Reframing Early Childhood Development and Learning in Alamance County

August 2016

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Introduction

Impact Alamance's formation in 2013 represents an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen the county's environments, systems, programs, and services so that all Alamance children can grow up to be healthy, contributing members of their communities. Realizing this mission requires recognizing and applying the scientific research that has established in recent decades how children learn and grow and the factors that promote their healthy development. This science does not speak for itself, however.[1] A rich body of scholarship on social change suggests that movements are most successful when they coalesce around, and effectively disseminate, a *unified* framing strategy—a master narrative about *how* children develop and learn that mobilizes people to take action.[2] This new narrative must be coherent and persuasive enough to dislodge folk wisdom about early child development and reshape dominant understandings of it.

Strategic Frame Analysis® shows that reshaping these existing understandings demands a *Core Story* approach that anticipates and answers the questions that attend to every social issue: *Why does this issue matter to all of us? What are the mechanisms at play—and what's going wrong? What should we do to move forward?* The recommended Core Story begins by activating the *Values* that establish why addressing issues related to early childhood development is so important to our society, moves on to establish key scientific concepts with *Explanatory Metaphors*, and concludes by highlighting *Solutions*—the interventions and policies that address children's issues.

The typical story that advocates tell about early development and learning focuses on evoking sympathy for "vulnerable children." The empirically tested communications strategy presented here takes a different approach. Rather than relying solely on appeals to emotion, it employs a science-based story about early brain development that is designed to build public support for policies that support children's learning and healthy development. In the past three decades, scientists have learned a great deal about the human brain —how it is built over time, what factors support its healthy growth, and how it affects our health, abilities, and outcomes. FrameWorks' prior research in the United States and internationally, confirmed through qualitative and quantitative research in Alamance County, suggests that telling a new, science-based story about children's development can help the public engage more deeply with the policy, programmatic, and systems-level change that advocates know is necessary to improve outcomes for children, families, and communities.

The Story Impact Alamance Wants to Tell

Impact Alamance has embarked on a multiyear initiative aimed at enhancing the region's health and prosperity by helping communities identify, develop, and sustain experiences and environments that build strong foundations for lifelong health and well-being. The initiative envisions resilient communities where multiple points of contact—from across the educational, health care, and human service domains—are focused on evidence-based practices that promote children's healthy development.

The key principles that Impact Alamance wishes to communicate to nonexpert members of the Alamance public follow.[3] These principles reflect the scientific consensus about early brain development and related issues. Together, they constitute what FrameWorks calls "the untranslated Expert Story"—the core content that scientists want nonexpert members of the public to understand and incorporate into their thinking. This content is "untranslated" in the sense that it is presented without the benefit of specific communications tools or strategies designed to make it more accessible to nonexpert audiences.

- Brain development begins before birth and extends into young adulthood. There are two especially important periods of brain development: the early years—particularly the first three years of life—and adolescence.

- Neurological development is driven by early experiences, through interaction with adults and with the environment.

- Toxic stress—or the chronic activation of the body's stress response system in the absence of adult support—damages the developing brain and leads to problems in learning and behavior and increases susceptibility to physical and mental illness.

- Resilience is a process of positive biological, psychological, and physiological adaptation to adversity. It is generally conceptualized as reduced vulnerability to environmental risk experiences, the ability to overcome stress or adversity, or a relatively good outcome despite adverse experiences. While early research focused on naturally occurring resilience in humans, scientists are increasingly researching how to *promote* resilience.

- The brain and other biological systems have the capacity to change over the life course—a phenomenon known as developmental plasticity. Different biological systems remain plastic (or changeable) to different degrees, and there are significant periods of plasticity after early childhood. It's easier and more cost-effective to provide the foundation for healthy development early in life, but it is still possible to improve outcomes later on.

- The science of early brain development has important policy implications. The brain changes in response to environments and experiences; improving them can, in turn, improve developmental outcomes.

