The Science of Communicating about Brain Development

5 Ways to Win Hearts and Minds

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Introduction
A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO COMMUNICATIONS

Advocacy

Political Science

Communications, Campaigns, & Media

Language & Linguistics

Anthropology & Psychology

Administration

Design & Digital Media

Public Health

Sociology

Language & Linguistics

Advocacy

Political Science

Communications, Campaigns, & Media

Anthropology & Psychology

Administration

Design & Digital Media

Public Health

Sociology
SCIENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
CHILD MENTAL HEALTH
CHILD MALTREATMENT

OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES
SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT
EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTING

Harvard Center for the Developing Child
Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (Canada)
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty To Children (UK)
Big Lottery Fund: A Better Start (UK)
Aspen Institute
Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children’s Hospital
Parenting Research Centre
Expert Interviews
21

Cultural Model Interviews
40

Media Content & Field Frame Analysis
592

On-the-Street Interviews
146

Survey Experiments
11,300

Persistence Trials
60

Usability Trials
26

Sample Size: 12,185
HOW WE COMMUNICATE CAN CHANGE HEARTS AND MINDS
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... AND THE WORLD
#1: Remember That Frames Shape Understanding
WHAT ARE FRAMES?

Sets of **choices** about how information is presented
WHAT ARE FRAMES?

EMPHASIS

EXPLANATION

UNSAID
FRAMES SHAPE UNDERSTANDING
FRAMES SHAPE UNDERSTANDING

Issue Salience and Support for Evidence-Based CMH Policies

* = P<.01
#2: Find Out What You Are Up Against
YOU SAY... THEY THINK
Persistent stress can derail development and have negative long-term effects on health and well-being.
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“People approach the world not as naive, blank-slate receptacles […], but rather as experienced and sophisticated veterans of perception who […] see events and objects in the world in relation to each other and in relation to their prior experience. This prior experience or organized knowledge then takes the form of expectations about the world, and in the vast majority of cases, the world, being a systematic place, confirms these expectations, saving the individual the trouble of figuring things out anew all the time.”

Tannen, 1993: 21
CULTURAL MODELS HELP US “THINK FAST”
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Shared (“cultural”) patterns of thinking about a given topic
CULTURAL MODELS HELP US “THINK FAST”

Taken-for-granted, automatic assumptions
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Taken-for-granted, automatic assumptions

Interpret, organize and make meaning
CULTURAL MODELS OF EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT
DEVELOPMENT = INVISIBLE PROCESS

FAMILY BUBBLE

INDIVIDUALISM

KIDS ARE SPONGES/LITTLE ADULTS

CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE

FATALISM

DEVELOPMENT = INVISIBLE PROCESS
#3: Avoid Communications Traps
CORRECTING MISPERCEPTIONS
BACKFIRES
CORRECTING MISPERCEPTIONS
BACKFIRES

MYTH "The flu isn't a serious disease."
FACTS Influenza (flu) is a serious disease of the nose, throat, and lungs, and it can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu. Most who die are 65 years and older. But children less than 2 years old are as likely as those over 65 to have to go to the hospital because of the flu.

MYTH "The flu shot can cause the flu."
FACTS The flu shot cannot cause the flu. Some people get a little soreness or redness where they get the shot. It goes away in a day or two. Serious problems from the flu shot are very rare.

MYTH "The flu shot does not work."
FACTS Most of the time the flu shot will prevent the flu. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the flu shot has ranged from 70% to 90% when there is a good match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine. Getting the vaccine is your best protection against this disease.

MYTH "The side effects are worse than the flu."
FACTS The worst side effect you're likely to get from a shot is a sore arm. The nasal mist flu vaccine might cause nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat and cough. The risk of a severe allergic reaction is less than 1 in 10 million.

MYTH "Only older people need a flu vaccine."
FACTS Adults and children with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and kidney disease need to get a flu shot. Doctors also recommend children 6 months and older get a flu shot every year until their 5th birthday.

MYTH "You must get the flu vaccine before December."
FACTS Flu vaccine can be given before or during the flu season. The best time to get vaccinated is October or November. But you can get vaccinated in December or later.

#4: Use the Power of “How”
“understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”

Lakoff & Johnson, 2003 (5)
EXPLANATORY METAPHOR

“[o]ur ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”

Lakoff & Johnson, 2003 (3)
EXISTING COGNITIVE PROCESS
HIGHLIGHT / OBSCURE FEATURES
MEMORY TOOL
STICKY
METAPHORS OF BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

- BRAIN ARCHITECTURE
- TOXIC STRESS
- SERVE AND RETURN
- RESILIENCE SCALE
Brain Architecture

The story you are telling:

The basic architecture of the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood.

Redirect public perceptions away from:

- Children are sponges/little adults
- Black box model of development
- What children can’t remember doesn’t matter
- Self-makingness

Move public thinking towards:

- Development starts early and requires quality resources
- This is an active process that happens in phases
- What happens early on has long-lasting consequences
Metaphor
#5: Tell A Story
A WELL-FRAMED STORY

‣ VALUES

What is this about?
How does this work?
If it’s not working, why not?

‣ METAPHORS
‣ EXAMPLES
‣ EXPLANATIONS

What can we do?
Who has responsibility?

‣ VALUES
‣ EFFICACY
‣ SOLUTIONS

Why does this matter?
A WELL-FRAMED STORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Why does this matter to society? Why does this matter to society?
Our shared prosperity is at stake

What’s this about? How does this work?
Brains get built like houses: foundations matter
Supportive interactions build brains

If it isn’t working, why not?
Toxic stress disrupts brain construction
Resilience is like a dynamic scale

What can we do about it?
Your program/policy solution here
Thank you!