

Chapter Five — Families And Communities Can Help As Well

Families and communities can both help our children build strong brains.

We need the family for every child to support strengthening the brain of each child — and we absolutely need every community group — every racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, ideological, and community-centered group — to make building strong brains for the children in their group a major priority for the group.

We need all groups to win. We need children who are born into every group to have the support needed for academic, economic, and functional success in their lives.

We have some significant differences now between groups relative to average group performance in a number of economic and academic performance areas. We are facing learning gaps today in many communities that are alarming at multiple levels. We need to make the learning gaps between groups that are so troubling in so many settings today disappear — and we need to do that by bringing up the performance levels of all groups.

We need to prevent the gaps — because it is so very hard to close those gaps once they exist.

We are seeing significant learning level performance disparities in too many settings for our Native American, African American, and Hispanic American communities. We can make those gaps disappear for the next set of children by focusing our efforts on the children, infants, and babies who are being born today.^{2,3,4,22,34}

The children who are facing learning deficits in our schools today are the same children who had very small vocabularies at age three and very small vocabularies when they entered kindergarten. We need to provide every level of support to those children who have those challenges in their lives and we also need to make sure that the current generations of very young children does not face those same challenges.

To make that effort a success, we need to support all groups. We need children from every single group to get the brain exercise needed in those key years to build strong brains.

We now need to create a sense and a belief in each relevant community that we can make those gaps disappear in the future and then we need leaders from each of those groups to be leading the way toward helping

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the children in their group improve their learning capabilities in those key years for each child.

Leaders will be extremely important. Leaders from all groups in each relevant setting need to make sure that infants and children in those key years are getting the support that will allow each child to have the best chance of success.

Families Can Be A Major Resource

Helping each child can be done as groups and communities and it can also be done particularly well in families.

Families who want their families to do well and families who want to have their family members succeed in today's world can make that success happen by helping all of the newborn children and all of the infants in their family receive very real and functional brain enhancing support in those first key years.

That process can start today for each family — and the benefits for each family that does that support for their children will be immediate — because brains are developing now in the children who are born in each family.

Families who want to help their families succeed can use this basic understanding to figure out a variety of ways of helping the children in their families grow strong brains and to also help children born into their families avoid the damage created for the brains of children by toxic levels of stress.

Families often function as a direct resource to make life better for each child who is helped by their family.

Similar support can be provided within communities and by groups of people for various people in their group.

People in any ethnic, racial, religious, or cultural group in any community can decide to put the people in their own group collectively on a better path by making sure that the infants and the very young children in their group get their needed levels of brain strengthening interactions that each child needs in those key years of life.

That Work Can Be Done Individually And Supported
Collectively

That process of helping children can be accomplished in specific settings for families and for ethnic, cultural, or racial groups by people in each group who understand those issues and who want to help each child in their group do well.

That work can be done one child at a time. It can be done collectively for multiple children in a family if the collective approach that is used also provides direct and individual support to each child.

Each group who chooses that pathway of helping their group's children in those key years will have almost immediate benefit for group members.

We Don't Need To Wait Decades To See Results

The benefit to the family or group from helping children in those key months and years is almost immediate because it only takes a few years for a newborn child to get to kindergarten. Having all children in a family or all the children in a group “learning ready” at that kindergarten entry educational crossroads moment for each child can create entirely different educational pathways for each child who is helped.

Kindergarten participation for the group members can be different for the entire group in just a few years if groups make that goal a priority and if group members do what needs to be done to make it happen for each child.

The impact can be felt very quickly. The future dropout rate for school students can be cut by half or more in just three years — by

functionally having many more children “reading ready” in each group when they get to kindergarten.

Each Family And Community Needs To Teach Each New Parent About Early Brain Exercise

As a starting point for getting more students in each setting reading and learning ready, both families and communities can simply, directly, and very intentionally help every single new mother and every new father understand and appreciate the great and important opportunities that exist for strengthening the brain connections for each child.

Group wisdom on that issue can add great value.

Families and communities can also help all new mothers and all new fathers understand the major negative consequences and the very real risks of not providing that support to each child in those first key years.

That information needs to be understood by all family members. It needs to be understood so that entire families can create enhanced interactions and appropriate and effective supports for the children and the new parents in their family.

