



# Framing the Early Childhood Message

The important work of the Frameworks Institute

# Framing the Early Childhood Message

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# Our Agenda

- What is the message we put out to American society about young children?
- What is the message they hear?
- What can we do to be more effective at communicating?

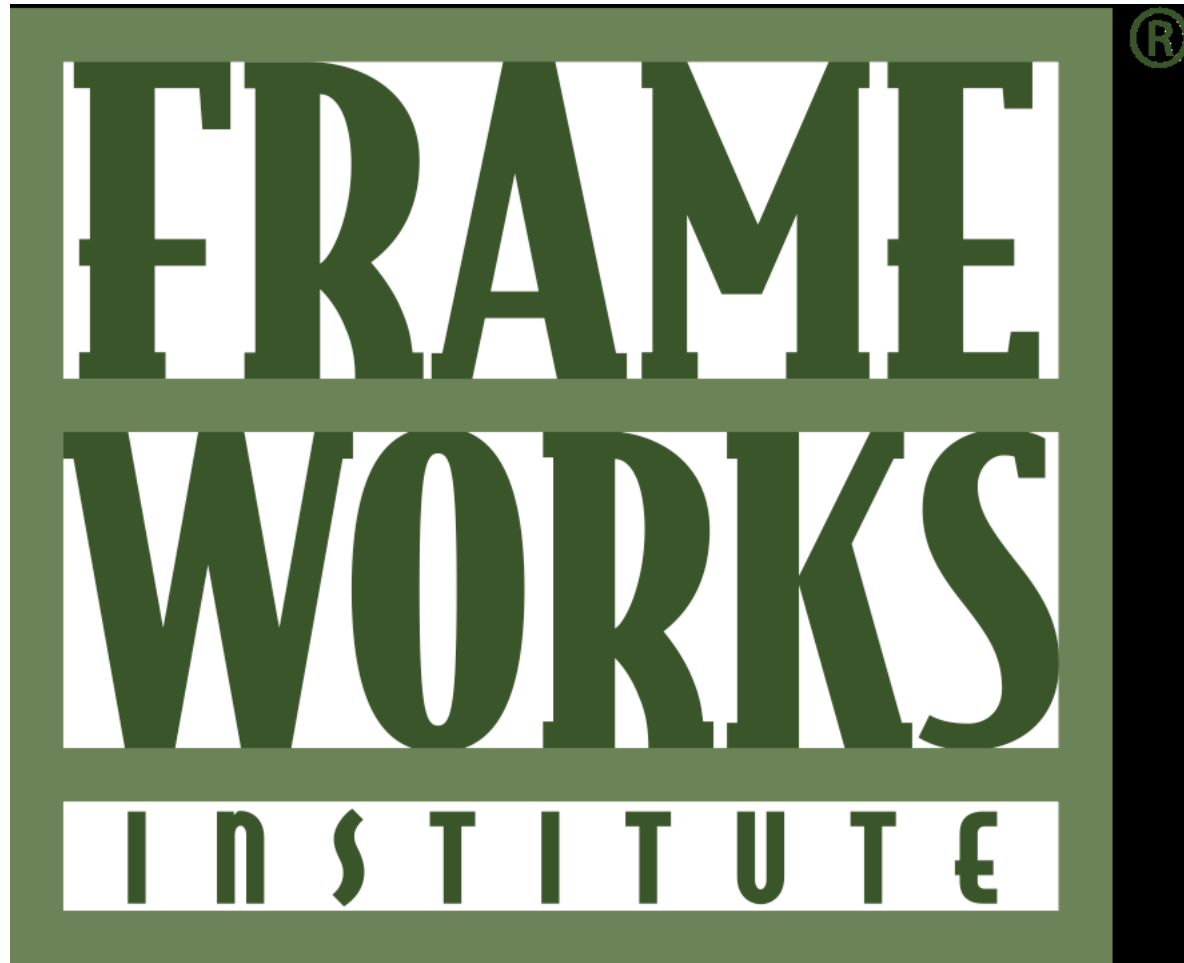
Its simple, really

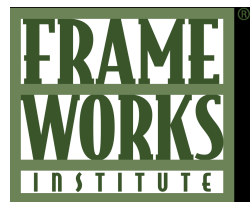


# Who needs to “get it”?

- Parents
- Teachers
- Administrators
- Politicians
- Funders
- Educators
- All of American society

