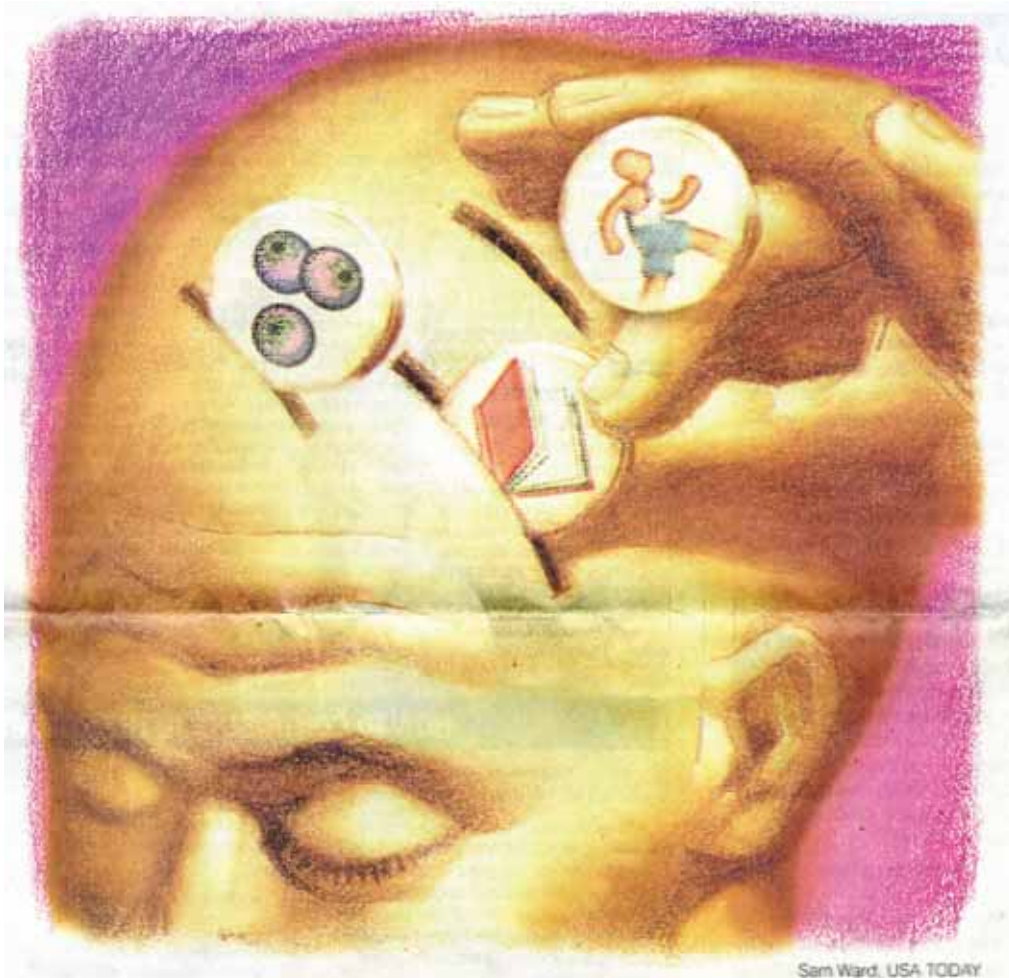


COMMENTARY

Off to a smart start



Sam Ward, USA TODAY

Early childhood series may continue

Fox Valley parents are clearly hungry to hear more about the best cutting-edge research available on early childhood development.

The recent Appleton Education Foundation speaker series featuring four highly regarded brain investigators from University of Wisconsin-Madison's Waisman Center resonated so well with the public that AEF hopes to carry that momentum into a new series next year.

"The response to the Brain to Five series exceeded our expectations dramatically and

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we are going to build on the success of this year," said Tim Riley, AEF board president. "AEF is committed to continuing to look at early childhood."

Details of how the topic will be framed next time still

have to be worked out, but AEF wants to delve more deeply into the nature-and-nurture question.

"We're interested in looking at the relationship between nature's impact on how we grow and how we nurture our children," Riley said.

Julie Krause, AEF executive director, said the board has been kicking around a number of ideas to discuss this summer.

"We'd like to look at practical things we can have some influence on, whether it be the optimal setup for learning at a child care center or nutri-

tion," she said.

Krause said Waisman officials were pleased with the large turnouts here and have an interest continuing their partnership with AEF.

Riley reflected on this year's series, which brought world-renowned researcher Richard Davidson and high-profile Waisman colleagues Susan Ellis Weismer, Jenny Saffran and Seth David Pollak to town in March, April and May.

All four sessions were well attended, drawing crowds to-

NUFER: Brain to Five series may spark another series next year

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taling more than 2,000.

"This truly was a community education series," he said, and encouraging for the AEF's first attempt at this. "We knew this topic of early childhood education was of importance. Nationally, there is an increasing amount of interest in the topic and locally we have some very strong school districts that are forward-thinking, so we thought it would be a good fit and we turned out to be right.

"The community at large, from parents to child care providers and teachers, became fascinated with the information the Waisman researchers shared."

Most heartening, he said,

was their expert advice and practical tips.

"People didn't walk away with just theory about how the brain works but walked away with what they could do because of their increased understanding of how early childhood development occurs in the brain," he said.

Riley said credit for the consistently large attendance goes not only to AEF and Appleton Area School District efforts to spread the word but to financial sponsors Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, Community First Credit Union, J.J. Keller Foundation, the Mielke Family Foundation, Affinity Health System and ThedaCare that also lent networking support.

The public was asked to

weigh in on the series and their responses indicate they want more.

"One person commented that the series has been so useful, she'd come to a session every month if we offered it," Krause said, adding that people came from as far away as Green Bay and Fond du Lac.

"We're excited to continue this," said Riley. "It's a testament to what this community can do when they join together and really examine an issue."

So if this topic is near and dear to you and you were unable to attend this year, watch for future news about the 2009 series and put it on your calendar.

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