Families can add functional value in many ways. Family members can read, talk, sing, and play with those very young children. Family members

can support the mother of each new child to both have the time to interact with the child and to bring books and other basic learning tools to each other or primary care giver for the child.

Families can also encourage mothers to have those kinds of interactions and can praise, congratulate, and celebrate the mothers and fathers who are having those kinds of interactions with their children. Peer approval can be a powerful reinforcing mechanism for having those behaviors happen.

We Need Ethnic, Racial, And Cultural Leaders To Understand

This Opportunity And Process

We need all groups in America to do well. We will not be successful as a nation if we end up with widening learning gaps between groups and if we have significant and growing numbers of children who are left behind in those key areas of development.

We need each ethnic, racial, cultural, and community group to be part of the agenda for success as well as having each family support those efforts.

That information about early childhood brain development clearly needs to be understood by all of our various ethnic, racial, cultural, and geography-linked communities and by their leaders. We very much need our

community leaders in each of those settings from each of those groups to support those activities.

We Need Community Cultures To Support Learning

We need our community cultures in all settings to include basic values that call for supporting all children in each community in those early months and years when that support for each child sets key paths for each child's life.

We need communities to create resources to do that work where those resources are needed by parents who are overworked, under pressure, and who have significant resource issues and financial difficulties.

We need communities to support parents and families in that process when support by the group in various ways can make a difference in parenting approaches for each child in need of support at the time when that support is most needed.

We also need each of our communities to have a culture of continuous learning.

We need all group members to appreciate the value of a learning process that starts at birth and then continues through the life of each person.

We need both community leaders and family leaders who teach and preach the values of continuous learning and who both understand and support the processes that are needed to give each child the best set of opportunities to learn. We need those same leaders to support and celebrate the parents who are giving those levels of support to their children.

Aunts, Uncles, And Grandparents Can Provide Direct Support

Multiple layers of family members can be involved to help each child. We often see very useful functional child raising roles for grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other family members in the support processes that exist now for our children in those first years of life.

For many children, the main support resource for child raising that extends beyond parents for a child is, in fact, other family members.

Grandparents play a major role in that entire process for many children. Grandparents often interact directly with the children and grandparents often very directly help the children's parents in the parent's support of their grandchildren.

Grandparents also often serve as a source of wisdom, experience, direction, and guidance for parents and families on child-related issues.

Raising children is an area where shared family experience and years of related knowledge can be particularly useful and important.

We now need all grandparents also to understand the science and the function of brain development in those first key years for each child.

Some cultural traditions have actually — entirely unintentionally — caused some grandparents in some settings to give advice about child raising to parents that have worked against the most effective brain exercise practices and that hinder and reduce some direct child interactions in the time-limited opportunities that are available in those first months and years to strengthen children’s brains.

Some cultural practices in some settings have included having grandparents advising new parents in their group and family to not interact directly with their children in several ways in those first key years.

That advice from the perspective of an older culture to avoid some levels of interacting with children and to avoid responding to inquisitive or emotionally needy children has unintentionally and inadvertently weakened the brain development process for some children in some settings. The children who have been at least partially ignored as a result of that advice and who were “not spoiled” in those settings where that particular advice has

guided parental behaviors are less likely to get the brain exercise needed to strengthen their brains in those key years.

We need the family elders and the grandparents who gave that old advice of having minimal direct child interaction in those early months and years to parents in their families to understand the new science and to know and support the need for mothers and fathers of infants to actually increase — not decrease — those interactions with each child in those settings.

We Need Grandparents To Teach And Use The New Science

In the best situation, we can have grandparents both interacting directly with children in positive ways and teaching this new science to new parents in the family. That teaching by the grandparents is needed and can be very useful if the parents of a child do not know the biology or the science, and do not know what the most effective approaches are for raising their child to be reading ready by school and to be richly endowed in neuron connectivity for life.

For many children, a grandparent is actually a primary caregiver. Sometimes the grandparent is the only functioning caregiver for a child.

For many reasons, grandparents can be both direct caregivers and a major direct resource in helping directly in the care of each child. That can be a wonderful thing for a child.

We need the grandparents who care directly for children to understand this new science of early brain growth in order to give the best support to each child.

