

Ounce of Prevention Fund
Annual Luncheon
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Sam Zell

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. My name is Sam Zell, and along with my wife, Helen, I have the honor of being co-event chairman today. And certainly being a supporter of the Ounce, it's a great pleasure to see such a spectacular crowd of a whole bunch of people that are very interested in a very important subject.

My job today is to introduce David Brooks, but since you gave me the podium – [*audience laughter*] – I couldn't resist sharing with you a little bit of my personal involvement with the Ounce. In 1968, somebody sent me over to see this very rich guy named Irving Harris. And my job that day was to hustle him and have him put some money in a deal that I was doing.

I was very fortunate that he not only wrote the check, but he and I became very good friends, something that I take great pride in and pleasure in, both telling you and remembering it. Irving was a very funny guy because he took me on as a project. He viewed me as economically astute and socially ignorant. Now, that's the way he put it, but I think he basically looked at me and said, "Here's somebody I can hustle," and he did, very effectively.

And then one night, somehow or other, and I'm not sure how, he got invited to my house for dinner with Harriet Meyer, and they pitched me on the Ounce. And to be honest with you, I was very unfamiliar with it at the time. But I would also tell you that I ended up becoming a supporter of the Ounce because I looked at Irving and said, someone of this stature and someone with this track record who is as committed to this is someone that I want to be partners with. And I continue to be a supporter. My wife is a major player and supporter and Board Member, and I'm very proud of her for her efforts.

Early childhood, as all of you know, is something that has historically not been focused on. We've devoted enormous amounts of capital, both human and otherwise, to various other parts of the educational system without really recognizing how important early childhood is. To that extent, Irving and Harriet and Diana and everybody else who has taken this thing and made it into a model for the whole country, should be very proud of what they've accomplished not only by setting the example, but also by helping all of the wonderful children who have benefited from it.

As a businessman and as an investor, I always think about risk and reward because that's what it's all about. I urge you all today to think about the risk/reward ratio in an endeavor like the Ounce. The reward is producing and creating an opportunity for disadvantaged children to have and become part of our society. The risk is if we don't do it and we fail at it, we will pay for it in the future whether it be in unemployment benefits or incarceration costs or degradation of society. We can't afford to overlook this important area, and I would encourage all of you to continue your support because what you're doing is extraordinarily important.

Our speaker today, David Brooks, as you all know, is a columnist that appears in the *New York Times* at least once a week. And I would define you [David Brooks] – you may not like this definition – as a social liberal and an economic conservative. Now, I, of course, think you're exactly right because you and I agree with each other. As the child of an immigrant, I was someone who grew up listening to my parents talk about how extraordinary the United States was, what an extraordinary opportunity it was to be here. One of the best things about reading David is that he constantly reminds us how lucky we are, how much opportunity we have, what a unique society we have, and what our responsibilities and obligations to that society are.

Last night, I had the privilege of having David and a number of other people over for dinner. I thought that David was selected for the speaker today maybe because he had a free day. What I didn't understand until I listened to him talk about early childhood last night was he's a *real* believer. He really studies and understands, is involved, and committed to this endeavor. And so to have you as our speaker today, David, is that much better because you're one of us. So with that, I want to welcome you and introduce our speaker today, David Brooks. [Applause.]

David Brooks

Thank you, Sam. When Sam started praising me, it was funny – I started sounding like I was him. [Audience laughter.] It's a pleasure to be part of the tag team of short, Jewish men who've come to speak to you today. [Audience laughter; applause.] I have a few extra numbers in the height; I think I'm about two inches taller and a few fewer numbers in the bank account, unfortunately. I want to thank Helen and Sam for a wonderful evening and for their support. The Bucksbaums, also, I'm related to by column writing. It's a pleasure to be back here in Chicago.

And really, what I wanted to do was to talk about how I got here, how I got interested in this issue. And I am barely a man – my wife would say “barely” – and men don't always do emotion particularly well. There's a bit of brain research, I think is hypocryphal, but captures the point, which is they took a bunch of guys, they showed them a horror movie, and wired their brain up. And then they asked them to talk about their emotional commitments to their wives, and they wired their brain up. And the brain scans looked identical. [Laughter.] It was a look of sheer terror, and I come with some of that. [Laughter.]