- The education system in Alamance County requires innovations that will prepare today's students for future workforce needs. These innovations may include changing the structure of the school day and academic calendar; opening classrooms to invite and encourage greater community

involvement in education; and making creative use of technology to align the education system with the region's goals.

- The school system needs to focus on the skills the next generation needs to function in the world of tomorrow—skills like problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration—and it must take the role of social and emotional learning as seriously as cognition and content.

- Inequity in the educational system is a problem that impacts all residents of Alamance.

Together, these principles comprise a Core Story of early childhood development and education. By explaining *how* children develop, and the factors that increase and decrease the likelihood of positive developmental outcomes, this story provides the foundation for additional conversations about early learning, education, and lifelong trajectories of health and well-being.[4]

Frames to Avoid: Default Public Understandings that "Eat" the Story

The public uses a rich and complex set of cultural models—deeply held cognitive shortcuts to make sense of new information[5]—to understand early childhood development and early adversity. In many cases, these models run directly counter to the communications goals of early childhood scientists, experts, and advocates. Put another way: These perceptions have the potential to limit public support for policies designed to prevent and ameliorate the impacts of *Toxic Stress* and promote resilience.

FrameWorks refers to this set of default assumptions as the "swamp" of cultural models. Just as a swamp contains many different types of creatures—some threatening, and some not—the public has many different ways of understanding an issue. Some of these ways of understanding are productive, in that they align with the messages that experts want to convey, but others can act as pernicious "gators" that can gobble up the intended meaning of advocates' communications.

Recognizing these default cultural models, and understanding how they shape thinking about early development and adversity, is a critical step in crafting effective communications about this issue. The swamp of dominant cultural models must be understood, avoided, and counteracted in order for the public to deeply engage with Impact Alamance's work. FrameWorks researchers have frequently encountered these models over the last two decades in interviews with members of the public across the United States. FrameWorks used qualitative research in July 2015 to confirm their existence in Alamance.

Childhood development is a "black box." FrameWorks has found that members of the public typically fell back on the understanding that children develop "automatically," following "natural" trajectories of physical growth and maturation. The process and mechanisms by which development happens remain largely "black-boxed" and poorly articulated.[6] As a result, people are less likely to consider either the contingent nature of development or the critical importance of positive environments and experiences and stable, supportive, and responsive relationships. Instead, people assume that much of what constitutes "normal" and "good" development happens of its own accord.[7] When people are using this model to think about children's development, they have difficulty understanding the need for and supporting programs that are designed to *intervene* to promote healthy development. After all, why intervene in something that happens on its own?

Young children are "hard to think." When asked to think about children and children's issues, members of the public typically focus on *older* children (such as those in middle or high school). This phenomenon occurs even when researchers specifically ask questions about younger children. People's natural tendency is to "age up" and focus on older children because they are not used to thinking and reasoning about how very young children develop.

It's all about the parents. The *Family Bubble* model refers to the idea that child development and children's outcomes depend, above all else, on parents. Early development, the thinking goes, happens in the home, under parental purview, and is beyond the influence of outside contextual and environmental factors. But once people focus on parenting practices, all of the other institutions and factors that shape early childhood development disappear from view. This highly dominant model obfuscates the importance of the environmental conditions, supports, and nonfamilial relationships that affect children and families and undermines support for the role of other factors that promote healthy childhood development.

Children determine their own fates. The public generally attributes authority and responsibility for outcomes to individual children. This *Self-Made Child* model closely aligns with a broader, foundational model in American culture: the emphasis on independence and self-reliance. The strength of this model intensifies as children age.[8] It is dangerous because it obscures the role of environments, relationships, and external supports in children's development as well as the damaging impact that stressful environments can have on children's outcomes.

Children are sponges. Members of the public often speak of children as "sponges," especially when reasoning about how school-age children learn. In this model, children absorb, and are filled with, that which surrounds them. This model runs counter to expert understandings of children as emergent, contingent, and developmentally plastic beings who develop skills and capacities through the active processes of engagement, application, and experimentation.

