

Brain Research in Early Childhood: A Primer for Caregivers and Administrators

Section Six: Advocacy in Early Childhood Services



Compiled by Tammie Benham & David P. Lindeman

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Kansas Inservice Training System
Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities

2601 Gabriel, Parsons, KS 67357

620-421-6550 ext. 1618

email: kskits@mail.ku.edu

web: kskits.org

Utilization of Brain Development Information in Advocacy for Early Childhood Services

The wealth of information related to brain development in young children has provided validation and hard scientific evidence to what many early childhood educators have believed for quite some time — that the early years are truly important in shaping and fostering the development of children. With this information we now have the opportunity to advocate for early childhood services with new pieces of information and in innovative ways. However, advocacy and training of others to support quality services in our communities and schools can seem to be a daunting task — especially when we are working with people we don't know or those who are in policy making positions. With a little planning the feelings of apprehension can be lessened.

The following are some questions that you might answer in relationship to your reason for using this research on brain development:

WHO IS THE TARGET GROUP?

- Are you using this information to educate a specific target group? Who are the people that you are talking to, what is their relationship to young children, and why do you



want to impact their thinking? For different groups you might organize the information differently for the greatest impact. Examples of target groups are many and advocacy / training efforts for each group will probably have a different purpose or outcome. For public figures such as legislators, county commissioners, or school board members, your outcome may be that you want these policy makers to invest financial support in program development or expansion. Therefore, it

would be important to discuss not only aspects of positive developmental outcomes but also the potential dollar savings related to less dependence on remedial and special education services. For parents you may want them to understand some of the simple activities they could do to support their child's development. And a final example, for nurses you may want them to understand the importance of nutrition or specific vitamins on the development of the brain. Other examples of potential target groups include service providers from a variety of fields such as social work, foster care, teaching, or health care; the general public; or administrators of services and programs. You will want to consider for each of these groups how the information will be packaged in a slightly different way or with different content to achieve your goal.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO USE THIS INFORMATION?

- Are you using this information for advocacy? Is your purpose to establish or develop early childhood services for your community or to improve the quality of existing services? If your intent is to use this information for the expansion of current services

your message may be somewhat different than information to establish services. A change in content when trying to expand existing services to new groups of children or provide enhanced services could be the potential benefits to all children in the community as opposed to a small group of children. Your intent may only be to inform people with no other specific outcomes identified. This type of sharing may be extremely important as time passes and opportunities change. It may be the seed that grows into an identified plan later.

HOW CAN/OR ARE YOU GOING TO DELIVER THE INFORMATION?

- What will be the method of delivery of information and how might that affect your desired outcome? The delivery of information can take many forms, from traditional workshops, conferences or presentations, to videotape, print materials, web-based delivery, or distance learning environments such as interactive television (ITV). The amount, complexity and depth of information to be provided will determine the method of presentation. For a ten-minute presentation to a school board you would not develop a sophisticated web based presentation. However, you may choose such a method for an in-depth training program to support teachers in their understanding of brain development and how it could affect their teaching method and style.

WHO ARE YOUR PARTNERS?

- Who are or might be your partners in the delivery of training or advocacy for programs and service? This might include parents, state agency personnel, representatives from professional organizations such as the Kansas Division for Early Childhood or the Kansas Association for the Education of Young Children, personnel from programs designed specifically for training such as the Kansas Inservice Training System, the Kansas Association for Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies or the Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, college/university faculty, educational personnel from the local early intervention network, child care programs, or Early/Head Start programs, or regional training programs such as the Quality Improvement Center for Early/Head Start, the Quality Improvement Center for Disabilities associated with Early/Head Start, or the Regional Resource Centers. It may be important in order to achieve your desired outcome and reach the targeted group that a collaborative partner facilitates your effort. One advantage may be that this partner already has credibility with the target group that will foster their listening and learning new information.

WHAT INFORMATION DO YOU WANT TO PROVIDE?

- As noted above, the amount and type of information that you provide will be dictated by many factors such as audience, amount of time, place, and your goal or desired outcome. This information can range from the physical development of the brain at different time periods in a child's life to the benefits of early education and intervention and the cost/benefits of early childhood education. You might conduct a community survey or map of existing services and then identify programs or services to fill gaps or improve quality. Therefore, the type and amount of information you provide to a group will reflect your desired outcome.

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