The other thing I am is I'm a newspaper columnist. I became a columnist because I was working at the City News Bureau in Chicago. I was dreaming of either being David Axelrod or Mike Royko. So I thought what I would do is I'd spend my life writing about Eddie Vrdolyak by day and getting drunk at the Billy Goat by night. [Laughter.] That's pretty much what I wanted to do.

And when you're a columnist, what you want to write about, to be a big manly-man columnist, are issues related to guns and money, banks and defense. You want to deal with the big problems that columnists give high prestige to, like, productivity, economics, and war. And I was trying to write that kind of column, especially when I came to the *New York Times*. And I was trying to write about a bunch of economic issues, issues like [stagnating] productivity, issues like widening inequality, issues about the fate of the American economy versus other countries.

And these were all problems that kept getting me into certain issues, issues mostly having to do with human capital. Why, for the past thirty years have we not seen any increase in our college completion rates? Why do we have a thirty percent dropout rate almost nationwide, a much higher dropout rate in places like this city? Why are we losing races? America became the richest country on the face of the earth

because during the 19th century, our educational skill level was rising and we had a 36-year advantage on the next closest nation on earth. We were winning the race against other nations in human capital development and we were winning the race against technology. We were getting educated faster than technology was getting complicated.

And over the past thirty years, we've entirely squandered that lead. Now, we're falling back in our long-range economic prospects; we're falling back in terms of widening inequality. If you're born into a family making \$96,000 a year, the odds are one in two you'll complete college. If you're born into a family making \$50,000, the odds are one in ten. If you're born into a family making \$36,000, the odds are 1 in 17. So we're segmenting as a society.

We've got one part of society, which is doing pretty well, the part, frankly, that I live in, where you've got upper-middle-class kids. You got to an upper-middle-class neighborhood, or you go up to Winnetka, or where I live outside of D.C., at three p.m., the little third graders are coming out of school. They've got their 80-pound backpacks with the wind sort of blowing them over. They're like beetles. [*Audience laughs.*] They're sort of like stuck there.

They're getting picked up by a group of women I call *über*-moms, who are highly successful career mothers who've taken time off to make sure all their kids get into Harvard. And you can usually actually tell the *über*-moms because they actually weigh less than their children. [*Laughter.*] At the moment of conception, they're doing little butt exercises to stay fit and trim, calculating what year they can become the school auction co-chair. They take so many soy-based nutritional formula during pregnancy that the bodies come out like these 12-pound, toothless defensive linemen, just dropping out there. The *über*-mom is cutting the umbilical cord herself, adjusting the video lighting, asking the ultimate *über*-mom question, which is, "Is her APGAR score above average?" to be whisked off to the gifted and talented ward.

And then they take the kid home in a luxury car that all have – a Volvo, a Saab, or an Audi, usually, because in these social circles, it's socially acceptable to have a luxury car so long as it comes from a country hostile to U.S. foreign policy. [*Laughter; applause.*] They stop off at the Ben and Jerry's to get some ice cream so they can get some socially conscious ice cream. I wrote in one of my books that Ben and Jerry's should make a pacifist toothpaste: doesn't kill germs; just asks them to leave. [*Audience laughs.*] It would be a big seller.

And then they need to get some organic baby formula, so they stop off at Whole Foods or Trader Joe's, one of these progressive grocery stores where all the cashiers look like they're on loan from Amnesty International. [*Laughter.*] My favorite part of Trader Joe's, actually, is the snack food sections because they couldn't just have pretzels and potato chips because that would be vulgar, so they have seaweed-based snacks. What we buy in my house – it's called Veggie Booty with Kale. It's for kids who come home and say, "Mom, mom, I want a snack that will help prevent colorectal cancer." [*Laughter.*]

And so that's one group of America, and a lot of us in the room are part of that America. But of course, there is another group, and that group doesn't get to have Veggie Booty with Kale. And we've spent the last twenty years trying to help the people in the other group, which is basically eighty percent of America. And I started writing about education with the *A Nation at Risk* report, which I think is about 1983. And since then, we've tried every single bureaucratic reform to the school system, and the results have always been disappointing.

So I started worrying about economics. Then I started worrying about human capital. Then I started worrying about education. So I'm getting deeper and deeper. And then after the failure of all of these education reforms, I ran across a guy named Jim Heckman, who teaches here at the University of Chicago, a Nobel Prize winner, and he was writing about the importance of the early years, zero to three or zero to five. And he was writing about them in serious economic chart terms that people who aspire to be manly men could understand. And then he had this thing called non-cognitive skills. We all know about IQ, we all know about test scores, but he was emphasizing the importance of noncognitive skills. And so I was thinking, "What is that?"