We Need Grandparents Who Talk, Read, Play, And Sing With Children

We need the grandparents who care directly for our children to have the same kinds of talk/read/sing interactions with the children under their care that parents need to use to strengthen the brains of their children in those key years.

Grandparents and other family members who do their own direct read/talk/sing and personal interaction support functions for each child under their care can transform the lives of those children.

The number of successful people in the world who point back to a grandparent as the key person who helped them personally in those all-important early years of their life is a very long list.

A grandparent who provides personal care to their grandchild in those early years can have a transformational impact on the child. Many grandparents have played that role for many children for as far back in our past as grandparents and children have existed.

Again, each child saved is a child saved. When a grandparent is there to help the child directly or to help a child's parents with various levels of support — and when the grandparent is able to read/talk/sing and to interact directly with their grandchild in those high impact years — then children's lives can be enhanced and transformed.

Families Tend To Care About Family Members

Other family member — aunts, uncles, cousins, and older siblings — can also do those same basic interaction functions that help create success for each child. Families tend to help their family members. Families tend to care deeply about family members.

One of the most loving and one of the longest lasting things that any family member can do for another member of their family is to be there for their newborn babies and for their infants and small children in ways that help strengthen those needed neuron linkages for those children in those key months and years.

That support from family members for a child doesn't need to be constant to have a positive impact on the child. Each time that a child in that age range has an interaction with a trusted and caring adult that builds those neuron connections, the impact of those connections for that child can last a lifetime.

Security Can Be Enhanced By The Sense Of Having Multiple Caring Adults

Each interaction with a child can have value. Family members with intermittent child interactions can add permanent value for a child.

Children's emotional security can clearly be enhanced by a sense that the child has a number of loving adults in his or her life who care for and enjoy being with the child.

There is a level of security created by children being in a loving family setting that adds value that reaches beyond the neuron connections. Families can and do make very real impacts on the life of each child and we need to make sure that we get the very best benefit from the family interactions with each child.

Communities Need To Provide Support, Guidance, And Leadership

Communities of various kinds can also help in extremely important ways with the development of our children.

Each and every community can add value for the child related developmental issues. Racial groups, ethnic groups, religious groups, and cultural groupings can all have a positive impact on children in those first key years. Fellow residents of a city or a geographic setting can add value as a form of community alignment when those opportunities to align in the context of neighborhoods or cities exist.

Mayors Can Play Major Roles

Mayors of cities can have a particularly strong impact on child development issues because mayors are often seen as the leaders of the entire local population. Mayors also tend to benefit as stewards of their cities when all members of the population they serve do well in both education and employment levels.

Mayors all tend to be leaders — or they would not be in the role of mayor. Mayors need to use their leadership skills and leadership leverage to create community support for the continuous learning of all children and for the reduction or elimination of any learning gaps that might exist for groups of people in their jurisdictions.

Mayors can help teach those issues about early learning opportunities to each community as well. For the most positive impact on children, all communities and groups should be aware of those early childhood development issues and all communities and groups should be doing what needs to be done in each setting to ensure that each child in that setting gets the support needed by that child in those key years.

Support For Children Can Be Volunteer Or Funded

That support for brain development in children from various communities of interest can be organized and somehow community funded or that support for children can be volunteer-based, cooperative, and basically unfunded or self-funded. Various kinds of child support and parenting support approaches can work. The key is to have someone in each setting who is helping each child.

Volunteers in many settings can step in where parents need additional levels of support for the care of their child. Volunteers don't need to make lifetime commitments to each child to have a major positive impact for the child. Short-term and well-timed commitments to children by volunteers can actually sometimes make a lifetime difference for each individual child who

benefits directly for life from that kind of immediate, timely, and situational support from someone in those key time frames.

Every day of safe and secure interactions of the kind that strengthen neuron linkages for a child is a day of benefit for that child. Incremental and intermittent support from a caring adult on a volunteer or assigned basis for a child is functionally far better for the child than no support for that child.

Volunteers can help with that effort in a number of settings. Paid staff who are assigned in a focused and intentional way to provide that support directly to parents and to our very young children can also add needed levels of assistance to both families and the children who receive their support.