Increasing teacher pay is the only imaginable reform to the education system. Members of the public understand that changes must be made to the educational system, especially regarding compensation for teachers. But while people are attentive to systems-level changes, they have a narrow understanding of precisely *how* changes in teachers' pay might impact learning outcomes for children in Alamance County. Without a clear sense of how children learn and develop, the public is poorly positioned to appreciate how a given educational reform can improve outcomes.

Frames to Advance: Redirections to Safely Navigate Through the Swamp of Cultural Models

In the section below, we specify a set of recommendations that can help communicators navigate through the swamp of cultural models about children's development and early adversity. These recommendations, which were tested with Alamance residents using qualitative or quantitative research methods, aim to help communicators avoid cuing unproductive cultural models and instead cue more productive ways of thinking about children and their development.

1. Fill in the public's "black-boxed" understanding of development and learning with the Explanatory Metaphors *Brain Architecture* and *Serve and Return*.

Metaphors are well-known *poetic* devices. But FrameWorks' research shows that they can also be powerful *explanatory* devices that allow for deeper and more nuanced kinds of thinking and understanding of complex concepts. An Explanatory Metaphor is a simple, concrete, and memorable comparison between something that the audience understands and something that they struggle to understand that quickly and effectively explains the abstract or complex topic. These metaphors empower people to think through an issue and address it more productively.

Ensuring that the public understands how an issue works is a cornerstone of an effective communications strategy. This requires a clear explanation of the causes of a problem and the mechanism by which the problem is created. Explanation invites the public into a richer and deeper understanding of an issue and empowers people to consider how to effectively address it. Explanations about children's development must connect the *causes* and *outcomes* of development to the communities and contexts in which this process takes place; that is, communicators must help people see clearly *how* social conditions affect children's development. This is particularly important in Alamance County, where qualitative and quantitative testing indicates that the *Family Bubble* cultural model (which attributes responsibility for children's outcomes solely to the parents and family) is especially strong.

The following metaphors have been shown to help the public understand the process of early brain development; as such, they are essential features of an explanatory strategy that connects community-level programs and interventions to children's developmental outcomes.

Brain Architecture. FrameWorks developed the *Brain Architecture* Explanatory Metaphor to communicate the ideas that brains are built over time and that there are critical periods of intense construction activity, particularly in the early years.[9] The power of construction metaphors is that they can at once communicate *process* (brains are built) and *agency* or *efficacy* (building is an active and ongoing process, and there is always room for change and improvement). The metaphor helps people understand that early experiences

affect the brain and establish either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for subsequent health, learning, growth, and behavior. An example of this metaphor follows.

> The basic architecture of a human brain is constructed through a process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Like the construction of a home, the building process begins with laying the foundation, framing the rooms, and wiring the electrical system, and these processes have to happen in the right order. Early experiences literally shape how the brain gets built. A strong foundation in the very early years increases the probability of positive health and learning outcomes later on, while a weak foundation increases the odds of later difficulties. Just as with a house, you can remodel when you need more functionality, but it's less expensive to get it right the first time.

The metaphor has a positive effect on public thinking because it:

- Explains how neurological development follows predictable stages, including rapid synapse formation in some periods, pruning of neural connections at others, and the development of specific neural circuits at specific stages.

- Helps people understand that the construction project starts during the first three years of life and that infancy is an especially intense period of neurological development.

- Focuses attention on the strength or fragility of the foundation, which shapes all subsequent development, learning, and behavioral outcomes.

- Communicates that development is an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood.

Recommendations:

- Use the language of construction to describe development as an active process. This will help dislodge passive models of development that are dominant among the U.S. public.

- Stress the importance of laying a strong foundation. This aspect of the metaphor trains people's attention on the critical period between zero and three years old, and thus serves as a powerful antidote to the *Aging Up* cultural model.