And so then I'm getting deeper, and somehow the key is in that box called non-cognitive skills. Then I come across a guy named Walter Mischel¹, who's a great guy who teaches at Columbia who's about Heckman's age. And Mischel did a very famous experiment, which is my favorite social science experiment of all time. And what Mischel did was he took four-year-olds – I'm sure a lot of you know this experiment – put them in a room, and put a marshmallow on a table in front of them. And he said to the kids, "You can eat this marshmallow, but I'm going to leave for ten minutes and when I come back, if you haven't eaten the marshmallow, I'll give you two marshmallows."

And one of the things we learned is that there are almost no four-year-olds who cannot not eat the marshmallow. They all eat the marshmallow. [*Laughter.*] And he showed me videos of kids trying not to eat the marshmallow. One little girl is banging her head on the table, trying not to eat the marshmallow. One little boy – one day Mischel was using an Oreo cookie – the boy picks up the Oreo, carefully eats out the middle, and carefully puts it back on the table. That kid became governor of Illinois, actually. [*Laughter; applause.*]

But the scary thing was that the kids who could wait seven or eight minutes, twenty years later had much higher college completion rates, and thirty years later, much higher incomes. The kids who grabbed the marshmallow right away – had much higher incarceration rates, much higher drug and alcohol addiction problems. So this was at age four. And the lesson is that some kids had grown up with organized emotional structures in homes where actions led to predictable consequences, and they developed strategies to control their impulses. And if you've got those strategies at age four, well, then you're going to be able to do okay in school. If you do not have them, then you're *not* going to be doing okay.

And so that research drags you further into this world of emotion and early childhood, a place I didn't expect to go. Then I come across some experiments of the horrible experience of the Romanian orphanages. Some kids are adopted out of these horrible orphanages and they're tested a couple years later. The kids who were adopted out of the orphanages in one program had 40, 50 or 60 *huge* IQ advantage [points] over the kids who were remaining in the orphanages. And was it because the mothers and fathers who had adopted them tutored them so they could do better on the tests? No. The mothers who had adopted them were mentally retarded themselves and living in a different institution. It was the love between a mother and a child that had helped anchor and organize the brain of those kids, and allowed for some sort of development.

So now you're deeply into the world of love. Now, in my world of Washington, if you go to a Congressional hearing and use the word 'love,' they look at you like you're Oprah. You are crossing – and I felt myself, as I got into this research – crossing what I called the Clint Eastwood line: the line that separates reticent, manly columnists from a world of mystery, of "mysterious emotion." And as I got deeper into the research, I realized we're in the middle of an intellectual revolution. And this research on cognitive science,

neuroscience, the new psychology, attachment theory – it all gives us a new view of what human beings are really like, which destroys a lot of our old models and our old social science models.

We used to think the mind was primarily conscious. In fact, most of our decisions are unconscious. A guy named Timothy Wilson² at the University of Virginia points out, "The mind can take in twelve million pieces of information a minute, of which it can be consciously aware of four." We used to think we were primarily individual decision-makers. In fact, we're powerfully influenced by unconscious communications between us at all times.

A psychology class decided to play a trick on their professor, taking advantage of this fact. He was one of these guys who would wander around the front of a classroom. And they decided – they arranged this before class – when he was over here [*points in one direction*], they would cough and look away; when he was over here [*points in other direction*], they would look at him with rapt attention. So within ten minutes, the guy was basically out the door. He had no idea what was happening, but he instinctively moved over to where people were paying attention. Those sorts of unconscious proto-communications are the key to how we learn.

We're also emotional; overrational. You can't make decisions without emotion. There's a guy named Antonio Damasio³, a great scientist from Los Angeles, who had this patient who had suffered a brain lesion and could not feel emotion. He's meeting with Damasio one day. Damasio says, "Do you want to come back for an appointment next week?" And the guy spends 30 minutes debating the merits of coming back on Monday or Tuesday. And Damasio sat there and watched him, and he wanted kill the guy because he had all these lists of things. And finally Damasio said, "How about Tuesday?" And the guys said "fine," and walked away. But the research shows if you can't emotionally feel something, you can't value it. You don't know how much it's valued and you can't make a decision. Emotion is at the heart of decision-making.

