



Know Before You Go

The Kenyan public holds some assumptions about early childhood development and learning that can have unproductive implications for those who communicate about these issues. Fortunately, subtle framing shifts can cue more productive thinking about why these issues matter, how they work and what society can do to improve children’s outcomes.

The chart below identifies the Kenyan public’s most dominant – and unproductive – assumptions about early childhood development, explains their communications implications, recommends framing strategies to push thinking in more productive directions and models how to apply each recommendation to communications practice. For a more detailed look, read *Expanding the Basics*, a FrameWorks research report that ‘maps the gaps’ between expert and public thinking about these issues.

Common Assumptions and Beliefs among Kenyan Public	Implications for Communicating about ECD	Framing Strategy to Redirect Thinking	Sample Usage
<p>Basic needs:</p> <p>To ensure healthy development, we simply need to meet children’s basic needs.</p>	<p>Impedes public support for quality early learning programmes and other resources, which are perceived as ‘extras.’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use the <i>Circle of Responsibility</i> value to help people understand the broad range of actors and resources that contribute to young children’s healthy development.• Use the <i>Brain Architecture</i> metaphor to explain that healthy brain development in the early years requires more than merely meeting children’s basic needs.	<p>‘What surrounds us shapes us. Let’s encircle all of Kenya’s babies and toddlers with quality learning opportunities and care; it’s our duty to the next generation!’</p> <p>‘Building a young child’s brain is like constructing a sturdy building: It’s a complex process! Early learning programmes, quality care and good health and nutrition are as critical to the brain’s architecture as wiring, support beams and plumbing are to a functional building.’</p>

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<p>Ageing Up: Children’s ‘real’ learning begins when kids reach the age at which they attend primary school.</p>	<p>Limits public understanding of how – and how much – early learning shapes young children’s future schooling outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the phrase Early Means Early to help people consider very young children when thinking about access to educational opportunities. • Use the phrase Born to Learn to help people think about how to best build babies’ skills from birth on. 	<p>‘Children’s brains begin learning at birth, so we must provide all children with strong learning supports from the earliest years of life. Early means early!’</p> <p>‘Babies are born to learn. Their brains develop rapidly in the first years of life, so that’s the best time to immerse them in interactive and supportive environments, where they can make the most of their brains’ voracious desire to learn and develop and grow.’</p>
<p>Brain as Container: A child’s brain is an empty, passive organ that simply needs to be fed and filled with information.</p>	<p>Makes it difficult for people to grasp the central role the brain plays in development or to understand brain development as a dynamic process in which children play an active role. This limits understanding of the importance of interactive learning opportunities.</p>	<p>Use the <i>Brain Architecture</i> metaphor to illustrate how brain development is an active process that requires the right ‘materials’ and plenty of opportunities for children to ‘construct’ strong neural pathways.</p>	<p>‘Like a house, children’s brains are built from the ground up, and the foundation and wiring begin even before birth. Getting this construction project right takes quality materials, a strong crew and a lot of supportive interactions between babies and their adult caregivers.’</p>
<p>Government = Health Services: The government’s main function in young children’s lives is to provide health care.</p>	<p>Renders invisible both the value of and need for publicly funded, publicly run non-health care-related programmes that support children’s healthy development.</p>	<p>Use the <i>Circle of Responsibility</i> value and Concrete Examples to expand thinking about the role government programmes play in young children’s wellbeing. Adding examples helps people think about government services beyond health care.</p>	<p>‘Including government programmes like public preschools, nutrition programmes and housing assistance in the circle of supportive services that are responsible for children’s wellbeing will ensure that more young children thrive.’</p>
<p>Early Development = Physical Skills and Language: Babies’ and toddlers’ growth centers on physical skills, like crawling and walking, and simple speech acquisition.</p>	<p>Distinguishes falsely between development and learning, oversimplifying the development process and making it hard to see the necessity of programmes and interventions that address skill development beyond physical and language abilities.</p>	<p>Use the phrase <i>Born to Learn</i> to drive home the idea that babies’ brains are ready for and primed to benefit from learning opportunities from birth onward.</p>	<p>‘Babies are born to learn. In fact, their healthy development depends on their getting plenty of opportunities to develop all their skills – cognitive, social, emotional and physical – from day one.’</p>

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<p>Two Models of Learning:</p> <p>Informal learning (ie, the kind of development that happens from birth), is distinct from and unrelated to formal learning, which is ‘real’ and happens inside a classroom structure when children reach the age at which they attend school.</p>	<p>Leads to confusion about early learning programmes (eg, the interpretation that ‘early learning’ is learning that takes place when children first enter school). Limits people’s ability to see how the first years of life are a time when important skills develop – skills that are critical to children’s later academic success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the phrase <i>Early Means Early</i> and define the term ‘early learning’ to clarify that this issue applies to the very young – those from birth to age five – and to bridge the distinction between informal and formal learning. • Use the phrase <i>Born to Learn</i> to begin conversations about early learning programmes and opportunities for babies and toddlers; it helps people associate ‘learning’ with ‘very young children’. 	<p>‘Quality early learning programmes help children from birth to age five begin to develop foundational skills – like social and emotional regulation, speech, curiosity and basic reasoning – that will help them do well when they reach kindergarten. Early means early’.</p> <p>‘Babies are born to learn. That’s why early learning programmes are so important: They tap into the rapid brain development that happens from birth to age five in order to maximise children’s potential – right from the start’.</p>