Students, Adults, And Retirees Can All Add Value

We need all of our day care settings to understand those key sets of issues and we need all day care settings — particularly the ones for very small children — to be having the direct contact interactions with each child that exercise the brain of each child.

We also need all day care and babysitting settings to have books to read to each child.

We need to think of day cares as an extension of our education system — the institutional support that educates the children long before kindergarten and prekindergarten.

We also need support in each home. Professional caregivers can do that work and volunteers of various kinds can also add major value to those processes and those children.

Volunteers to do that work of helping a child in those key years can come from many sources. Student volunteers have helped children in some communities. Adult volunteers can have a huge impact in the right settings.

Retired people who have already raised their own children can sometimes have the time needed in their own lives to help change the lives of a child.

Retiree volunteers can add value at multiple levels.

Retiree Volunteers Can Read To Children

Volunteer grandparents — retirees in each community who have time to give to change the lives of real children — can be a wonderful resource for our children in that time of high need.

Retirees are a significantly underutilized resource in many settings. Retirees often have both skill sets and dispositions that can benefit children

— and some retirees may also have time to spend directly benefiting children.

We need better ways of facilitating that kind of helping opportunity for retired people who want to function as people who can add real value to children. Volunteers can literally transform lives by being there in a consistent way for the children who need that consistent and direct support in those first years of life.

Retirees don't need to make a 10 year commitment to a child to add lifelong value. A 10 month commitment at a peak time could add life-changing value for a child or for small children who are helped by that volunteer. Five months could change a life. Billions of neuron connections can happen in five months.

Community Reading Programs Can Also Help

We need more children to benefit from reading. Large percentages of our children have no one reading to them.

Community reading programs can be a great way of helping with the reading aspects of the overall early childhood development effort. Various organizations can and do set up places and times where children can be read to by adults. That reading can be done to groups of children or it can even be

done for individual children who are brought by their family to those reading-focused settings.

Serving as volunteer readers in libraries, religious settings, and even in daycares or community gathering places can also give people a very pleasant thing to do that can also help make a real change in the trajectory of children's lives.

That process can be particularly helpful when the settings who provide the reading opportunity and who set up the reading resource also have free or low-cost books that are available for the children to take home and to use in their homes.

We also need all day care settings to include reading as a basic component for their care and interaction with each child.

You Can't Read To Your Child If You Have Nothing To Read To Your Child

A couple of studies of low-income mothers found that more than half of the low-income homes did not have a single children's book.

Communities of various kinds can correct that deficit by making good and fun books available free or at very low cost to the homes and to the day care settings that have no books or very few books in them.

You can't read to your child if you have nothing to read. The logistics of that reality are self-evident. You can't read a non-existent book.

So we need books to exist and be available in all of those settings where we want children to be read to. Various programs can make that a reality. The best chapter of this book salutes several of those programs. They are very much needed. Making books somehow available to families who want to read does need to be done somehow in all settings if we want reading to happen everywhere.

There may be very few investments that a community can make that create higher levels of benefit than making books available to low-income homes. Between half and 60 percent of the low-income homes have no books today. Making books directly available to those homes along with information about the benefits of reading actually can increase the likelihood of reading for low-income mothers by a factor of eight.^{5,22,28,47}

Homes With More Books And More Reading Have Higher Learning Skill Scores

The homes with more books and more reading times tend to do better on all measurable outcomes for children.

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Children with more reading time tend to have higher reading skills.

Preschools and daycare settings for low-income children also need books. One study showed that 80 percent of the daycares for low-income children had no books at all. We need to do a much better job of getting books into those settings as well because low-income children spend a major number of hours at those locations.⁴⁸

Daycares can have a major impact on the life of each child and we need to be sure that our daycares are encouraging reading and have books to read.

That set of consequences that links reading with other success levels is not just true for the U.S. A study of 3,000 homes in Germany showed that the number of books in the home strongly predicted reading achievement levels for children and that was true across all income levels.⁴⁸

Another study of 29 countries showed that the number of books in a home was a better predictor of reading success for a child than the family standard of living — and that the positive impact of having books in the home was the highest for the least educated and poorest families.⁴⁸

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Book distribution can change lives — particularly when the parents of a child learn the new science of early year brain strengthening and are ready and eager to have access to actual books in order to use reading time to strengthen their children’s brains.

