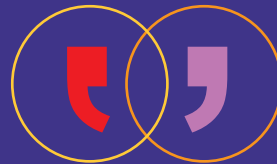


**The  
Workshop**

# Talking about early brain development in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Deepening understanding  
of brain development and  
how to support it



**Version 1.0 July 2021**

[www.theworkshop.org.nz](http://www.theworkshop.org.nz)



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# Background and purpose

The Child Wellbeing Unit of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is working on the implementation of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.<sup>1</sup> This includes improving the wellbeing of 0 – 6 year olds with a focus on the first 1000 days of life. One of the projects is building greater awareness of brain development and how to support it in the early years. Initial engagement last year identified a need for deeper understanding of this issue and new narratives to support this change.

The Workshop was commissioned to work with the Child Wellbeing Unit to design, facilitate and report on a two day brain development collective wānanga held in March 2021 that brought together non-government service providers and designers, government and philanthropic funders. The goal for the first day was to connect the interested parties to bring together and reflect on evidence on brain development, mātauranga Māori and diverse world views. This shared knowledge and connection informed the development of a shared new 'story' to be told to deepen understanding of brain development and how to support it and also helped to outline the existing communication tools being used in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The aim of the second day of the wānanga was to provide a high-level insight into the current narrative landscape around brain development in the early years, and what it is that experts and advocates want people to better understand, in order to deepen understanding of brain development and what needs to be in place to support it. The purpose of this report was to provide a useful basis for any future narrative change work.

<sup>1</sup> <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>

# About this report

This report<sup>2</sup> is for knowledge holders, communicators, advocates, non-government service providers and designers, government and philanthropic funders that focus on supporting early brain development.

## Its purpose is to:

- provide a partial map of the current territory of public narratives and mindsets around early brain development;
- explain some guiding principles for deepening understanding of the issue through more effective narratives;
- propose some communications strategies; and
- recommend potential next steps in this narrative shift work.

It was developed by The Workshop for the Child Wellbeing Unit of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet from analysis of the contents of the two day wānanga, a brief review of the framing literature and The Workshop's unique evidence-based framework of narratives for change.

## How to use this report

- This report offers preliminary recommendations for narrative strategies about early brain development based on helpful strategies identified by participants at the wānanga, a literature review of framing research related to brain development specifically and child development more generally, and an established body of literature on narratives.
- What we are able to offer in this report are research-informed predictions which have not been research-tested (although some are being tested in practice) in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- We also set out recommended next steps in the work to shift narratives to deepen understanding of early brain development, and those next steps include research to see whether these preliminary message recommendations actually shift the thinking of persuadable audiences in Aotearoa.
- For now, we encourage advocates and experts to start experimenting with these narrative strategies to see how they work with your audiences.

<sup>2</sup> Suggested citation: Elliott, M., & Bell, S. (2021). *Talking about early brain development in Aotearoa New Zealand*. The Workshop.

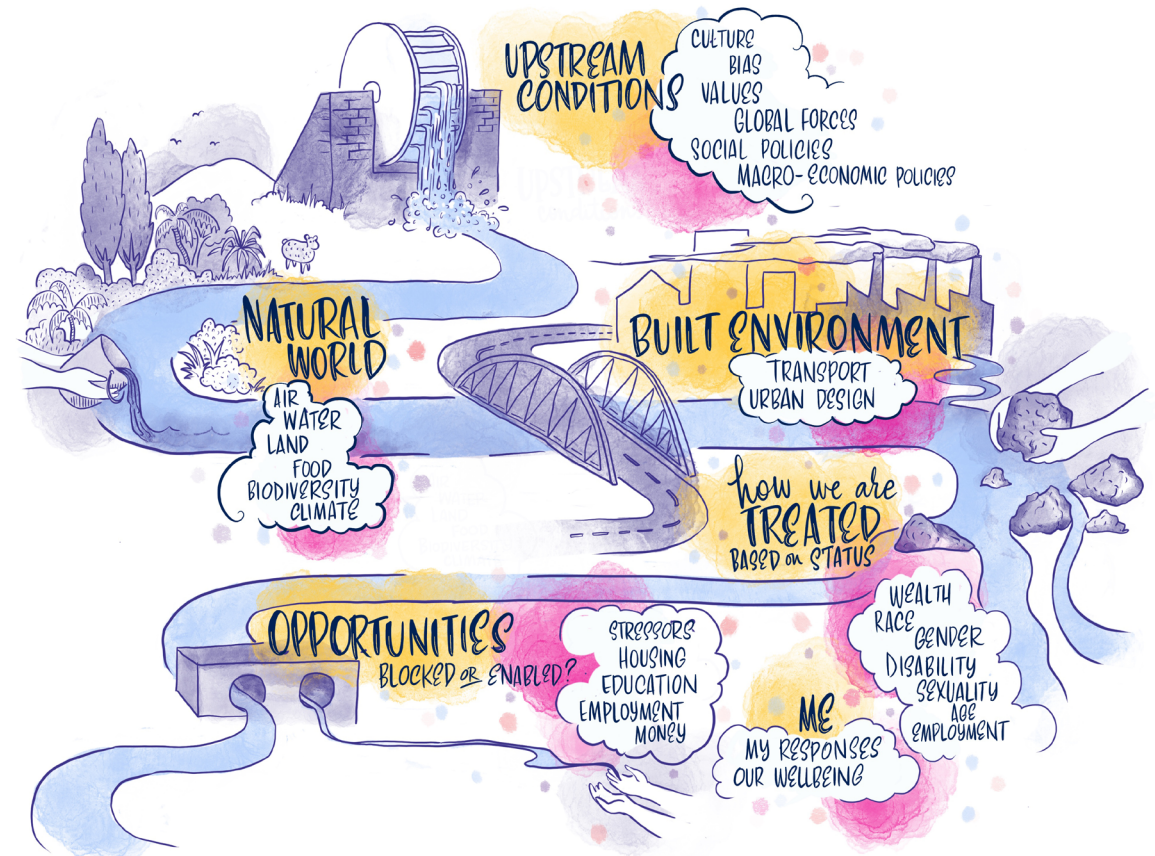
# Why we need a plan to shift the narrative on early brain development in Aotearoa New Zealand