Serve and Return. The *Brain Architecture* Explanatory Metaphor establishes that brains are built over time. The metaphor of *Serve and Return* helps people understand that relationships with supportive caregivers are a critical part of the brain-building process. By describing how reciprocal interactions are the "active ingredients" that build the brain circuitry on which future learning and development are based, the metaphor helps inoculate against default assumptions that children's development and learning "simply happen."[10] Furthermore, *Serve and Return* can happen with a variety of adults and caregivers, so it is able to explain development and learning in a wide variety of settings. An example of this metaphor follows.

> Scientists now know that the interactive influences of genes and experience shape the developing brain. The active ingredient is the "serve and return" relationships that babies and young children have with their parents and other caregivers in their families or communities. Like the process of serve and return in tennis and volleyball, young children naturally reach out for interaction through babbling and facial expressions.

The metaphor has a positive effect on public thinking because it:

- Communicates the basic process of how neural connections are made through mutually contingent reciprocal interactions. It conveys that development depends on more than getting children to copy adults; rather, it is about getting adults "in sync" with children.

- Establishes that this kind of interaction comes in many forms, including, but not limited to, language.

- Opens space for extra-familial relationships and conveys that stable, long-term, supportive relationships between adults and young children are essential to healthy development.

- Helps people think about how the interactions that occur, or don't occur, in a child's early years have a significant and lasting effect on development and learning that follow.

Recommendations:

- Use the term "caregiver" or "adult" rather than parent. Doing so expands the conversation beyond parents and avoids activating the *Family Bubble* model.

- Point to policy-level conditions that help or hinder the serve-and-return process. These include issues such as child-caregiver ratios, age-appropriate curriculum, parental leave policies, and access to appropriate mental health supports.

2. Use the *Toxic Stress* and *Prosperity Grid* Explanatory Metaphors to make systems and conditions—rather than people—the villain in the story.

Toxic Stress. The Explanatory Metaphor *Toxic Stress* explains how chronic exposure to early adverse experiences negatively impacts brain development. *Toxic Stress* distinguishes between stress responses that are time-limited and buffered by the presence of a supportive adult and those that are severe, chronic, and occur in the absence of adult support. It helps to explain why interventions that ameliorate exposure to severe adversity are critical to children's future health and development.[11] An example of this metaphor follows.

> There are many different kinds of stress, but some stress is so severe and frequent that it becomes toxic, especially when children don't have supports. Toxic Stress in early childhood can result from extreme poverty, frequent neglect, abuse, or severe maternal depression, all of which can disrupt

the developing brain. In this way, Toxic Stress can lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health. Environments and communities that have supports and resources can help children withstand the effects of toxic stressors and promote healthy development and well-being.

The metaphor has a positive effect on public thinking because it:

- Establishes stress as a factor in child development and makes a clear distinction between normal, everyday stress and serious adversity, which can cause disruptions in brain and biological development.

- Shows how responsive caregiving moderates stress responses, thereby building public understanding of how environmental factors influence development.

- Communicates the gravity of adverse experiences; the brain-based explanation can dislodge the unproductive belief that stress is a manifestation of heightened emotions.

- Conveys that early adversity can lead to lifelong difficulties in learning, memory, and self-regulation.

Recommendations:

- Connect social conditions and disparities to health and behavioral outcomes.
- Elevate the public's understanding of the gravity and urgency of adverse community conditions such as poverty and violence.

Prosperity Grid. The Explanatory Metaphor *Prosperity Grid* focuses people's attention on the unequal distribution of resources across communities and explains how inequities in access to resources lead to disparities in outcomes.[12] By emphasizing systems and context, the metaphor helps shift people away from the belief that some people don't do well because they lack drive and self-discipline (the *Self-Makingness* cultural model). It helps people consider how *place* determines whether people have access to resources, which, in turn, influences their *outcomes*. This aspect is particularly useful for Impact Alamance, given the variability in economic development across the county and differential access to public services. An example of this metaphor follows.

