Grounding Immigration Advocacy in Communications Science

Sponsored by the AAP Immigrant Health Special Interest Group

February 2, 2018

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FrameWorks is on a mission...

to advance the nonprofit sector's capacity
to frame the public discourse on social problems.
Examples of FrameWorks’ Research

• Harvard University Center on the Developing Child – how to translate science of early childhood brain and biological development

• Paul Hamlyn Foundation – how to promote a more productive discussion about crime and criminal justice reform in the UK

• National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children – how to use communications as part of an innovative strategy to prevent child maltreatment in the UK

• Alberta Family Wellness Initiative – how to talk about the science of addiction; training researchers, practitioners and policymakers to use frames to close the research/practice gap

• Public Health Informatics Institute – how to help public health professionals understand the function and the value of informatics as a crucial part of population health improvement


• DentaQuest Foundation – how to help the public understand the importance of oral health to overall health, and engage policymakers in thinking of oral health as a social justice issue
Why Does Framing Matter?

How Can We Reframe the Issue?
Because Understanding is Frame Dependent

N=6,000

Interdependence
Ingenuity
Empathy

Support for Evidence-Based Addiction Policies

Policy Support relative to control

Because Understanding is Frame Dependent
Because Frames Can Help Make Change

- Communication
- Discourse
- Thinking
- Policy & Practice
Changes in Communication

TOXIC STRESS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

2014 FRANKLIN COUNTY CHILDREN'S REPORT
How Toxic Stress Threatens Success
Changes in Discourse

The New York Times
The Opinion Pages

Opinionator

Protecting Children From Toxic Stress
By DAVID BORNSTEIN  OCTOBER 30, 2013 11:55 AM
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<th>2002</th>
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<td>Only 42% understood that infants can communicate before they learn to speak.</td>
<td>96% understood that infants can communicate before they learn to speak.</td>
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<td>Public unsure whether babies’ cries were ‘conscious manipulation’ or expressions of genuine need.</td>
<td>85% understood that for infants, cries and signals indicate a genuine need for adult attention.</td>
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CALIFORNIA SENATE PASSES RESOLUTION ASKING GOV TO LOOK AT INTERVENTION POLICIES TO ALLEVIATE “TOXIC STRESS” IN CHILDREN
Because You Have a Problem
You Say...They Think

AAA

Expert/Advocate

BBB

Public
“Current immigration policies are creating stressful environments, which can derail development and have negative long-term effects on health and wellbeing.”
Opinions as Expectations

“People approach the world not as naïve, blank-slate receptacles who take in stimuli … in some independent and objective way, but rather as experienced and sophisticated veterans of perception who have stored their prior experiences as an organized mass. This prior experience then takes the form of expectations about the world, and in the vast majority of cases, the world, being a systematic place, confirms these expectations, saving the individual the trouble of figuring things out anew all the time.”

Current immigration policies are creating stressful environments, which can derail development and have negative long-term effects on health and wellbeing.

You Say ... They Think

CULTURE!
Connecting the issues of immigration + ECD involves both challenges and opportunities.

Most Americans don’t see connections between these topics.

Dominant narrative frames immigrants as “others”.

⚠️
Recommendation #1: Lead with an aspirational appeal to shared values, not a stark negative evaluation of the status quo.
When advocacy narratives lead with problems, they make it harder for the public to see solutions.
Use Values to establish why an issue matters to society

Values are a broad category of cherished cultural ideals: enduring beliefs that orient people’s attitudes.

Values aren’t the entire frame - but they are an essential part of one. Values help to:

• Establish a collective orientation
• Tap emotions that work for policy thinking: curiosity, concern, and can-do

ME vs. WE
Three values recommended for messaging about immigration and ECD

**Shared Prosperity:**
Children are the basis of our future civic and economic wellbeing.

**Human Potential:**
We need children’s talents and skills to be available to our communities.

**Human Dignity:**
We have a moral obligation to respect people as people.
INSTEAD OF THIS

“The outlook is bleak for children in our nation. Too few have access to what they need to grow, develop, and thrive - and the lack of opportunity is structured by immigration status.”

TRY THIS

“For America to reach its full potential as the economic and moral leader in the world, the nation must intentionally unlock the potential of our children, ensuring that all kids have opportunities to grow, develop, and thrive.”
INSTEAD OF THIS

Today, one in four children in the United States lives in an immigrant family. Soon, we will reach a demographic shift in which the majority of children in America are children of color. We must give these children and their families the tools and skills that will help them succeed.

TRY THIS

We need all children here to reach their full potential if we are to reach ours as a nation. Much of the country’s future success depends on whether we will equip children living in immigrant families and their parents with the tools and skills that will help them learn, develop and contribute. We can’t afford to wait any longer to figure out how to get this right: one in four children in the United States lives in a family where at least one parent was born abroad.
Recommendation #2: Attend carefully to *attribution of responsibility* when highlighting racial or ethnic disparities.
Attribution of responsibility refers to the framing of: who or what causes a problem, who or what is affected, and where responsibility for addressing it lies.

Many aspects of a communication work together to create the attribution of responsibility.
“The proficiency rate data reveal that more than half of fourth graders nationally are struggling to learn to read, failing to reach an important milestone on the path to success.”

“Given that more than half of fourth graders nationally are not reading at the levels needed to prepare the nation for an information-based economy, the proficiency rate data suggest that greater efforts are needed to strengthen the education system.”
“The Race for Results indicators for education and early work experiences can inform an assessment of how well we are preparing children to take on the opportunities and challenges our communities will encounter tomorrow.”
Rephrase relentlessly to get the *attribution of responsibility* for disparities focused on underlying causes, shared consequences, and social responsibility.

Don’t leave room for the public imagination to place blame for disparities on the marginalized communities themselves.
Recommendation #3:
Use a science-informed *Brain Development* frame to explain universal processes of human development and then show how development is being undermined by inequitable or exclusionary policies.
“No child should have to live in fear of being separated from their parents.”

“Highly stressful experiences can disrupt the building of children’s brain architecture - and few childhood experiences are more stressful than a long-term or permanent separation from a parent.”
To shift the baseline of public understanding, take an explanatory approach.

Support for sound policy

Push $n$  Push $n+1$  Push $n+2$  Push $n+3$
Brain Architecture: Brains are built in the early years. Context influences its sturdiness. The foundation matters for years to come.

When early learning settings are high quality, they actively build early brain architecture.

The brain is being built in the earliest stages of life. Sound nutrition and access to health care are essential construction materials.

Consistent, stable, responsive caregiving is essential to building brain architecture. Inclusive immigration policy would help ensure strong foundations.
CHECK IN
Let’s continue the conversation!

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