Leadership Is Key

We do need our leaders for all groups to be promoting all of the direct interaction efforts — reading, instructing, and talking to our children. Our leaders should now be leading us all to helping every child succeed. It is hard to imagine a more important priority for any leader than having the children in the group they lead succeed.

Having the right levels of leadership in each community on those specific issues is key to getting us all down those new paths.

We very much need community leaders in each setting to help with this early childhood development support for all children in their groups.

Every group of people has people who are the respected, admired, trusted, supported, and emulated leaders of their groups. We need those respected and trusted leaders in each group to be leaders on this specific issue in order to save all of our children.

Each ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and community group needs leaders who want to improve the future and the destiny of their entire group by leading on these issues. We need leaders who help the children from their group each be on a path that leads to success for each child and that will also lead to success for their entire group because all of the children succeed.

We have patterns of behavior today that are not creating those positive outcomes for too many children. The negative outcomes we face will not change until someone does what is needed to create change. The status quo will prevail unless leaders take us to a better future. We need respected and trusted leaders for each of our key groups and communities need to teach, preach, lead, and model behaviors that will help the parents in their groups improve the lives of their babies and support the brain development in those key early years.

Each Group Needs Respected Leaders Who Lead On This

Issue

There are major learning gaps today relative to average performance levels for our American Indian, Hispanic, and African American students.

Multiple studies show the existence of those learning gaps and the reality is that some of those gaps are growing larger.^{2,18}

That should not be happening. We need people in each group to help the children in each group in those key years to keep those gaps from happening in the future for each group.

We need trusted and visible Hispanic leaders who explain those issues to the Hispanic community in each setting. We need African American leaders who have an equally powerful and equally influential leadership impact on the African American community to explain those issues to African American parents of young children in each and every setting.

We need leaders from each refugee group and from each local minority group of any kind who also has measureable learning gaps today to also help their groups with those issues in each setting.

We need leaders in every Native American group who are taking a leadership role on this specific set of issues for the children in their groups. Multiple studies have shown that there are major problems in the education levels of far too many American Indian children today.⁶¹

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Some of the Native American early reading readiness levels have deteriorated over the past couple of decades. The number of school dropouts in a number of Native American settings has increased significantly. There are almost no children going on to college and less than half of the students in some communities are even graduating from high school.

That situation could be reversed in each of those settings if each child in each setting received the right support and the right set of direct interactions from an adult in those first key years of life. Children who are on a path to failure and major difficulty today can be helped to be on a path that will lead to success.

The only way to reverse that negative pathway is for people who lead in each Native American setting to figure out ways of achieving those goals for the children in those settings.

Each setting's leaders should figure out what resources are needed to break those cycles by intervening now with each child born in those settings.

There may be internal resources available or there may be a need to use external resources. In either case, the cycle will not be broken until and unless someone does what needs to be done to break it.

All Groups With Gaps Need The Same Sets Of Strategies

That same strategy is needed for the leaders of every group where learning disparities exist today. The specific processes and approaches that can make success for children happen in each group will need to be specific to each setting.

Leaders in each site need to set the goal of having each child in their group helped. Then leaders need to have parents, families, and other group members figure out what the approaches and resources are that are needed to help and save each child.

That opportunity to save each child exists. It can be done one family at a time and it can be done one setting at a time. Each child who is saved in each setting can take advantage of a very different set of site-specific resources to use to address their own lives and their own learning pathways.

Today, the outcomes for far too many children in far too many of those settings are dire and grim. Learning gaps abound... some of those gaps in some settings are getting worse.

Those learning gaps can all be made to disappear.

Learning Gaps Disappear When They Are Prevented — Not Healed

For all of the groups in this country that have reading gaps today, we need to recognize that there is knowledge that needs to be shared about early childhood development with each parent, family, and group. We also need to recognize that there are some cycles of learning deficiencies that need to be broken in those first years for each child, each family, and each group.²³

Leaders from every group need to break those cycles. Leaders from every group need to set up functional pathways to success.

We need leaders from each of our community groups who serve as credible teachers and as support resources for the parents of young children in their groups, as well as leaders from each group who help the parents get the resources each child needs to break the cycle of failure.