> There's a Prosperity Grid that supports people in Alamance County. It's a grid of resources that keeps people healthy, provides them with opportunities for success, and helps them develop talents and abilities to contribute to society. This grid comprises resources like schools, hospitals, community centers, and other institutions. The problem is that the grid has faulty wiring. Resources are widely available in some parts of the county, but not others. In some places, people can plug into the grid and access a strong and reliable flow of resources. In other places, the current is patchy—and the resource flow is weak and unreliable. To support all people in our county, we need to figure out where the grid is patchy and repair it. This way, everyone in our county can get the resources they need.

The metaphor has a positive effect on public thinking because it:

- Establishes that inequitable outcomes are the result of the way the *grid* functions—not individual choices or willpower.

- Helps people understand that access to resources varies depending on where people live in the grid.

- Communicates that when resources flow through the grid reliably, people can get what they need to help their children develop well.

- Focuses on the idea that the grid needs to be monitored, maintained, and, if necessary, repaired.

Recommendations:

- Use the language of a "patchy grid" to draw attention to that fact that not all people in Alamance County have access to the resources they need.

- Use the metaphor to emphasize the importance of having services and resources available across the entire county.

3. Mute *Family Bubble* patterns of thinking with the *Resilience Scale* Explanatory Metaphor.

The metaphor of the *Resilience Scale* was created to translate the emerging science of brain plasticity and resilience. It channels thinking toward the multiple factors that influence development. In so doing, it addresses some of the most critical gaps in public understanding of children's development.[13] It encourages the public to focus less on willpower and "self-makingness" and more on the community-level supports that support children's positive development. An example of the metaphor follows.

> Think of child development as a scale that has two sides. One side gets stacked with negative things, like stress, violence, and poverty, and the other side gets loaded with positive things, like supportive relationships, skill-building opportunities, good jobs, and access to quality health care. To help children turn out well so they can build and strengthen their communities, we need the scale to tip toward the positive. Loading up the positive side of the scale can help children overcome the negative factors that build up on the other side. We should strive to address the negative weight on the scale and also load up the positive side by making sure all families and communities have needed supports.

The metaphor affects public thinking because it:

- Mutes the *Family Bubble* and amplifies environmental influences (both positive and negative) and their significant impact on outcomes.

- Inoculates against the perception that resilience is an individual character trait.
- Sparks discussions of the community-level factors that determine positive and negative outcomes for children.

Recommendations:

- Reference Alamance-specific resources when using this metaphor. This will help people understand how to load the positive side of the scale with local resources and how to avoid adding Alamance-specific dangers to the negative side.

4. Help Alamance residents conceptualize education reform with the *Remodeling* Explanatory Metaphor.

Frame communications about changes to the country's educational system carefully. Otherwise, the public may react defensively; or, they may infer that the degree of change needed is impossible to achieve and/or will disrupt the system. After all, the "education is in crisis" frame is pervasive and has weakened people's sense of efficacy. The *Remodeling* Explanatory Metaphor has been proven to communicate the need for innovative reforms and new approaches to learning, explain how reform processes work, and inoculate against "crisis thinking" about education reform.[14] It consistently and reliably expands the public's understanding of why the education system needs to be reformed and how to achieve that goal. An example of this metaphor follows.

> Changing our education system is like remodeling an old but valuable house. We need to keep what works and update what doesn't to make it more functional for today's needs.

The metaphor has a positive effect on public thinking because it:

- Establishes reform as both necessary and significant while also showing that it is *feasible*.
- Focuses attention on *how* to reform the educational system. Like education reform, remodeling a house is a step-by-step process that involves changes of varying sizes and degrees; even larger, structural changes are thinkable and understandable.
- Inoculates against pessimism about, and disengagement from, reform conversations.

Recommendations:

- Emphasize that the goal of remodeling is to better enable people to meet current needs and goals.
- Point out that remodeling is not about superficial alterations or a complete "re-do" but rather about significant changes to the structure and functionality of a building.

