him or ignore him, feed him or play with him, put him in a bouncer or give him a new toy. (unknown)The infant must be miraculously resilient. Or is he? If we look around, not here, but in the adult population we wonder if perhaps we pay a high price to adapting to such confused upbringing.

9:26 - Are we, or have we ever been, a child oriented society? This is an appropriate question in the international year of the child. Or, do we intentionally want to harm children? By no means. Everything is done under the name of love. The list would be endless to tell all cruelties, unknown, physical and emotional, that parents and other adults inflict upon children under the name of love. But besides such sinister examples, even such accepted signs such as kissing, hugging, may or may not convey to your child that he's loved. Ask yourself. What does your baby mean to you? A play thing that you can play dollhouse with? A helpless creature that makes you feel omnipotent? A puppet you can make dance to your tune? An extension of yourself who will fulfill your thwarted goals in life? Of course there is all of these in all of us.

11:25 – One mother once asked, “Can too much love spoil a child?” Love? No. But many ways of demonstrating love, yes. We can spoil by overprotecting. “Don’t do this, be careful, watch out, don’t touch.” Real care is to take the time and create a safe environment in which the infant can safely explore while the mother can relax. We can spoil by controlling, “do this now, take this toy.” Many prescribed baby stimulating projects advise us to do just that. Real care is using the time when we naturally spend with our babies to learn, to teach, and experience together that what is happening. We can spoil by constantly entertaining thus taking away their natural curiosity and capacity to entertain themselves. Boredom is not in a young child’s repertoire. In an adequate environment we can easily condition a child to be bored by overindulging, doing things for him, of course this is faster and easier. Real care is to allow the time, have the patience, and encourage even the youngest baby to do whatever he’s capable of doing by himself.

13:29 – Parents work too hard, try too hard, carry babies around through sleepless nights, buy expensive toys, learning cribs, teaching kits, teach, stimulate, follow prescribed curricula. And in this (unknown) effort they forget what is most evident that all those unglamorous, everyday, routine experiences like feeding, breast-feeding, diapering, have the greatest effect on their baby. I remember as a child I liked to watch the switchman at the railroad. It was a small movement, changed the train’s destination, by opening or closing tracks so that the train would go to either Rome or Paris or it’s destination. How does this apply to child rearing?

14:44 – We have to first know where we want to go. Our goals, ideals, only then can we plan how best to go there. In other words, what kind of an adult would we like our child to become? RIE visualizes a human being who has some or many of the following characteristics: realistic trust in himself and his environment, perception of his inner needs and the ability to communicate them, the ability to make choices for himself which includes knowing and accepting the consequences of his choices, flexibility and the capacity to learn from past experiences, an ability to deal actively with the present and plan for the future, free access to his creative talents and resources, a person who is goal oriented and also can enjoy the process of problem solving, whether physical, emotional, or cognitive, because the process is life itself.

16:22 – (Unknown phrase) These ideas imply that we have to critically exam child rearing practices in order to determine which would facilitate and or hinder the emergence of the desired characteristics in infancy. Trust develops when the primary carer allows the child to anticipate what is going to happen to him. We must relate the trust in the infant. We must trust the infant and then relate it and trust him to be an initiator of activities. Infants do perceive their inner feelings and needs and learn to communicate them. Carers however, when not sensitively observing the infant do not respond to his communications but rather their own interpretations of the infant’s needs. Let me give you an example for instance: A mother who’s

cold. She may cover the crying infant without first trying to find out whether the infant is cold or warm.

18:00 – Making appropriate choices in life is a learning process lasting from birth to death. Few people realize at what an early age infants are capable to make proper choices if given the opportunity. The carer has to differentiate between situations according to whether the infant has a real choice or not. If there is a real choice, for instance, “do you want to be picked up now” and the child responds either negatively or with disinterest he should be left alone. If no choice is involved the carer doesn’t ask but states the intended action. I’m going to pick you up now, it’s time to go. Then the child is picked up. Flexibility of the body and mind develops while repeated exploratory exercises of infants in free play. Infants, while restricted by mechanical devices, as you already heard, such as infant seats, bouncers, walkers, swings and so forth, all, while encouraged to assume positions which they are not yet ready for are not moving freely. Propping up an infant into a sitting position before he can sit up or lie down by himself will not make him move better or become flexible or autonomous. Infants do naturally have access to their own resources unless we superimpose tasks which are beyond their tactile abilities.

