Early Means Early

Mapping the Gaps between Expert, Stakeholder, and Public Understandings of Early Child Development in South Africa

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Frames are aspects of messaging that activate existing understandings that people have about an issue.

Messages are framed by many factors: tone, visuals, symbols, values, numbers, metaphors, exemplars, sequencing, and others. All can act to shape understanding.

As communicators, we want to be intentional and strategic about our framing choices.
Frames matter

because

they have different effects on how people understand and act around an issue
Support for Child Mental Health Policies (USA)

* = P<.01
You can’t assume people are hearing what you are saying...
Why don't the greenhouse gases escape through the hole in the ozone layer?
Not this...
Cognitive short cuts created through years of experience and expectation.

Many are widely shared across a population, and are reinforced in media, education, custom, and elsewhere.

People rely on cultural models to organize and make meaning out of experiences, feelings, questions… and your communications.
The **science** you want to be communicating and implementing.

Policymakers and implementers.

The people who raise and interact with children, as well as who vote, volunteer, work, and participate in the national discourse about children.
### Research Base

**Experts**

*Existing research from 15+ years of work with ECD scientists in US, UK, Australia, Canada, and Brazil*

*6 Interviews with South African ECD experts (Nov and Dec 2015)*

**Stakeholders**

*10 Interviews with ECD implementers and decision-makers in government (Nov and Dec 2015)*

**Public**

*30 Cultural Models Interviews*  
(March & April 2016)

*48 On-the-Street Interviews*  
(February 2016 in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban)

* Conducted in 4 languages: IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Afrikaans, English
The Science of ECD
What develops?

• The developing brain is central to the story
• Brain plasticity decreases over time
• Executive function & self-regulation skills are set up early
How to make this a story that people across South Africa understand and feel an investment in?
Brain Development is contingent on stimulation and inputs

“It is everything that is developed from the womb onwards. So, first of all, you have got to understand the rapid processes of brain development.”

About both prenatal and early post-natal experiences

“Early child development begins at the conception stage. That human foetus is already in early child development.”
Multiple environments, especially home

“Early child development happens first and foremost in the home—where the parents are, where the extended family is, and where the friends come and visit.”

Poverty undermines development

“Poverty obviously is a massive factor, not just because you don’t have resources for things, but because of the strain it puts on mental health issues.”
Social Outcomes

“It’s the future of our country… if you want to be safe, secure, productive in South Africa, you cannot afford to ignore early childhood development.”

Need investments in antenatal care and family support

“I would place a much higher emphasis on the importance of parental support and capacity development.”
Aging Up

“The public policy that I would change is, I would say, okay, state-funded universal access to early child development programmes from the age of three for children with different modalities, not necessarily in centres, but different modalities that can be provided.” (emphasis added)
Public Models
30 Cultural Models interviews

48 “On-the-Street” interviews

- 2 hours
- one-on-one
- semi-structured
- recorded
- 4 languages

- 10-12 minutes
- sidewalk recruitment
- open-ended questions
**Demographics**

Recruitment through community-based organizations in all 9 provinces:
- local NGOs
- faith groups, sports clubs, farming groups
- men’s and women’s groups
- Rotary International Club
- Community Advisory Boards
- Community Policing Forums
- School Governing Body

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What is ECD and How Does It Happen?
“You start to discipline a child as early as you can...Once they are born, you need to start to instill discipline.”

“A happy house, proper food, love and attention – that’s the main needs of a child.”
“From 0 to 1 they can laugh and cry and sit and then crawl, and maybe walk at 1, and they start developing teeth… If you tickle them they smile. You feed them they are happy.”
The Basics

- Love
- Discipline
- Nutrition
- Safety

Assumption of Automaticity

What Develops

- Physical
- Emotional
- Social
Aging Up

“I would say that early childhood development is about the education system of the country, to develop the child.”
Resilience – You Have It, Or You Don’t

“Some of them just have tough skin. Some have stronger personalities…and others don’t really.”
What Shapes ECD?
“Common dangers are child abuse, that happens in the house between family members…and rape, kidnapping, trafficking.”
Environments Are Key

Poverty Undermines Development

“I notice the difference between children who come from poor families and those who are from well off families. It looks like poor nutrition can affect the development.”
Who is responsible for ECD?
“The community has a role to play, as well as parents, in developing children’s mind-set so that children can develop and reach their adult stage.”
Why Does ECD Matter?
“Early” Child Development is Foundational

“It is the foundation, the base of what the child will be tomorrow as a human being.”
Society is an Outcome

“Children need to be developed because they are future leaders.”
How to Improve ECD in South Africa
More Control of Children
(children have too many rights)

“They have taken the authority away from the parent... because children have more rights.”