- Focus on the step-by-step nature of the remodeling process, which involves keeping what's working and fixing what's not.

5. Provide actionable steps people can take to promote children's development and learning.

The framing recommendations outlined above are designed to prime a conversation about *Solutions*. The story is incomplete without a final chapter about specific actions that can prevent and ameliorate the effects of *Toxic Stress* and promote resilience. However, a discussion of proposed solutions must begin after the problem has been explained.

Other Frames to Advance: Framing Recommendations from National Research

The recommendations listed above were tested in Alamance County. Those below are drawn from FrameWorks' larger body of research on education and education reform. Because these frame elements were tested across the nation, communicators can feel confident using them when talking about education reform in Alamance County.

1. Explain how students weave the strongest *Skill Ropes* when their interests are engaged.

Good learning environments help students master a wide range of skill sets that include—but also go beyond—basic academics. This idea often conflicts with the public's narrow understanding of "the basics" as the only important skills that children should learn in school. *Weaving Skill Ropes* helps communicators talk about a variety of important skills and explain how those skills develop. An example of this metaphor follows.

> Learning is about weaving skills together to form strong skill ropes. For a rope to be durable and usable, it needs strong and tightly woven strands. Learning is also about developing interconnected skills. To do its job, each strand in a skill rope needs all the others.

Learning, like weaving, is an active process; both require opportunities for application and practice. This metaphor helps dislodge the public's understanding of learning as a passive process and helps people envision what student-centered learning environments could look like: settings where teachers help students develop a range of interconnected skills through practical application and practice. And by using an analogy to an object that involves "both/and" rather than "either/or," it also redirects the public away from a hierarchical, linear view of knowledge and skill and toward a more intertwined, mutually reinforcing understanding of learning.

2. Use the *Cooking with Information* Explanatory Metaphor to show how teachers actively help students.

To explain effective instructional strategies, communicators should first reframe "teaching." Most members of the public think about teaching as a top-down activity and equate assessment with standardized tests. Experts, however, have a different view; they see teaching as an active, engaged pedagogy that fosters higher-order thinking and skills and that relies on ongoing and multimodal assessments to evaluate students' learning progress. Communicators need to take the time to explain the need for student-centered instructional strategies and the modes of assessment that are necessary for student-centered learning

initiatives to be successful. FrameWorks research shows that the *Cooking with Information* metaphor helps members of the public think productively about the skills children need to master and about the importance of instructional strategies associated with hands-on and experiential learning and assessment. An example of the metaphor follows.

> Children have to know how to use information in the same way that cooks have to know how to use ingredients. This involves working with a master chef who can help them select, evaluate, and combine the ingredients in a hands-on, exploratory way.

The metaphor provides an accessible and engaging way to talk about the importance of hands-on instruction. Like chefs, teachers are active mentors who help students develop the skills they need to "cook" with information. In addition, this metaphor allows for a more robust understanding of what quality assessment looks like. This is particularly true for formative assessment, a topic that is difficult for the public to understand and value. How do you know when you have created a delicious dish? You taste a sample—and then you ask others to taste it. It would be foolish to wait until the food is on the table to check its quality; instead, you take little bites along the way, adjust the ingredients, and check again. Assessment is similar; it is reasonable and essential to good instruction. Using the *Cooking with Information* metaphor can seed a more productive discussion with policymakers around the need for performance assessment, self-assessment, and peer assessment—all issues that are central to student-centered learning initiatives.

3. The *Charging Stations* Explanatory Metaphor can help the public understand how educational inequity happens and its impacts on Alamance County.

The *Charging Stations* metaphor explains how inequality translates into differences in educational outcomes. It does so by explaining disparities in outcomes as the function of certain "upstream" disadvantages related to race, place, language, and income. It focuses on schools and school systems rather than groups and minimizes the importance of individual choices and traits, like willpower and stamina, by establishing disparities in outcomes as population-level phenomena. It also explains how educational funding structures (i.e., funding public schools through local property taxes) drive disparities in outcomes. Finally, *Charging Stations* neutralizes the "zero-sum" associations that often result from the ubiquitous "achievement gap" metaphor. An example of the *Charging Stations* metaphor follows.