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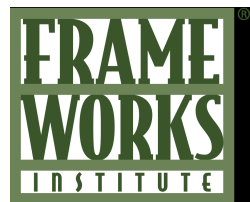
# Frameworks Institute

Look at **social messages** through

- Communications theory
- Linguistics
- Psychology
- Anthropology
- Political Science

# Strategic Frame Analysis™

- Analysis of media messages
- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Interviews

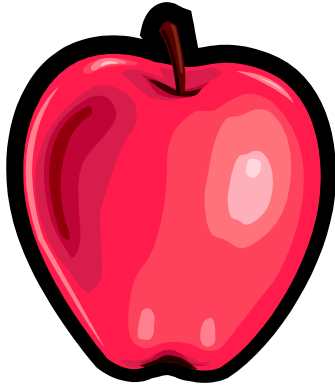


They talk about...

- Schemas
- Cultural models
- The pictures in our heads
- Stories
- Frames

# How We Process Information

- We use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world
- Incoming information provides cues that connect to the pictures (schema) in our heads



## Schema “Education”

- What we think about it is related to how we feel about it.
- How we feel about it is the result of
  - Personal experience
  - Values
  - Our knowledge
  - Predominant cultural model

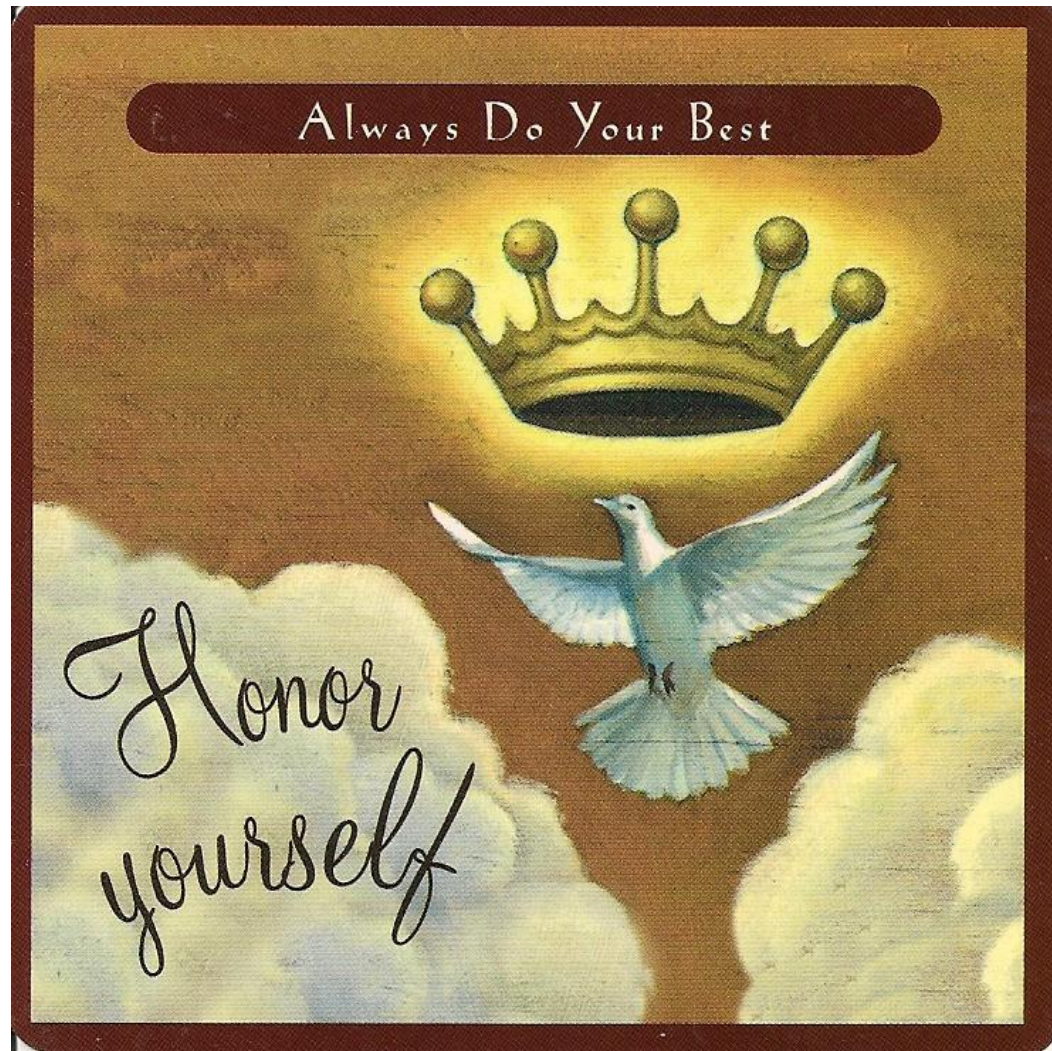
# Schemas

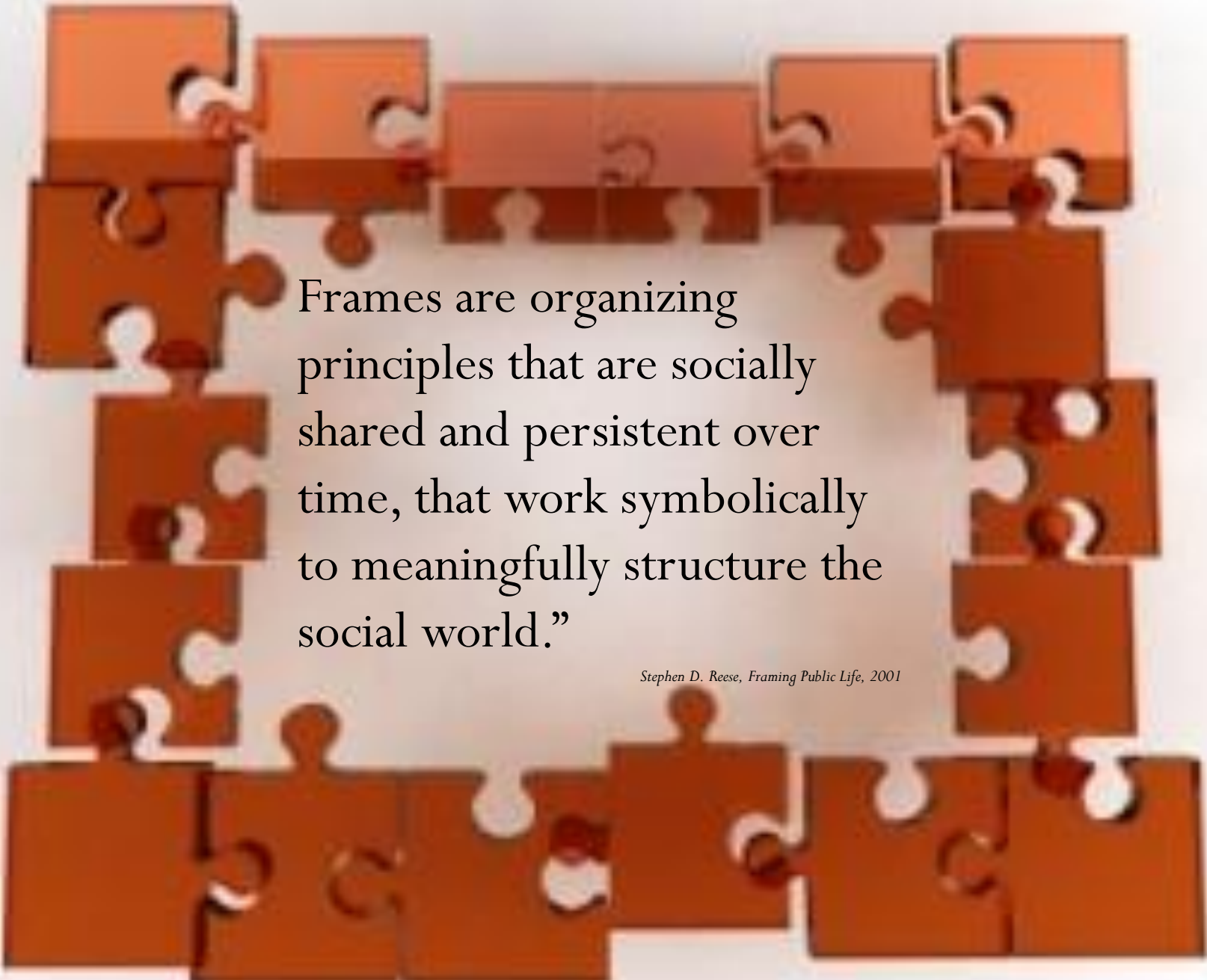
“The mind is a  
swamp of hypotheses  
based on

- Prior experience
  - Expectations
  - Knowledge”

Frame Works Institute(2009).