The other final thing to say is we are plastic; we are not hard-wired. You can take a kid at age two and cut out half their brain in something called a hemispherectomy, which they have to do in some radical circumstances. The brain will rewire itself. We can remake ourselves through behavior.

So these are all new things and a new way of looking at human nature, and then underlining of the fact that the brain is really chaos. It's a hundred billion neurons with 10,000 connections per neuron. It's just a chaotic swirl in there, and it needs to be organized in certain way, and it needs to be organized through an attachment at a very early age. We're all sort of smitten by genetics, and it's sort of exciting. And genetics is powerful, but genetics is really a series of potentials, which are activated or not activated by environment.

There's something called the MAOA gene, which in some circumstances can lead to a lot of violence; make people criminal. If you grow up in a home and you possess this gene, if you grow up in a disrupted home, then it will be enacted and you will probably commit violence. If you grow up in an organized and peaceful home, it will not be enacted and you will not commit violence. It's all a question of the environment.

So the brain is forming from a very early age; it's forming in the womb. You read a fetus *The Cat in the Hat*, that fetus will recognize the rhythms of the story *The Cat in the Hat* and will be calmer than when you read other stories. It's forming just after birth. You take a 42-minute-old baby, put your face right up to it and wag your tongue, the baby will wag its tongue back at you because it has an instinctive need to communicate with another human face. Babies at minutes old can pick out their mom's face. They have an

instinctive need to communicate. They have an instinctive need to form themselves through an organized and steady relationship with another person.

Samuel Coleridge, in the 19th Century, had a three-year-old. And the three-year-old was obviously very precocious, woke he and his wife up one morning, middle of the night, and the baby said, "Touch me; touch me with your finger." And Coleridge's wife said, "Why? Why should we touch you?" and the baby, the three-year-old said, "Touch me so that I may be here." Touch me so that I might exist. And that's an example of a kid's amazingly understanding that the sense of self is created through a series of conversations with a trusted, permanent, lasting caregiver through a relationship.

Human beings are the only mammal who, when they're suckling at the breast, pause. Babies pause. And the theory is that this gives their mothers an instinctive urge to jiggle them, to move them a little. And that's a communication; it's a rhythm that's building that helps organize a brain. The parents give them, or the caregiver gives them, a way of seeing, a way of modeling the world, and pattern of attachment.

Some babies are securely attached, which means they have a pattern of attachment. They can go into the world safe. They can explore safely, knowing they could come back. Some children are "avoidently attached" – what they call avoidently attached. They're unsure of how to use adult people, and so when they're introduced to a new adult, they're like sailboats sailing into the wind; they zigzag back and forth because they're not sure. Some people have disorganized attachment filled with conflicting impulses when they meet a new person or a new situation. And these early attachment patterns have tremendously powerful impacts all through life.

And so suddenly I'm a guy who starts out writing a newspaper on defense policy and tax rates, and I'm in the world of breastfeeding. [*Laughter.*] This is way over the Eastwood line. And yet when you look at the research, when you look at how much you can tell at age four, how much you can predict about a kid, when you look at how human capital actually develops, when you look at what neuroscience and the intellectual revolution we're in the middle of tells us about the plasticity of the mind and the importance of those early years, you just have to follow the evidence.

And you follow the evidence to this fact: that for most of us, and the "über-moms," they don't need any help because they know how to form those early attachments. They know how to structure the brain. And it doesn't help to give them *Mozart for Baby's Minds* CDs. But you just have to be decent.

But for a lot of people, that process of organization just doesn't happen. And the pay-offs for insisting on that, the pay-offs for creating a permanent structure, a permanent organizing dyad, a relationship – the pay-offs are just immense. And so you find yourself thrown into the sorts of activities the Ounce does. And this is not where I thought I would start or thought I would end up when I started down this road, but it's where the evidence inevitably takes you.

And as you get there and as you begin to look around and meet the people who are actually doing this, you come across two final points. The first is that this is a new continent. I've been writing about education for 25 years, and attention is always focused on K through 12, which is certainly very important. But when you look at the landscape of K through 12, it's like there are buildings everywhere, there are organizations everywhere, there are schools everywhere, there are these dense structures everywhere.

