Innovative Practices to Promote Learning in Museums and Libraries

Families and Work Institute Partnership with Institute for Museum and Library Services

As the U.S. recommits to its goal of becoming a nation of learners, it is time to help children, families and the professionals who work with them better understand the brain and executive function life skills.

The Institute for Museums and Library Services (IMLS) and Families and Work Institute (FWI) will be partnering over the next year to highlight how museums and libraries can:

- Increase an understanding of the brain, how the brain develops, and how the brain really works;
- Share research from neuroscience on learning;
- Increase awareness that there are specific skills—called executive function life skills—that can help children (and adults) thrive now and in the future; and
- Share innovative ways in which libraries and museums develop visual displays and exhibits to educate parents and the community on neuroscience, on executive function skills, and on how everyone in children’s lives can be brain builders.

Families and Work Institute (FWI) and its President and Co-founder Ellen Galinsky have been leaders in the national conversation on the importance of executive function life skills. Her groundbreaking book, *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs* provides an extensive review of the research on early childhood learning, sharing these findings in ways that have become a powerful impetus for families and educators across the country.

FWI is working intensively with communities and their schools, early learning settings, social work, higher education, mental health, and other health professionals across the country, to share the findings from neuroscience on brain development and on executive functions. The evidence-based executive function life skills are enabling communities to create a common language about priorities for children and families in education systems and in family life. These skills are:

- Focus and Self Control
- Perspective Taking
- Communicating
- Making Connections
- Critical Thinking
- Taking on Challenges
- Self-Directed, Engaged Learning
Some museums and libraries are already using Mind in the Making content, tools and resources. For example, Portland, Oregon is engaging families with playgroups and promoting the Executive Function Life Skills: http://www.portlandcm.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/SevenEssentailLifeSkills.pdf

Other museums and libraries and developing creative approaches to sharing neuroscience research and to help families and educators become “brain builders.”

With this project, FWI will work with IMLS staff to engage museums and libraries to share the best research on children’s learning and neuroscience and its practical implications into this critical work in communities. The reason is clear: As the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) highlighted in its report Growing Young Minds: How Museums and Libraries Create Lifelong Learners, museums and libraries are adept “brain builders” offering environments that address the importance of social, emotional and cognitive aspects of learning that powerfully engage executive function life skills. In a world of continuous learning, libraries and museums play an important role as community anchors that are open to all and are places where families, including low-income families, can learn together. These trusted civic institutions promote the kind of family engagement that lays a strong foundation for learning and academic success.

This work builds upon a symposium and report that FWI and IMLS, along with partners Association of Children’s Museums, Association of Library Services for Young Children and the Civil Society Institute, convened in 2003 called: The Twenty First Century Learner: The Continuum Begins with Early Learning.

This partnership will examine best practices in the museum and library fields that:

- Provide information about the brain, how the brain develops, and how the brain really works;
- Share research from neuroscience and learning;
- Raise awareness about executive functions and how they can be promoted; and
- Help engage adults in being brain builders.

FWI will reach out to libraries and museums working directly with children, families and professionals, to collect their best practices and innovative approaches to gather this information. The results will be released in a national report published by FWI in early 2015 and disseminated widely to museum and library professionals, community leaders, educators, and parents. The best practices will be in a range of museums and focused on ages birth to age 18.

After gathering these best practices, FWI, with the guidance of IMLS and the expertise of museum and library professionals will create community-based design teams to develop new outreach and education tools, with an emphasis on visual displays and exhibits, on neuroscience and learning, including promoting executive functions. FWI will use a Request for Proposal (RFP) process.
to forge new partnerships with national organizations, local science and children’s museums as well as libraries and to select pilot community design teams whose exhibits can be replicated by other libraries and museums to create other high-impact strategies in communities.

We hope you will join with us in the important venture!

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