# Complex messages use schemas





Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.”

*Stephen D. Reese, Framing Public Life, 2001*

# Important!

- Finding some familiar element causes us to activate an existing picture/story in our heads, and we understand the new information as if it were an exemplar of that old story.
- Understanding means finding a story you already know and saying, 'Oh yeah, that one.'
- Once we have found (the) story, we stop processing.



# Day Care

# Early care and education



Hhhmmmmm.....

- When “the profession” can’t agree on the frame, what does that tell the public?

We love our frames



*This is my story and I'm sticking to it.*

# Resistance

If someone tried to convince you that what you do is about babysitting, even if they supplied evidence and rationale, you are no longer listening because your strong frame about child care and babysitting has been called up.

# Important!

Frames are made strong  
Because they are emotional  
Not rational.

# What is a cultural model?

- Cultural models are a small set of shared schema; internalized concepts and values that allow us to accord meaning to new information or unfolding events.
- Widely shared and understood across the society.
- Our mental shortcuts (how we process new information) rely on “cultural models” or “worldviews.”

Henry is a short, slim man. He likes to read poetry. He has been active in environmental and feminist causes.

Henry is a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.

It is most probable that Henry is .....

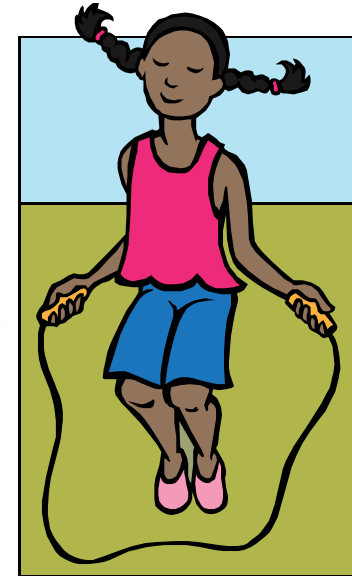
- A. A TRUCK DRIVER
- B. AN IVY LEAGUE CLASSICS PROFESSOR
- C. A TRUCK DRIVER WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE AUDUBON SOCIETY AND MENSA

# What do Americans think about child development?

What is the cultural model?

# Cultural Model for child development

## The Black Box



# Important!



When there is a gap in understanding people reach into their familiar cultural models and personal frames and schemas

Here are 3 cultural models

- The Family Bubble
- Self-Made Child
- Safety First

# The Family Bubble



Child rearing takes place inside the family and parents are solely responsible for the way children develop.

## Limitation of the model

- When parents are the problem, government's role is dismissed.
- Not about me.

# Self-Made Child



Goal of family-centered child-rearing is to raise a successful and self-reliant child who can “stand on his own two feet in the world.”

Emphasis on autonomy over interdependence leading to less focus on social, emotional and regulatory development

## Limitation of model

Children are not appreciated in the “environment of relationships” that brain development tells us is critical.

# Children need to be safe



Priorities for child-rearing are defensive: protect from harm and disease, keeping children physically safe

Fueled by media focus on crime and safety in news coverage of children's issues

Physical growth trumps emotional/social development

Children as “precious objects”

## Limitation of model

- In times of competing resources, health and safety win
- Anything else is a luxury
- Because it is understood, it is over-valued.

## Public notions of “child care”

- Child care is seen by the public as an “unfortunate necessity”
- Child care is seen as a choice by the family

# Connecting to Values

[For the general public], the issue of child development links to three core values:

- nurturance
- opportunity
- legacy

Situation Analysis:  
The Swamp of Early Childhood Frames

Something about  
"the brain" complicated/  
can't understand

Self-made  
Child

Development is  
automatic  
Discipline = focus  
Stress is good for you  
We turned out okay



