Taking Your Poverty Class to the Next Level

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Is it Possible to Get Research on Early Childhood Development into the Hands of Policymakers?
Family Impact Seminar on
The Science of Early Brain Development

• Art Rolnick, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and Economist with the Federal Open Market Committee

• Pat Levitt, Provost Professor of Neuroscience, Psychiatry, and Pharmacy at the University of Southern California

• Dave Riley, a Rothermel-Bascom Professor of Human Ecology at UW-Madison/Extension
If We Offer Research on Early Childhood, Will Policymakers Come?

The seminar attracted 98 participants including:

- 26 legislators & 20 legislative aides
- 22 legislators at a discussion session
- 38 different legislative offices
- 3 Supreme Court Justices, including the Chief Justice
- Wisconsin’s First Lady
- Two state secretaries, 4 assistant deputy secretaries, and 2 assistant deputy secretaries
- 10 analysts from nonpartisan legislative service agencies
(2) How Did Policymakers Rate the Research?
(N=74, 76% Response Rate)

- Quality of Research
- Objectivity
- Relevance
- Usefulness

1 2 3 4 5
Poor Excellent
(3) What Value Did State Legislators See in the Research?

- The information was such that it is not generally out there. If you don’t go to a seminar, you won’t hear it. The science of it was really interesting to me.  
  (Legislator)

- I really learned a lot . . . It will help in the future to produce policy that’s the best in the field, using the available evidence.  
  (Legislator)

- I was really surprised by how many legislators were there from both houses and from both parties . . . There will be a lot more opportunity to get policy on this issue that is truly bipartisan.  
  (Legislator)
(4) How Did Legislators Use the Research on Early Childhood?

- Two legislative leaders lobbied for a follow-up study committee that met several times;
- One legislator introduced seven different pieces of legislation on early childhood at the Governor’s Council on Workforce Investment; and
- Legislators raised early childhood in speeches and comments at the First Lady’s Fostering Futures Initiative; the Jobs, Economy, and Mining Committee; the Heroine Task Force; the Safe Kids’ meeting; with local coalitions; with the business community; with constituents, lobbyists; etc.
“We are well past the time when it is possible to argue that good research will, because it is good, influence the policy process.”

—Ray Rist, 1994, p. 546
U.S. General Accounting Office
(1) Conceptualize policy work, not as disseminating information to policymakers, but as developing relationships with them.
Keys for Building Research-Based Policy Decisions

(1) Conceptualize policy work, not as disseminating information to policymakers, but as developing relationships with them.

(2) Respond to what policymakers say they need and want—not more information, but more nonpartisan and reliable information
Evidence-Based Policymakers: Insights from Policy-Minded Researchers & Research-Minded Policymakers
by Karen Bogenschneider & Tom Corbett (2010)

- Chapter 9 – Key Insights on How to Communicate Research Evidence to Policymakers
- Chapter 2 – Do Policymakers Want Research?
- Chapter 19 – How to Communicate Research Evidence Using the Dispassionate Nonpartisan, Educational Approach
- Chapter 7: What Researchers Should Know about the Policy Process
Family Policy Matters: How Policymaking Affects Families and What Professionals Can Do

- Chapter 1 – How Youth Have Used Policy to Change the World
- Chapter 11 – What Policymakers and the Policy Process are Really Like
- Chapter 13 – The Impacts and Insights Generated by the Family Impact Seminars Across the Country
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One Important Message Instructors Can Convey to Students is HOPE!