The Workshop researches and advises on ‘narratives for change’, a set of narrative and communication strategies that research has shown can help deepen and shift public thinking on complex social and environmental issues, improve decision-making, and contribute to evidence-informed system changes.

Mindsets play a central role in people’s ability to think deeply about and support any kind of change. Mindsets are deeply embedded, often invisible, ways that people think about how the world works and the particular issue of concern. These mindsets can play an even more crucial role when we are asking people to think about and support the kinds of big changes that experts say will make the most difference to people’s lives. These mindsets are informed by enduring narratives or stories in our cultural discourse. Mental short-cuts we all use, which help us survive in an information rich world, also serve to protect our existing mindsets.

It is difficult for researchers, advocates and policy makers to make evidence-driven shifts to policies and practices if existing mindsets and cultural narratives are shallow or out of date.

For people to be willing to support and actively engage in best policies, investments and practices, we need to deepen people’s understanding of the causes of problems and the changes that are needed and possible. Researchers have found that shifts in people’s thinking, and ultimately shifts in systems, are driven by scientifically developed and tested narrative strategies. They are a critical tool for anyone working on changes that will make the biggest difference to our long term wellbeing.



We want to see the changes that make the biggest difference for children, whānau and communities. To explain this, we use the upstream/downstream metaphor of an awa or river. Downstream where most people stand, are all of the visible problems we collectively wish to overcome – including things like toxic stress. As we walk upstream we can see the social, environmental and cultural conditions that shape our lives and experiences. For example, the way in which people in our public institutions treat us, our information environment, how our transport systems and cities are built, the policies the government put in place (or don't), the rules of the economy, and our cultural beliefs and values.

Extensive bodies of research show us that, in changing some of these conditions, we can make the biggest improvements to the most people's lives over the longest time frame, for the least individual effort. Many of the big issues of the world can't be solved at the downstream level (for example, by asking individuals who experience poor outcomes to change their behaviour) while the issue that caused the problems upstream remains in place. However, much work being done by people and organisations downstream is critical to support those experiencing poor outcomes.

The research on framing early brain development and childhood advocacy highlights the power of a group of organisations or communities of practice collaborating to make narrative changes that deepen public understanding. When audiences hold more helpful mindsets they will act in support of evidence-led upstream changes that have a greater positive impact on the work being done at the downstream level.<sup>3</sup>

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**3** For case studies that show powerful, collaborative efforts to shift narratives and the success in translating brain science for policy makers, see: FrameWorks Institute. (2020). *Building strong brains in Tennessee (a FrameWorks Impact Brief)*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tennessee-ECD-Impact-brief.pdf>;

FrameWorks Institute. (2020). *The impact of strategic framing on early childhood advocacy efforts in Colorado (a FrameWorks Impact Brief)*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Colorado-ECD-Impact-brief.pdf>;

Kendall-Taylor, N., & Hawkins, N. (2019). *Six ways to boost public support for prevention-based policy*. Stanford Social Innovation Review. [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/six\\_ways\\_to\\_boost\\_public\\_support\\_for\\_prevention\\_based\\_policy](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/six_ways_to_boost_public_support_for_prevention_based_policy);

Shonkoff, J. P., & Bales, S. N. (2011). Science does not speak for itself: Translating child development research for the public and its policymakers. *Child Development*, 82(1), 17–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01538.x>

# The landscape of thinking and narratives on early brain development

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In order to develop effective communication strategies to deepen thinking we first need to understand the landscape of public thinking and the narratives that relate to the issue we are talking about. This includes getting a good picture of:

1. What it is that experts and advocates want people to understand about the issue (the 'story' you want to tell);
2. Who are the groups of people who need understand the issue better (your audiences);
3. What it is that those people currently think about the issue, both helpful and harmful (their mindsets); and
4. What are the ways that experts and others currently talk and communicate about this issue, which inform, uphold and reflect those helpful and unhelpful mindsets (narratives).