Opportunity

Children = future  
Begins in school

Safety

Physical Focus

Control and contain

Community = Predator

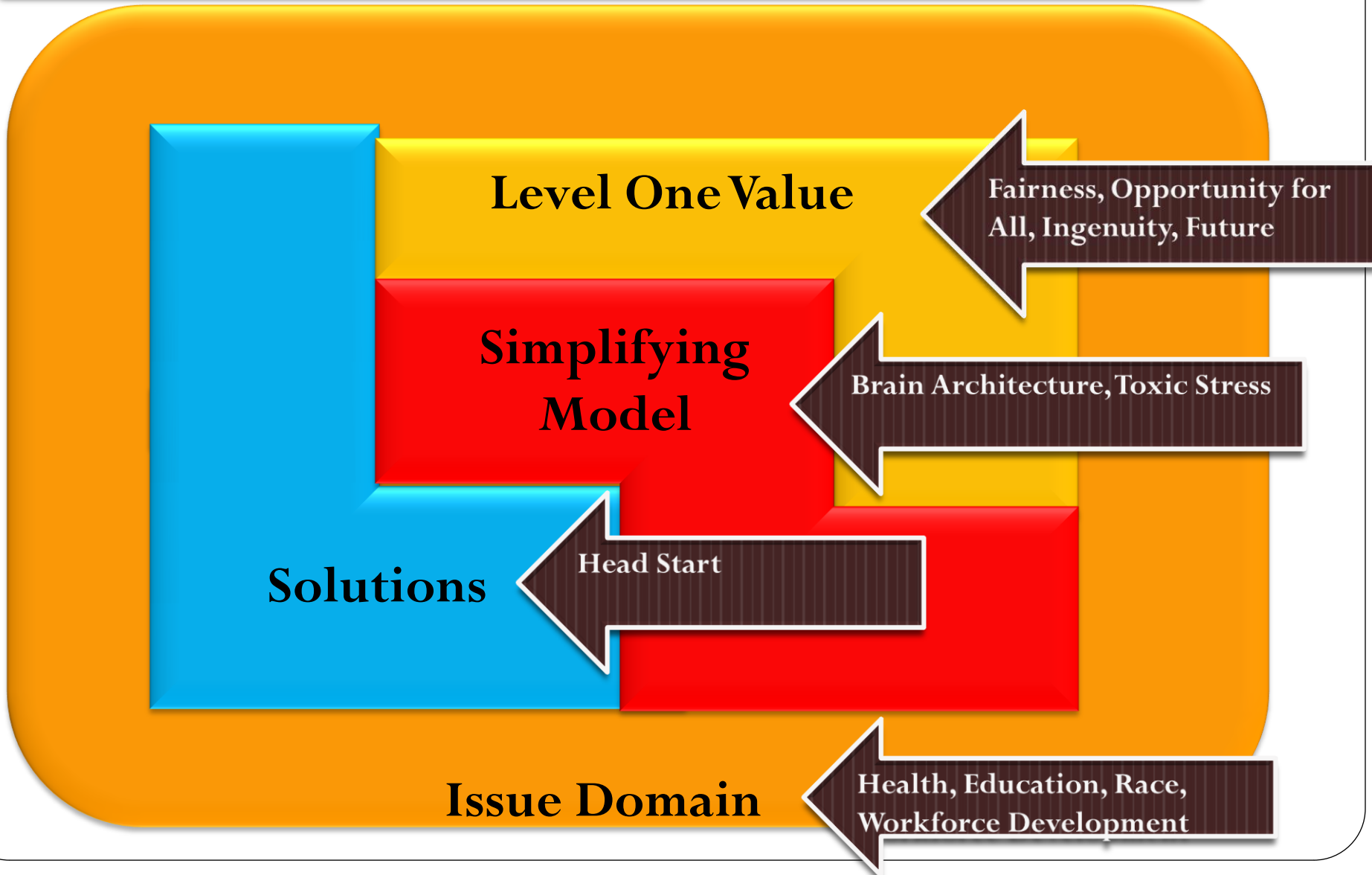
Family  
Bubble

Achievement

Pre-K = Old K  
Hurried Child  
Fancy Parents  
Flash cards in cribs

Momma knows best  
Bad parents  
Private not public issue

# The Basic Reframing Equation

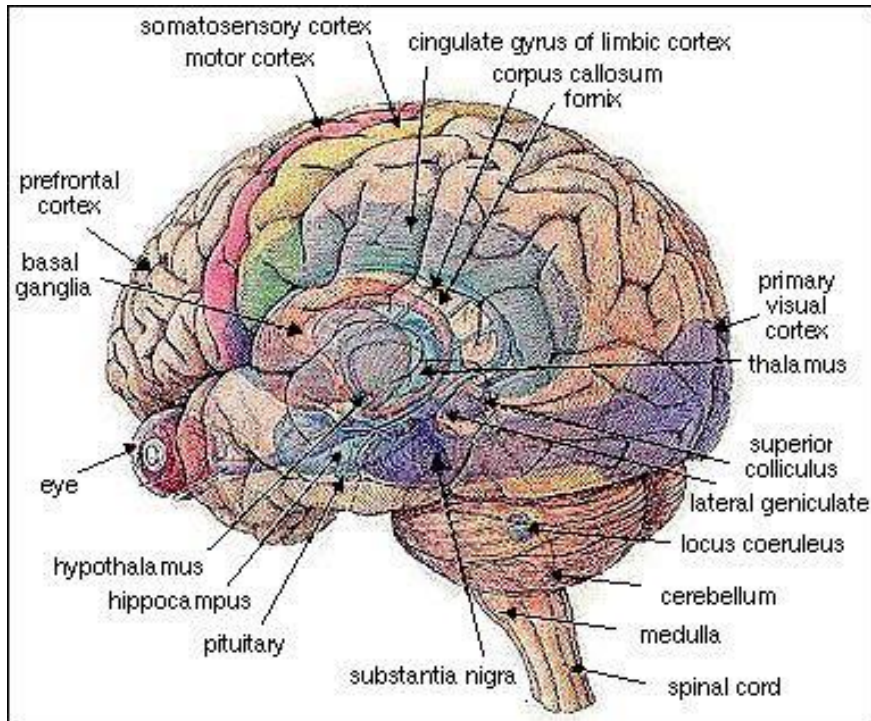


# Brain Development

“Well, its something about....”

Triggers “science” frame

“Only the professionals understand this stuff”





Brain

“Architecture”

Calls up frame that  
includes the  
importance of strong  
foundations

The notion that the brain is wired for  
“serve and return”



# Toxic Stress

- Healthy Stress is good for us
- Toxic Stress interferes with the development (building the foundation) of a young child's brain, affecting their ability to become productive citizens in the future
- A weak foundation predicts future problems

# Changing the way people think: giving them a new frame

“ I think what really gets me...is that it could actually have a chemical or biological or some sort of impact on the child's brain...Behavior is one thing, and attitude and personality is one thing, but if it can really negatively impact...the chemistry and the makeup of the brain – you can damage that that early—that's really serious. That's more than just having a bad personality, that's really screwing up a kid.”

Talk Back Informant

# Framing: Levels of Thought

Level 1	<b>Universal Values</b> Fairness, Prosperity, Freedom, Responsibility, Authority, Charity
Level 2	<b>Issue Type</b> Civil rights, environment, education, child welfare, law enforcement, health