Group Success Is Improved By Having Group Members

Succeed

Group success, for any group, over time, can obviously be affected very directly and significantly by having more people in each group who have benefited from the best early learning exercises and opportunities.

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Breaking the cycles of disadvantaged children can be helped in each group, one child at a time, by getting the right support from parents, family, and friends to help each child in the group.

We also need our city leaders, our legislative leaders, our education system leaders, and even our congressional and governmental leaders to be part of the solution strategy for those issues. We need all of those levels of our society to be supporting the processes that are needed to break the learning cycles for each child in each group.

We need to build targeted community resources to help each child. We need parents who reach out to use the community resources and who use those resources for their children because the parents understand the value of helping their children in those first key years.

To create those beliefs and to support those behaviors in the parents of all of the children, we need community leaders from each group who are teaching and encouraging all parents in their groups to help their children in those specific ways.

We Need Early Learning To Be A Cultural Value And
Behavior

We need to very intentionally and deliberately embed those beliefs about those capabilities and those achievement goals in each culture.

If we are going to break some of the negative cycles that exist in some settings and communities, we will need credible and trusted leaders in each group who work to enhance and modify the culture of their group in that setting to make early childhood support both a cultural value and a shared cultural behavior for their group.

If we are going to eliminate the learning gaps that exist by racial, ethnic, and cultural group in this country today, we will need to do the only thing that can make those gaps disappear. The only strategy that can make those gaps disappear is to help all children in each group in those first key years with their personal and individual neuron connectivity building process and do it well enough for each child so that those gaps never appear for those children.

We need to prevent the gaps — not close them. We need the culture of each group to support that process and to encourage the behaviors that can make it a success.

We need group cultures in every setting that support, protect, and celebrate the early learning successes of children in their culture.

Some Group Cultures Support Early Learning Now

We know from looking at multiple cultures that not all cultures hold the same beliefs about early childhood support today. There is clearly a very mixed set of beliefs between cultures on those issues.

Some cultures in our country do place a very heavy emphasis today on those times of early learning for their children. Books have been written about the “Tiger Moms” from some cultures who now focus high levels of energy on their children’s minute-by-minute development opportunities from birth on — and who focus intensely on the immediate needs and opportunities for their child in the early years of each child’s life.

We now know from the perspective of biological science why those cultures have had the success they have had in the high academic achievement levels for their children. Biology and timing have made those cultural approaches major successes for the children who have had that support from their family and group.

Some aspects of those cultural beliefs about focusing direct support on each child in those early years need to become realities for other cultures as well if collective progress for all group members is going to be a goal and an achievement for all groups.

The Focus On Early Learning Clearly Does Work

That early learning focus as a behavior and a cultural belief clearly does work for the groups of people who use that approach now.

The lifetime pathway results that we see for the children whose parents share those cultural beliefs about early childhood support can be seen in their children's on-going academic success — stretching on far past kindergarten into their college years and even into their post-graduate education levels.

The patterns and the consequences of those workable approaches to early childhood support are both fairly visible. Which cultures and groups of people are sending their children to graduate schools today? Those numbers have been studied and they have been reported. We know what those academic admission and success patterns are for those children who have that level of early support.

The Success Levels Are Not Genetic

What we need to understand and remember is that those success levels for those groups of successful children are not genetic. A high percentage of those very same children who are each doing so well today in all of those academic settings would be non-readers and many would also be school

dropouts if each of those children from those same groups had been isolated and if each of those children had not been given those early years of direct and focused support that they receive.

Those levels of success that we see today for that set of children are based on clear patterns of parental and family behavior — literally beginning in those first days of life and continuing through those very first months and first years of life for each child. That level of support in that key time frame had a huge positive impact on the life of each child.

We can send all children from all groups down that same path to success, by using that same approach for each child from every group for those same key months and years.

The trajectory that is being created now for those children who get that direct and early support from adults in their world can exist in the future for children from every single group — that success can happen for all children from all groups if the first years of life for each child give a strong start to each child from every group.

We Can Help All Children Reach Their Potential — By
Exercising Every Brain

Again — those basic and core consequences for those children who do well and those basic consequences for those children who do poorly in those areas are purely biological. The basic biology of early brain development is the same for every brain.

The time frames for that brain development process are the same for all brains.