> Learning opportunities are like charging stations. Currently, access to these stations varies greatly from one place to the next. We need to make powerful charging stations ubiquitous so every child can charge up on education—and take an active role in their learning.

The metaphor helps members of the public understand the wide range of environmental factors that shape individual educational outcomes. At the same time, it attributes responsibility for educational outcomes to systems rather than individual parents, students, and teachers.

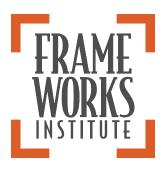# Frames to Avoid: Potential Communications Traps

In the following section, we list communications cues that may be "easy to think" but that in fact trap public thinking in unproductive evaluations and judgments. Traps are habitual communications practices that can be difficult to notice and hard to avoid. They are plausible ways of framing an issue that, upon investigation, fail to achieve the desired effect on people's understanding of, and support for, an issue—or even do more harm than good. We focus here on common traps in science and advocacy communications.

- Avoid discussions that invoke models of childhood development that imply absorption or imitation. Communicators should avoid language that suggests that development and learning are passive processes and instead use metaphors like *Brain Architecture* and *Resilience Scale* to describe the dynamic processes by which development happens.

- Avoid using stories about individual children or families to illustrate the need for interventions. Individual stories reinforce notions of individual responsibility, willpower, and family autonomy, thereby dampening people's understanding of the collective nature of these issues and their support for systemic policies and programs. Instead, communicators should tell systems-level stories—stories that position systems and social structures as the protagonists and antagonists—rather then "episodic" stories about the trials and tribulations faced by individual children and families.[15] FrameWorks' online course *Wide Angle Lens* provides more detailed analysis about how individual case studies—no matter how vivid—can undermine policy-level stories: http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/workshops/wideanglelens/children/

- Avoid phrases like "vulnerable families" or "at-risk children." These terms cue the idea that families and children are responsible for exercising the self-discipline and hard work they need to climb to more advantageous circumstances. Instead, talk about children and families who live in communities that lack resources.

- Avoid talking about "resilient children" or phrases that suggest that resilience is an inherent personality trait. Instead, talk about resilience as a quality that can be strengthened and promoted through quality programs and strong social supports.

- Avoid rationales for supporting children's development that focus exclusively on the benefits for wider communities. Instead, highlight the intrinsic reasons to support healthy development, including the community's sense of moral obligation to young children.

Conclusion

The narrative described in this report has been proven to advance a wide array of reform measures. It can therefore be shared by many groups advocating for related, but distinct, policy changes. This narrative does not try to capture the public's attention with dozens of different stories about individuals or policy remedies; rather it advances a "lift all boats" structure that maps on to multiple policy solutions. It charts a course through the dominant patterns of public thinking about child development in Alamance, identifies major communications challenges, and recommends how to redirect communications to improve public understanding.

Impact Alamance's success will depend, in large part, on the extent to which advocates can engage the public in a *new* conversation about how children develop and the types of early environments and experiences that establish and maintain positive developmental trajectories. FrameWorks' research strongly suggests that a new narrative that deepens appreciation for and understanding of the foundations of healthy child development, and of the failings of the current policy environment to provide solid foundations, is within our reach. We urge communicators to expand their explanatory messaging so that ordinary people are able to understand the systemic perspective that experts take for granted. By making use of the reframing strategies in this report, communicators can help the people of Alamance recognize how the current system fails young people and how systemic and policy reforms can create a better and brighter future for all.

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O'Neil, M., and Haydon, A. (2016). *Reframing Early Childhood Development and Learning in Alamance County: A FrameWorks Core Story Brief.* Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

Endnotes

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[4] For details on FrameWorks' education research, see http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/k-12-education.html.

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