Level 3	<b>Specific Issue/Policy</b> Funding for home visiting; EITC; health insurance for children; capping carbon emissions

# Context Matters

## Different Kinds of Stories Set Up Different Policy Solutions

- As advocates, we want our communications to move from a focus on the individual to a focus on the community (because that is where our solutions lie).
- Move from episodic stories to thematic stories

# Episodic Frames...

- reduce life to a series of disconnected episodes, random events or case studies.

"Betty Jones and her family of four are braving the elements tonight because the homeless shelter was full." ... Such a news story might go on to describe how the children miss their toys, how cold it is, when they last ate, etc.

- do not describe trends or conditions that give context to the problem and shape it as a community problem -- how many people are homeless in this city, whether the numbers are increasing or decreasing, or the root causes of homelessness.

# Thematic Frames...

- provide details about trends, not just individuals; they identify shortcomings at the community or systems-level that have contributed to the problem.

"The homeless shelter at 4th and Q was full again tonight because of drastic reductions in city allocations, and this situation is taking its toll on families like Betty Jones'. But the mayor says the Jones family will have to brave it because there is no more money in the city to pay ...."

- help the audience see the solution at the community/environmental/government level versus with individuals only

# Summary

Think about

- Values
- Context
- Use a message that evokes a frame that works WITH you, not against you.
- Your frame is what convinces you. It is not necessarily the same frame that will convince someone else.