Spanking is Necessary

“Bend the tree while it is still young.”
Strengthen the Role of Government

Direct Services (Health, Education)

Raise Awareness

Monitoring/Oversight

“It all goes back to the government… the government has the infrastructure to reach everyone.”
What cultural models did you see?
About the Basics
- Love
- Nutrition
- Safety
- Discipline

Responsibility
- Parents
- Extended Family
- Community
- Government

Early Child Development in South Africa

Aging Up
- ECD about older children
- Older capacities attributed to young children
- Poor understanding of early years

The “wetlands” of public thinking about...

Environments Matter
- Home, community, media
- Poverty causes problems
- Importance
  - Good society
  - Personal confidence & competence
  - Lays the foundation

Resilience
- You have it, or you don’t

Solutions
- Raise Awareness
- More Government Services
- Fewer rights for children
- Some spanking is required.

SA Is a Dangerous Place
- Extreme dangers - rape, kidnapping, trafficking, drugs

Importance of Early Childhood Development
1. Childhood development sets up rest of life.
2. Environments matter.
3. Access to quality services is key.
4. Development matters because a good society depends on it.
5. Government should play a key role.
## Mapping The Gaps on ECD in South Africa

### Experts
- Early Is Early
- Stimulation, Interaction
- Brains & Key Cognitive Skills
- Pervasive Risk Factors
- On a Continuum + Can Be Strengthened
- Children Have Rights
- Interaction & Distraction
- Targeted at Prenatal to 3 Years
- Parents Enabled & Empowered by Government

### Public
- Aging Up
- Basics Early On
- Physical, Social, Emotional
- Extreme Cases
- Have It, or Not
- Children Have Too Many Rights
- Physical Punishment
- Focused on Older Children
- Direct Government Services

### Key Time of Brain Development

### Early Developmental Needs

### What Develops Early On?
- Physical, Social, Emotional

### Threats to Development

### Resilience
- Have It, or Not

### Rights
- Children Have Too Many Rights

### Disciplinary Approach
- Physical Punishment

### Solutions
- Focused on Older Children

### Primary Agent
- Direct Government Services
Bridging The Gaps on ECD in South Africa

Strategic Framing
Know what’s in the wetlands!

- What is being triggered?
- What is being strengthened?
- What is being muted?

Use tested strategies to keep your messages from getting stuck, lost, or “eaten” in the wetlands.
Framing your messages about ECD with the right value(s) can help open people’s thinking to everything else you have to say!

VALUES: An Orienting Tool

- Ingenuity
- Interdependence
- Protection
- Pragmatism
- Prevention
- Human Potential
- Progress
- Responsible Management
- Civic Responsibility
- Shared Prosperity
- Fairness Across Places
- Workforce Preparation
Brain Architecture

Key entailments of the metaphor:

1. The brain is central to development.
2. Brains are built! Good brains don’t happen automatically. They need support.
3. Brains are built over time.
4. Early matters — attention on helping children develop a solid foundation. Has consequences for later.
Mapping The Gaps on ECD in South Africa

**EXPERTS**
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**KEY TIME OF BRAIN DEVELOPMENT**

**EARLY DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS**

**WHAT DEVELOPS EARLY ON?**

**THREATS TO DEVELOPMENT**

**RESILIENCE**

**RIGHTS**

**DISCIPLINARY APPROACH**

**SOLUTIONS**

**PRIMARY AGENT**
Toxic Stress

Key entailments of the metaphor:

1. There are different kinds of stress: positive, tolerable, and toxic.
2. Supportive relationships are key to making some stress tolerable.
3. Toxic stress undermines children’s biology & brains. It can have long-lasting consequences.
4. Social environments can be toxic — poverty, community violence, etc. So this is a social & public issue.
Mapping The Gaps
on ECD in South Africa

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PUBLIC
- Aging Up
- Basics Early On
- Physical, Social, Emotional
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Brain Architecture

Toxic Stress
Serve and Return

1. Children’s brain development depends on dynamic interplays between caregivers and infant.

2. It requires activity on both sides, like two players on either side of the net sending the ball back and forth.
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**KEY TIME OF BRAIN DEVELOPMENT**

**EARLY DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS**

**WHAT DEVELOPS EARLY ON?**

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**RESILIENCE**

**RIGHTS**

**DISCIPLINARY APPROACH**

**SOLUTIONS**

**PRIMARY AGENT**
Developing and Testing New Metaphors

Candidate Metaphors

On the Street Interviews
N ~ 30-40

Experimental Survey
N ~ 2000 - 8000

Persistence Trials
N ~ 30-40

Usability Match Trials
N ~ 25

Effective Explanatory Metaphor
Thank you
Danke