Then, if you turn around and look at the continent of zero through five, it's like there's a little outpost here, there's a little outpost there, there's a little outpost there. It's just practically virgin territory. And as a

result of that, the actual environment for a lot of kids zero through five is all over the place. Some of it is fine. Some of it is absolutely horrible because the infrastructure isn't there yet. And so this is like investing in a sphere where nobody's been. It's untracked territory.

And then the second and final thing to be said is just about this room. If you went to an NEA conference or an AFT conference or an education conference, a crowd this size wouldn't be that remarkable, but for a zero through five conference, it's actually kind of is. And it's a sign of the growing importance of this issue, the growing awareness borne by the research, by organizations like the Ounce, and by the President.

In a sense, it's somehow momentum. I look around this room, and as Sam and I would say, it's like the bar mitzvah of the movement. [Laughter.] It's like a coming of age, the size of this crowd. And it's just truly impressive. And so we're going to get to a spot with enough work and enough patience to where all Americans can eat Veggie Booty with Kale. [Laughter.] And that's a utopia to be admired.

So I'm going to take questions if anybody has any. I'm going to ask that they be about this subject and not Afghan policy or Barack Obama's inner soul. And thank you for your attention. [Applause.]

Question: I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on learning that happens before birth, as well as the learning that begins after?

David Brooks: That question – what about the learning before birth. There's a lot of it going. As I understand the research... First of all, for the brain of a child, birth is not an important event. It doesn't affect anything. So at a very early age, a child or a fetus will sense the sound of its mother's voice, it will sense, as I mentioned... In this experiment done with *The Cat in the Hat*, they read *The Cat in the Hat* to the fetus and then they read a bunch of other stories after the babies were born, and the babies would suck more calmly to *The Cat in the Hat* than to other stories. So they recognized the rhythm.

If you shine a light and somehow penetrate into the womb, the baby will react to that, I think, in about six to nine months. They can taste the salinity of the fluid. They can play with the umbilical cord in the last trimester. So the brain is creating literally, I think, if I've got this right, 250,000 neurons, maybe, per minute, per hour – very quickly – and it's organizing. And so that happens at birth, and then it just keeps going.

And it's not as if it ever goes away. We have this sense that the brain is not plastic, but you have critical periods that are early and then you're done. And that's somewhat true; it's evidenced by the experience of Henry Kissinger and his brother. As you know, Henry Kissinger and his brother moved to this country – I think Kissinger was thirteen; his brother was eleven. Henry speaks with a thick Germanic accent; his brother speaks with a complete American accent...though his brother's explanation for that is, "I actually listen to other people." [Laughter.] So you get these critical periods.

Well, one of the things we're learning is, plasticity forms in the womb and pretty much keeps going, with some elevated moments, especially early on.

Question: David, you've done a lot of studying in this area. But it would be interesting for a number of people in this room to get some recommendations on accessible literature on the subject that they could read.

David Brooks: Well, on the general brain research literature – let me start there as I try to – all the books on early childhood have titles like – and there are a lot of people who could do better than I at this – they all are like: *How Babies Learn*. They all have interchangeable titles. You've got to work on that. But I would recommend reading, first, a book by Antonio Damasio called, *Descartes' Error*, that just introduces you to the realm of emotion.

And then I'm trying to think of other people. And it's really shameful, because I'm writing a book that has some of this in here and the authors are going through my head. Maybe Diana can help me with some recommendations. Diana knows this field a zillion times better than I.

Diana Rauner: *The Scientist in the Crib*.

David Brooks: I've read that book. Okay, that's a good book to read.

Question: Historically, the states have funded education. What do you think the role of the federal government should be in that?

David Brooks: Well, it's slowly being nationalized, and it's being nationalized for good and bad, but it's being nationalized on a bipartisan basis. And I think it's being nationalized in part because the states can do some things really well, but they have not imposed strict standards on themselves, and that's evident in K through 12. And I think it's going to become more evidence in zero through five. It's also just a fact of life that Americans look to Washington. Washington cannot say, "That's not my problem" anymore. Washington has to get involved.

Now, my view, and I think Obama's view, is that the government should set standards, should have some constant, rigorous controls, but should leave it completely up to schools and states and localities to figure out how to get there. I think that's the dumb, simple way to divide the labor.