Those differences we see in groups of children and in our collective learning gap data by group are not ethnic or racial at their core. All children from all groups have the same potential to develop and strengthen neuron connections in their brains in those first key years of life. We need to help all children achieve that potential by exercising every brain.

We need the cultures and the leadership of all groups to support the needed processes for each child so that all children get that needed support in those first key years of life. We also need to change cultural beliefs that create impediments to the learning processes for our children.

It is time that we understand clearly the fact that there are some cultural beliefs today that drive parental behaviors in ways that have either a negative and positive impact on that particular consequence of our brain biology.

We Can Change Our Cultures To Include Those Values

We need all cultures to expand their behavioral expectations to include shared beliefs about the value of helping children at an early age.

We need to change some beliefs in some cultures. That can be done. Cultures can be changed. All cultures are simply invented. No culture is genetic. No culture is innate or functionally inherent to any of us. DNA doesn't create any specific cultures. Each and every culture is invented and then each culture is learned.

We can choose to change cultures when culture change is in the best interest of the group that is using the culture.

That process of culture change for a group generally requires leadership of the group to be involved. Cultures can be changed if key people in leadership positions in a group take direct steps in intentional and deliberate ways to change the culture of the group on any specific point or belief.

We Need To Embed Continuous Learning In Every Culture

Leaders need to lead that process of changing cultures relative to those learning issues. We need all cultures to include those cultural values

and to include the key cultural expectations about helping each child in those first years when that help is most needed by each child.

The book “Ending Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Disparities in American Health Care” deals explicitly with some of those issues. That book says that there are major differences and disparities in American health care by group. That book explains that the very real health care disparities that exist between groups in this country are caused by three main basic factors — bias, biology, and behavior.

Bias, Biology, And Behavior Create Disparities

That particular health care disparities book describes how to fight bias and it explains how to influence behavior. We need to use exactly those kinds of strategies for children in the first three years of life. We need to fight bias and we need to influence behavior so that every child gets the full benefit of their own personal biology.

We need each of our community groups to explicitly understand and to directly support those strategies and we need to make those strategies real and functional for each family.

Celebrating Success In Learning Is A Good Family Culture

Practice

Family members and group and family cultures can also help create success for their children by celebrating the successes of the children who do receive the right early year support.

Families and community groups should each celebrate the children in their group who have vocabularies that contain thousands of words rather than having vocabularies that are limited to hundreds of words at the point when children enter kindergarten.

The disadvantaged children in each group at that point in their lives will continue to need the support of family and the community far into the future. That need to help the children who fall behind will not change.

What we do need to change is to also now very intentionally celebrate the children who have been successful and who have been advantaged in their personal vocabulary building and learning skill set.

Children who have been successful in their personal neuron connectivity growth should be recognized and applauded for their successes by their families and by the culture that each child is part of.

We Need A Culture Of Success

We need a culture of success and we need cultures that celebrate success. Success builds on success. Winners win. Cultures reinforce behaviors.

Success can be a foundation for success. Doing well and being recognized for doing well can be both beneficial and emotionally rewarding for the people who are recognized in any setting by their own group for doing well.

It can be very reinforcing for the children who are doing well in the learning process to have their personal learning successes receive the quiet but clear approval from other members of their family and from other members of the community who are most relevant to each child.

We Are Becoming Bi-Polar In Our Developmental Realities

Families do matter. Cultures matter as well.

Some mothers, fathers, and families in our country today are very highly focused on their infants and children. Children in those families and groups who benefit from that focus have a huge advantage over children who do not have that support.

Some children are surrounded from birth with a culture of support that includes a wealth of direct adult contacts, frequent and direct interactions,

significant reading times and embedded and consistent reading rituals, as well as a set of constant learning experiences that happen daily for each child.

Some families have both the time and the resources to provide that broad support for their children as a top priority. Some mothers do those kinds of functions for their children at an almost total immersion and full commitment level for the mother.

Some of those highly supported children have almost constant conversations and constant interaction with their mother and with other focused adults. Those parents have extensive direct interactions with their children.

When they use daycare for their children, that set of parents often insists that the daycare settings they use for their child be solid, intentional, well supported learning experiences for their child as well.

The consequences of those extensive and positive interactions with parents and other adults are obvious for those fully supported children. Those children benefit directly and individually from that support.