20:15 – It is truly fascinating to observe infants solving their own problems with concentration, endurance, and good frustration tolerance. This happens if adults are available rather than intrusive, and if they learn to wait and see whether the child could work it out by himself before offering help. The freely exploring child selects his own problems and is internally motivated to solve them in his own way and continuously learning without experiencing failure. Though of course some individual modifications are necessary when we work with high-risk or handicapped children. Providing learning experiences without failure is more important for them than it is for the average child. While emphasizing the infant’s need for autonomy one must keep in mind the utmost importance of the relationship that the infant develops with his primary carer. An intimate, trusting relationship is the prerequisite for healthy separation and individualization of the child. Only after he gets refueled during the unhurried times he spends with his carer will he be willing to let go of the carer and explore his environment.

22:06 – If our goal is an authentic individual, we should let him be authentic, an authentic infant. Meeting the needs of infants is not an easy task for the family and it becomes increasingly more difficult in various types of infant centers. Nowadays there is a great demand for curricula for infants in centers. Appropriate curriculum for infants should not be a special teaching plan added to his daily activities but rather it should be built into the infant’s every experiences. The types of programs offered as well as curricula should evolve as a joint effort between the carers and the infants. The roles are divided, the carer provides space, objects, and loving care. The infant explores the space, manipulates the objects, develops trust, instills confidence.

23:40 – The guidelines for any and all interventions must be based on observation, empathy, sensitivity, and respect for the infant. If then our goal is an authentic child, the guideline is to allow the child as many direct experiences and interactions with the world, his world. Do not become the interpreter of the world or the child's feeling. Do not manipulate children's moods by stimulating them when they are tired and soothing them when they are aroused. There's a German saying, "Live and let live."

24:50 – What makes parenting so difficult is that each parent sees the world in a certain way – believes what is good and what is bad, and wants to transfer his or her beliefs, likes, dislikes, and tastes into their children. How many of you have heard, "This is good for you, this is bad for you, mother or father knows best." This attitude, however, is not respecting the otherness, the uniqueness of our children. The guiding spirit of Dr. Pikler's and RIE's philosophy in all human interactions is respect. In order to comprehend the application of such an abstract but so often used word it is helpful to review the behaviors which are guided by respect. Regardless of age, the infant is never talked about in the third person, not even when you go the pediatrician, "I'm so worried about him he doesn't sleep all night and he doesn't want to eat." When adults need to discuss an infant it should not be done in his presence. Dialogue between carer and infant begins at the earliest age as the carer observes and acknowledges the baby's every response.

26: 52 – Infants are never forced, should never be forced to do anything during feedings for example you could see it very well in the movie. The baby is shown the spoon containing the food and only when the infant indicates acceptance by opening his mouth is the food put into his mouth. The infant is allowed to anticipate every step of what is about to happen to him. He's never picked up or put down without being told of the intending action. If asked to make a choice between actions, I've already said the infant's choice must be respected. But respect should be used in other situations other than routine care also. This is what I like to refer to as selective intervention and again is based on sensitive observation – knowing when and when not to interfere, when not to interfere is more important and generally more difficult for all of us than indiscriminate intervention. The movie you are going to see will address itself to this topic.

28:28 – Whenever possible an educator, a word I coined because I wanted to put these two very important concepts together, that caring is educational and education must have the elements of care in it. So the educator trusts the infant to solve problems as they occur in his daily existence. When observing a 7 month old trying to get a ball which is stuck the carer may just wait or comment, "hmm, difficult to get that ball out isn't it?" Compare this approach with giving the child the ball or physically helping him. Take another situation, two 4 month old children are pulling on the same toy, very usual situation. The educator might reflect, "Anne you want that toy and Jon you want it too." Often the calm tone of the voice of such impartial

reflection is enough for the children to solve the conflict in their own way. Compare this reflective, non-directive, attitude with one where the adult becomes the problem solver. “Anne had it first. If you fight I will take the toy away. Jon, take that other toy.”

30:25 – The role of the educator is to facilitate the development of an active child who’s challenged by problems, enjoys his autonomy, and trusts adults. Are educators angels? This question comes often to me – always patient, always understanding infant’s point of view? No, they just learn to become better organized – more economical with their time and energy and emotions. What makes parenting so demanding, so difficult, at times almost unbearable is the ongoingness of it. RIE advocates balance between togetherness and separateness. Infancy is a time when patterns of a lifelong struggle between dependence and independence, between hold on and letting go, between security and adventure are established. To foster both trust and autonomy we focus on two areas of the infant’s life.

31:57 – Trust in human relationships and free exploration. One is the time the infant spends with the adult who cares for him the other is the time the infant spends alone, freely exploring. These two areas are interdependent. There is another interdependence. If the infant receives undivided, unhurried, full attention while he’s being cared for he will feel trust and security and if the mother enjoys those times, the father may too, she has to spend with the baby anyway but also takes time to respond to her own needs she will be cheerfully available for the next time of mothering or fathering. A great deal of time mothers, or fortunately fathers too, spend with babies in daily caregiving activities. If these are carried out as chores to be rushed through the infants will react either as passively enduring it or by resisting, fussing, crying. The interaction results in unnecessary frustration.

