

# INTRODUCING THE INSTITUTES

## *The Milton H. Erickson Institute of Houston*

Written by Roxanna Erickson-Klein

Carol Kershaw and Bill Wade each started private practice in 1980; three years later they chose to merge their practices. At that time, The Milton H. Erickson Foundation in Phoenix had begun to actively license Institutes across the nation and around the world. As Kershaw and Wade evaluated aspects of their own work, they decided that founding an Erickson Institute would offer opportunities for networking, participation in what was then a new movement toward brief therapy, and most importantly, provide a framework to pursue their own work in interactional communications and mind-body healing. Early on, The Erickson Institute of Houston joined with the Erickson Institute in Austin, and with two Erickson sisters, Betty Alice and Roxanna, both residents of Dallas, to coordinate educational efforts. While over time, individual efforts prevailed, the generative and cooperative energy gave a lasting momentum to both Institutes.

Kershaw and Wade had been introduced to Erickson's work by the study of family therapy and Jay Haley's *Strategies of Psychotherapy*. Wade describes Haley's book as having one of the more intriguing explanations of hypnosis from an interactional point of view. Once familiar with Haley's viewpoint, other work about Erickson became easier to understand. The couple began to broaden their studies, looking at *Uncommon Therapy*, strategic work done at MRI, and Erickson and Rossi's writings. They then studied with Stephen and Carol Lankton, and afterward, Wade went to Phoenix for training at The Milton H. Erickson Foundation.

Wade states, "What fascinated us was Erickson's highly pragmatic, flexible, and individualized approach to helping people move beyond their learned limitations and developmental gaps. While not ignoring the realities of psychopathology, we were fascinated that Erickson did not become stuck arguing over diagnoses. This

strategy allowed him to see possibilities for growth in ways that others missed. We model our work after this perspective."

Kershaw and Wade teach the interactional aspects of hypnosis, a direction often overlooked in hypnosis courses. Described in Kershaw's 1992 work, *The Couple's Hypnotic Dance*, their teaching of hypnosis emphasizes multi-level communication and how subtleties, including touch and voice tone can create therapeutic double binds, and invite dissociative states. The couple says, "We do not think of Erickson's style as merely a set of techniques or linguistic maneuvers but a whole philosophy of flexibility, close observation, and open-ended possibilities."

Kershaw and Wade's therapy practice is quite diverse. It includes working with couples, children, and individuals who have anxiety, depression, phobias, and trauma. Additionally, they invite professionals—musicians, athletes and executives—to work in therapy to enhance performance. The couple's work integrates deep hypnosis with a variety of other technological and naturalistic strategies, including meditation, neurofeedback, biofeedback, and brain music therapy.

Workshops have always been part of the couple's Institute. Several format variations have been offered, including weekly, monthly, and supervision series. During the last 27 years, they have brought to Houston to teach, many of Erickson's students, as well as others in related fields. While sponsoring others was an important part of their educational commitment, their focus has now shifted to their own teaching, and inviting other Ericksonians to be part of the training they offer.

Kershaw and Wade have evolved a therapeutic direction from Erickson they call Brain Change Therapy, which includes meditation practices, and the neuroscience research. Fully described in their most recent book, *Brain Change Therapy: Clinical Interventions for Self Transformation* (2012, WW Norton), their approach suggests mental states precede everything: perspective, emotions, attitudes, and behavior. They maintain that by learning

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to shift and condition mental states one can stay in states of thriving for longer periods of time. The couple is currently engaged in a series of workshops and presentations teaching Brain Change Therapy around the country. Co-presenting at the International Tele-conference on Ericksonian Approaches, they describe their work with its Ericksonian roots, in the context of modern neuroscience.

As part of an Erickson Hypnosis Series at Esalen, they are invited to teach a workshop called *The Heart of Forgiveness: Brain Change Therapy from Trauma to Thriving*. They describe the five-day workshop as a "deep dive" that invites people into the alpha/theta states where they can gently release and resolve old wounds.

Their latest endeavor is to begin a series of videotaped interviews with

other Ericksonian professionals to explore the process by which their own thinking has evolved and matured. This exciting series is envisioned as an opportunity for both professionals and the general public to learn more about the depth with which Erickson was able to stimulate the change process, as well as the long lasting effect his teaching has had on others. The series will address specific therapeutic techniques and specific problems, and examine the ways that interventions cascade into a healthier state of being. Targeted to be online sometime in 2012, Kershaw and Wade invite Ericksonian therapists who would like to be part of this exciting project to contact them for further discussion.

To learn more about The Erickson Institute of Houston and the training offered visit: [www.mhehouston.com](http://www.mhehouston.com).