But the one thing I'll say is that state legislators are less partisan than Washington, and so there's some virtue in that. The other thing to be said is – and I've talked about early childhood stuff with every single U.S. Senator, in groups – and the response I often get is sort of a patronizing "'Atta boy. Yeah, I agree, I really love that. I've got my own program. We've got something in my state. It's really worthwhile. And we love that and we love Hallmark cards and we love puppies, and now I feel good about myself and I can go back to screwing the taxpayer." It's like a patronizing vacation from their real jobs.

And I think the President is beginning to change that, and Rahm Emanuel is beginning to change that. And I wouldn't underestimate the importance of Rahm, because if there's ever a guy who (a) cares passionately about this issue, and (b) who is a hardass... I'll tell my two quick Rahm jokes, just because I enjoy them so much. One is...Obama tells this joke that Rahm lost his middle finger in a deli accident, and Obama says, "When Rahm lost his middle finger, he was rendered mute," which is a great line. [Laughter.] And the other is education-related: that one of the reasons Rahm cares so much about education is that he's afraid American high schoolers are cursing at a fourth-grade level. [Laughter.]

But having advocates like that in the White House in positions of power, people who could be doing anything with the defense budget, that's just tremendously important in crossing this Einstein curtain. I'm serious about the importance of that – just putting it central to education and to economic policy.

Question: Thank you for such a good speech. I would like to ask you how you assess outcomes that seem to have conflicting research as to whether very early childhood health has made a difference when they're adults or has not.

David Brooks: Well, in Washington, in the column-writing business, what you do is you pick the research that confirms your prejudices. [*Laughter.*] No, you know, I think there are a couple of things to be said. One, I don't think the research is actually that close on this issue. I deal with a lot of issues where the research is all over the map and incoherent. On this issue, I think it's reasonably strong, and Heckman can give you graphs and graphs.

The second thing to be said, and this does need to be – not to oversell anything – I always go back to the Coleman Report. James Coleman,⁴ University of Chicago Professor, I think, in Sociology, wrote a report in the mid-'60s, and it was about the value of schools. And he said, "Everyone thought you changed schools, you changed lives." And his report was that it was at the home and the peer group. And that's actually a much more complicated thing to change.

And the lesson is, we should never underestimate the complexity of human beings. I mentioned there are 100 billion neurons in the brain. If you take a mere 16 neurons and imagine all the connections they can have, one to another, that's 10 with 81 zeros after it. That's about equal to the amount of matter in the known universe. Every single behavior has 100 genes or so that contribute to it. If each of those 100 genes can be switched on and off in different combinations, that's a trillion trillion possible gene states. Human beings are phenomenally complicated.

There's a guy at the University of Virginia named Eric Turkheimer⁵, who has this concept of what he calls the "gloomy prospect." He says the context of poverty is related to lower brain development and lower IQ. And then reporters ask him, "Well, what *about* the context of poverty is related to those things? Pick out the causes." And his answer is, "It's impossible to pick out the one or two causes. You can't dissect it that finely. You just know the whole context does it. And so what you've got to do is change the context."

And that's why I think if you go to the really good child care centers, they're not working on one little thing. They're changing an entire context. You're creating a zillion different relationship moments. And you don't know which one will work; you can't fine tune it that way. But you're changing the entire context of a child's life, and you know, somewhere in that mystery, it tends to work. And that's why I don't think we can push the social science too far, but we do know this for sure: that people with organized attachments do better. There's no doubt about that.

Question: I think you've touched on this a little bit, but I was wondering if you had any thoughts or recommendations on what the private sector can do to raise the profile of this issue or to try to really help increase public investment in the early childhood education issue?

David Brooks: Well, to me, the first thing is getting good teachers in these centers. And it's getting good people, and that takes (a) money; (b) giving it some economic credibility, and again, I recommend going to Jim Heckman's websites and finding where he connects it to economic potential and making it an economic issue. But I do think the whole key is getting a teacher in the room who is emotionally attuned to the students. And that means you can't have a lot of students with one kid at this age, at the early age. And

that's what I saw this morning. Very incredible student-teacher ratios. But that costs money. And it's money that's worth it, but I think that's the primary thing.

And then giving it credibility with politicians. If a bunch of business people come in and talk about this stuff, that gets attention of your basic Republican – forgive me for [calling out] my colleagues -- Republican politician who may not otherwise give it credibility.