33:49 – We believe that these most consistently repeated experiences – guess how many times a baby is being diapered throughout infancy. We made all kinds of calculations with the help of a computer. It’s about, average, 7,000 times. It may be 6 or 8 but that’s the average. Now, can anybody doubt that that must have an accumulative effect on the baby? They indeed laid down the basic patterns for relationship with his mother or carer and his attitude for future learning. Therefore let’s not forget that the goal is not only a dry and clean baby, let’s not forget all they’re learning possibilities, possibilities within the process. I have designed and devised many times a kind of dialogue to illustrate what interchange can take place during diapering. I will try to read it to you. The educator greets the child.

“You seem to have a good time playing with your giraffe.” Then shows and tells what she’s going to do.

“I want to pick you up, it’s time to diaper you.” The infant pays attention. The educator waits for the infant’s reaction.

“You’re not quite ready so I’ll wait a little.” After 1 or 2 minutes, “Now you seem to be ready.” The infant responds to the initiation of the carer either positively or negatively. The educator asks for cooperation or follows the child’s lead. Remember in the movie when the child threw his little booties down and the educator said, “hmm, you wanted to throw that down” with no need to fight. The educator would say, “first we have to remove your overalls. You pull a little here.” And the infant cooperates and participates.

36:50 – We all know that things we participate in are interesting things for us. The educator encourages mastery. “You helped with this,” touches the foot, “now pull out the other.” The infant achieves mastery becomes playful, teasing, doing the opposite of what was asked. Do you remember the scene in the movie? That showed it very beautifully and I like to emphasize that. Because there is a certain time when many parents have said, “You know I did it all the time the way you said and my baby was so nice and responsive and now suddenly, no way, I ask for a hand, he gives me his foot.” And I feel that that means you did a marvelous job because only a child who feels safe and secure will dare to tease. Fearful children don’t tease. They may revolt but they don’t tease. And I think at Loczy the staff is very proud that these children who live in an institute are teasers. They do feel secure enough to tease. And the end of the dialogue is that the baby enjoys what is happening to him and so does the mother.

38:40 – I am a little afraid that I will be very repetitious on this theme because I always feel it is so important and maybe I’m hammering it too much but we still do believe that it is this full, undivided, unhurried attention during all these activities whether it’s feeding, diapering, that the infant will be ready and willing to then stay by himself and explore his environment on his own or if he’s in a group setting of course with other children. And this balance is so necessary for both infant and mother. It does give them time for real togetherness, real attachment, and also time to pursue their own interests. Just how think how much this is in contrast with the generally prevailing attitude that an infant needs 100% of the mother’s time, all the time. Can it be done? He needs to be nurtured, stimulated, and also taught specific skill. These are unrealistic demands and usually result in nagging babies, guilty mothers, and feelings of unfulfillment for both. The rhythmic pattern, again, of togetherness and separateness we propose allows for anticipation predictability for both parents. “Now I will have time to read my newspapers” knows the parent from past experiences. But besides having a pleasurable time together a great amount of learning takes place in those few minutes. They pay attention to each other, they anticipate each other. These are most important ingredients of learning. The inference of these refueling times have a far reaching effect which goes way beyond the actual time spent together.

41:26 – They saturate the infant and the carer with feelings of security, of being loved, respected, and understood. Earlier in this presentation I have painted a rather grim picture of

certain demonstrations of love. What is love? It's a feeling, an emotional state that artists, writers, philosophers, poets have tried to define. Marcel Proust says, "Love is space and time measured by the heart. I paraphrase that. It is you because what is space and time? It is the here and now. It is what you give in space and time. What kind of love then is nurturing, or longing for growth? It is the combination of love, care, respect. To care is to put love in action and the way we care for our babies is then the way they experience our love. I would, from this esoteric issue, I want to come down to earth again and I wasn't quite sure whether I answered the question of my title. What of the Loczy model is applicable in the United States? I would think that everything that is universal, that we believe is good for children wherever they live, wherever they are. But I also would like to warn you. Our guidelines may seem deceptively simple. Some of you may even believe that you have been following them all along anyway. But I have learned from my own experience that the more you understand them in-depth the more you will find out how seldom they are truly followed. We hope, however, that by the end of these two days, with the help of other speakers, the panel discussions, the movies, our booklets and whatever we have available you will have a grasp of the RIE philosophy. Thank you.

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