

## History - Past & Present

### A Brief History of Mind in the Making (1994-2003)

(Excerpt from the national website <http://mindinthemaking.org>)

Mind in the Making has its origins in the work that Families and Work Institute (FWI at [www.familiesandwork.org](http://www.familiesandwork.org)) did between 1994-2003 to raise awareness of the importance of the early years of life. This effort was successful beyond our highest expectations for a variety of reasons: We were spurred to develop this "campaign" because the science pointing to the importance of the early years had been largely unheard and was unknown by many families, doctors, the public, and policy makers. This was revealed through the painstaking analyses conducted by a powerful coalition of scientists and policy makers under the aegis of the Carnegie Corporation of New York's three-year task force that focused on meeting the needs of young children. The work of this task force led to the publication of its seminal report, *Starting Points*, published 1994: <http://www.carnegie.org/startingpoints/index.html>

We took on the challenge of more broadly communicating this knowledge with Carnegie. As a first step in doing so, Carnegie and FWI convened a group of strategic communicators, who had been in successful public awareness efforts in a variety of fields, to frame our background communication and outreach strategies.

We brought attention to the science of early development, especially the science of brain development, by convening a conference with Carnegie at the University of Chicago in 1996.

We formed a far-reaching partnership with Rob Reiner and his I Am Your Child Campaign. Among the I Am Your Child's most successful other partnerships were those with the National Governors' Association to host local and national policy forums on the early years; the White House Conference on early development in 1996; and the partnership with Newsweek Magazine and Johnson & Johnson in their special editions of the *First Three Years* in 1997 and again in 2000. This initiative was both top down and bottom up. FWI assembled cross-disciplinary state and local coalitions (including educators, pediatricians, parent support and resource leaders, business, and philanthropy) to support this campaign in every major city and all of the states in the United States.

The campaign developed a variety of materials for different audiences, including PSAs, videos for families, tip sheets, a website, how-to booklets on community mobilization for policy makers, and more. Like every successful change initiative, this one had its downsides and its upsides. Some of its results were intentional and some were unintentional.

Public polling on the local and national level revealed that the public has become increasingly aware of the importance of the early years. Yet, in that awareness is confusion about what early learning means. Attitudes range from "children are like flowers—all they need is sunshine and watering and they will grow" to "children need ongoing stimulation to build bigger and better brains."

In other words, the science of early development and early learning was at times overstated and not always communicated in ways that help the public reframe their views. That knowledge led us to an ethical commitment to continue what we had launched. We have done so by:

- continuing to study how the public understands early learning and what “frames” will provide better understanding;
- finding through this process that the public needs and wants to see the underlying science i.e., how scientists know what they know about early learning, and that visual images can override the “folk” understandings about early learning and educate the families, professionals, and the public to become more discerning consumers; and
- exploring how to best to disseminate this knowledge through a joint project with Civitas.

#### Tulsa Pilot Project 2003-2005

More than 281,791 children are under the age of five in Oklahoma; the majority of these cared for outside the home. Yet, much of Oklahoma's child care struggles to meet children's basic needs for health and safety, let alone warm relationships and appropriate learning opportunities. The 2003 Oklahoma Child Care Portfolio Research reports that only 4.8% of licensed centers were rated 3 Star by the Oklahoma Reaching for the Stars Quality Rating System.

The current revolution in neuroscience has increased understanding of the developing brain and the effects on early childhood development. Yet during early childhood, the most critical window of development, our society relies on the least trained, most poorly educated teachers in the workforce. Numerous findings suggest that children fare better when teachers have more training and education. This staff development is highly correlated to positive outcomes for children, such as increased social, language, and cognitive development. Teachers with more advanced education score better on measures of classroom quality (they were more sensitive, more responsive and had higher quality classrooms) than teachers with less education.

As the Tulsa Pilot became more aware of these Learning Modules and the overall Mind in the Making campaign, we realized that these new resources could be used to support and expand our state's commitment to using what we know from research about how young children learn to improve the quality of early learning programs. We recognized that the modules offered an opportunity to transform how early childhood teachers, trainers, families and other professionals think about child development in ways that could positively change practice and promote a culture that values life-long learning.

The ultimate vision for utilizing the Mind in the Making Early Learning Modules is to improve the quality of childcare and education of young children in Oklahoma. We believe that the Mind in the Making Modules will provide a vehicle for facilitating the education of caregivers in Oklahoma, as well as assist in understanding the relationships of the Oklahoma Early Learning Guidelines currently being drafted at state level. We see these materials as being a significant unifying tool that Oklahoma can use to infuse the best knowledge and practice throughout Oklahoma's evolving early learning system. We are encouraged and eagerly anticipate using Mind in the Making resources (TV and videos for parents and the public) to reinforce this momentum and increase broad understanding of the science of early learning, which we think will help drive an appropriate and effective policy agenda for our state. The vision also includes influencing and supporting the universal pre-kindergarten initiative to give appropriate prominence to the importance of relationships, the importance of teachers being learners and the importance of integrating social, emotional and intellectual development. It complements and supports Oklahoma's Infant Mental Health Initiatives by promoting mental health for young children.

Tulsa, Oklahoma was one of five pilot sites, along with New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Florida

which were selected to field test the Mind in the Making Early Learning Modules. With the conclusion of the pilot project in 2005, we are now in the process of developing communities of life-long learners throughout Oklahoma.