There are many children in our country who are doing extremely well in school and in their various life activities — and the scores for the top

children on the standardized tests taken in school settings are at very high levels now and are growing higher.

Some Children Have No Readers, No Talkers, And No Books

Some other children in our country are at the other extreme. The children at the other extreme have no one reading to them. There are no books in their homes. Reading isn't part of their lives.

The interaction for those children with adults tends to be inconsistent and low volume. The lower levels of interactions that do happen for some children with their adults can too often be angry, impatient, rude, critical, cold, and even sometimes, cruel. Children who face primarily negative interactions with adults do less well on their learning levels and capacity and they do less well on their emotional security and their interaction skills and approaches.

The chapter on our parenting tool kits pointed out that the most advantaged children in our country today tend to hear positive words for nearly 90 percent of the time in their interactions with adults. Those same studies show that the more disadvantaged and lower income children often

hear negative or critical words for two thirds or more of their adult interactions.⁴

Those children who receive minimal support, minimal reading time, minimal adult interactions, and who often also hear a high level of negative communications, too often go down paths that will make their lives difficult and often painful and dysfunctional.

Where that channeling into negative pathways is happening for a child, we need to break that particular negative feedback pattern for that disadvantaged child. We need to turn the damage into a strength and an asset.

We need to set up positive interactions for those children. Many of the most effective positive interactions and comments made to children don't cost money. Making supportive comments to a child can be affordable in every setting. Children benefit significantly at multiple levels when positive feedback shapes their adult interactions.

We need all families to understand the value of positive interactions. We need parents, families, communities, and relevant groups of people to understand those interaction direction issues and to have their own

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interactions with the children in their family be positive reinforcement for the child.

We Need To Bring The Lowest Performers To Higher Levels

We need to help the children now who have the lowest levels of interaction, the lowest level of reading, and the lowest level of support in those key years.

If we do not help those children, we need to recognize that we are currently are on a path as a country of creating significant and growing bipolarity relative to the capabilities of our children. We can't succeed as a bipolar country. We need to lower that degree of division between our children by bringing up the lower performers and by giving more children with the lowest levels of support more support at the time when that the support is most needed for each child.

We Need To Offset And Balance Financial Resources With Human Resources

For those families where financial resources are slender, those financial advantages that create early childhood support resources for the most affluent children need to be offset for low-income children by very real

human resources and by various functional resources that can spring from our families and our communities.

We also need organized and functional support systems in various settings that mothers can reach out to and use. We need approaches that can bring support staff into homes when that support is needed in homes to help both mothers and children. Communities need to have those resources available when they are needed for the children and parents who need them most.

We Need The Interaction Needs Met For Each Child

Children need that support and need their neuron connecting interactions from some source. It can work just as well for an individual child to have that support resource spring from the family and from the community as it does to have that same resource spring for higher income children from the children's parents' bank account.

We Need Families And Communities To Support Every Child

We need each child to have a parent, family member, or other caregiver to provide those needed interactions in those key biological windows of opportunity when those interactions add the most value for each child.

For the parents who have resource limitations and barriers to providing that support, we need to figure out support tools that can and will help the parent and the child achieve those goals.

The key to success is to have the biologically relevant direct interaction need filled for each child in that key time of opportunity.

We need community leaders from all groups who see that need to help every child in that key time frame and we need leaders in each community and each family to lead us to ways that the need can be met in that time of opportunity for each child.

There are programs like the visiting nurses services that can bring very important and highly useful support and services to mothers and fathers in their homes. There are a variety of support programs that can strengthen in-home parenting.

We need to support those programs and make sure they are available when they are needed.

The communities that have major reading and learning gaps today will not see those gaps disappear until each group does what is needed to prevent those gaps from occurring in the children from that group.

Those major learning gaps between groups of people used to be a mystery. No one knew how those gaps came into being or what caused them. We can now work backwards to see how those gaps came into being for each child on either side of each gap.

We now know how to prevent those gaps. Because we know how to prevent them, we all need to do what needs to be done to prevent them — and we need both our education system and our various government programs to help us with that effort.

The next chapter of this book explains both how our education system will benefit when those gaps are closed and what our education system of leaders can do to make those gaps disappear.