Question: I'm not sure we've been giving you enough positive feedback over here. I was recently at a conference where an eminent scholar said that there was a discussion about health care, and she said if she could do anything for the zero to five group, she would want national child care. And I'm just thinking – you talk about this open terrain in the future, if you could do anything, where would that play into your future – national child care?

David Brooks: Where would it play in...?

Question: To your dream about what could be done for the zero to five population.

David Brooks: Let me put it this way. Barack Obama and John Edwards had an interesting debate during the campaign, and the debate was, do you take kids out of the areas where they're living – who are in poverty areas – and do you move them to middle class areas? And Edwards' policy was based on the Gautreaux experiment out here, which is sort of, disperse neighborhoods where you've got a lot of bad stuff, and move people around.

The Obama approach was based on the Harlem Children's Zone, which is organized by a man named Jeffrey Canada. And that was to do everything at once. Not just a school, not just a clinic, not just social services – do everything at once, going back to this gloomy prospect about we don't know what works. And there was an interesting debate they had, and it was interesting to interview the two candidates. Because when you asked Obama about this, he really wanted to have this debate, and frankly, when you asked John Edwards, "Oh, well, that's my policy, I guess." I mean, he didn't really want to have the debate.

But I think Obama was right: that what you've got to do... There's no one thing. If you do everything at once, something will work. And getting a health clinic, getting proper nutrition, proper dental care is all part of the way all of us raise our kids. And to divide them into different policy zones is kind of weird.

Question: What's the role of dads in zero to five?

David Brooks: Well, this is where I'm a conservative. [*Laughs.*] I mean, I think two-parent families are much better than anything else. That doesn't mean you judge people who don't have it, but I do think the evidence shows that two-parent families in relationships with dads are just tremendously important, and especially for boys. And I think that's true in every neighborhood. It's certainly true in my own life, and I think it's still a challenge for all schools.

My kid, my oldest, is, despite my genes, quite tall and athletic, and he went to a school where every single teacher was a woman in elementary school. And he thought of himself, through sixth grade, as a dumb jock because he was treated that way by all the teachers. He had no sense that he could be a good student until he had a male teacher in seventh grade. And suddenly, having the male teacher revolutionized his life.

And men are different than women. And having men in lives is something that's vitally important and, which I think, we should be judgmental about, and Barack Obama is right to be judgmental about.

Question: This country just elected its first African-American President. Over the next thirty years, the country will become more diverse. The social fabric, the social landscape of this country will continue to change. I guess I'm trying to get your thoughts on how aggressive we need to be in this country, how intentional we need to be to regain our competitive that you talked about earlier. And if you were Obama's budget director, what number would you put in terms of making this kind of investment?

David Brooks: If I were Obama's budget director, I'd have bruises all over my body – [*laughter*] – from complaining about the size of his overall budget, but I would invest here. The only thing I'll say is we should not be shy about talking about the legacy of culture. Cultural differences are profound and long-lasting, go over centuries, and are passed down generation from generation. And different cultures and people in different ethnic groups have different patterns, and we shouldn't be shy about talking about that.

Just one final story from the research, and then I'll let Diana throw me off the stage. I mentioned a Minnesota study that could predict with 77% accuracy at age four who's going to graduate from high school. And there's one case that describes a little boy named Ellis. Ellis is three years old. He's asked to stack a bunch of blocks up together. His mom is in the room. As he's stacking the blocks, mom comes in and grabs the blocks and stacks them herself and says, "See, I could do that and you didn't."

Twenty years pass; Ellis now has a boy. Ellis is still part of the experiment. He's brought into a room with his little boy and the boy is asked to stack blocks. And Ellis grabs the blocks and stacks them himself and says, "See, I did that." He had no memory of his mom doing that twenty years before, but you unconsciously replicated the models you learn from your parents, and these things can go on for centuries. And so that's one of the reasons why you need to give people models of attuned ways to parent. And that's one of the things that happens that the woman who's about to throw me off the stage does, so thank you. [*Applause.*]

1. Walter Mischel, Niven Professor of Humane Letters in Psychology, Columbia University.
2. Timothy D. Wilson, Shence J. Asten Professor of Psychology, University of Virginia.
3. Antonio Damasio, Daniel Dornsife Professor of Neuroscience, Director, Brain and Creativity Institute, University of Southern California.
4. James S. Coleman, Professor of Sociology, University of Chicago.
5. Eric Turkheimer, Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Virginia.