There are a range of methods we generally use to do this including in-depth interviews with experts and advocates, media scans, public surveys and focus groups.

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## What we did (and didn't do) for this report

**We worked with the DPMC Child Wellbeing Unit to design, facilitate and report on a two day brain development collective wānanga held in March 2021 in Wellington.**

**In our role as narrative change specialists, we used the following methods:**

- advised on the design of the agenda and sessions for day two of the wānanga for the purpose of gathering data about the current narrative landscape;
- conducted a brief scoping review of existing material on framing and narratives in the early brain development space, including Aotearoa New Zealand-specific materials;
- attended day one and co-facilitated day two of the wānanga and gathered information recorded;
- conducted a post-event qualitative analysis of the data generated with participants at the wānanga using The Workshop's Narratives for Change framework. We mapped the current landscape of:
  - » audiences, identifying which ones were the top priority for narrative and mindset shift
  - » helpful and unhelpful mindsets
  - » helpful narrative techniques and strategies being used;

- ➔ contracted a third party (who was not at the wānanga) to undertake a blind review of our analysis<sup>4</sup>;
- ➔ summarised the analysis into this report; and
- ➔ undertook internal peer review of this report.

The description of the current landscape of thinking and narratives in this report is based largely on the contributions of a group of experts and advocates at the wānanga. As a result, this is only a partial map of the current landscape of thinking and narratives. Specifically:

1. In terms of the story that experts want to tell, we drew largely on the expert presentations from the first day of the wānanga. A wider and deeper review of what experts want people to understand could be a next step in this work.
2. Audiences were identified and prioritised by participants on the second day of the wānanga.
3. In terms of how those audiences currently think, there are a few things to note about the limits of this data:
  - a. We only had time for a deeper analysis of the current thinking of some of the audiences, based on a rapid prioritisation by the participants. So there are other important audiences whose thinking has not been mapped at all, and further audience mapping could be a next step in this process.
  - b. The descriptions of current thinking in this report are based on the expert opinions of the people at the wānanga. We would usually also gather and analyse data directly from the audiences identified, e.g., through focus groups. This could also be a next step in this process.

c. The nature of the event (and the fact that it was hosted by DPMC) may have focused the discussions in particular ways, which has influenced the data. For example, the participants may have focused on policy makers, Ministers and the voting public as audiences because they saw those audiences as being most relevant to the work of DPMC. A next step could be to gather data about current thinking using alternative methods to compare to this data.

4. Finally, this report doesn't include any primary research on narratives. Some of the experts at the wānanga identified specific narratives which they think are either underpinning unhelpful thinking, or promoting deeper and more helpful thinking about the issue. A next step for this work could be to look at the narrative landscape to see where, and in what form, those narratives appear.

**Overall, to develop a more comprehensive and robust map of the current landscape of thinking and narratives, more research would be needed. See the section on next steps, below, for more on this.**

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<sup>4</sup> This blind review is useful as a check against researcher bias that can occur when researchers are present at the event at which data is gathered but unable to hear all the discussions, which can result in the input that researchers heard in person being given more weight in the analysis than the other data.



# The story that advocates and experts want to tell about early brain development

## In the analysis of the story that experts and advocates want to tell, an important distinction needs to be made between:

- the information that experts and advocates want people to understand about the science and evidence on early brain development, and
- the story they want to tell using that information to tell.

Our analysis is focused on the story that experts and advocates want to tell, rather than the specific information they want to use to tell that story. This is because the focus of narrative change work is on shifting stories and mindsets, which provide the underlying frames or lenses through which people make sense of our information. At the outset of thinking about narrative shift, therefore, we need to get very clear on the story experts are trying to tell with their information (e.g., facts and evidence about brain science). Facts and evidence are a strategy for informing people about your topic, rather than shifting mindsets.

**On the first day** of the wānanga, experts and advocates presented a rich selection of mātauranga Māori, and facts and evidence about the science of early brain development.<sup>5</sup> Knowledge, facts and evidence are an important part of communication and experts and advocates have found that this set of facts is engaging and empowering for whānau and communities. Experts have found that these facts help whānau understand brain development and gain a sense of self-efficacy – self-determination and control – to make a difference in children’s lives.<sup>6</sup> This is a great example of how good information can be really useful for people whose underlying mindsets allow them to take that information on board and use it in productive ways. Narrative shift work helps us understand why some people are less able to take that information on board and use it, it helps us uncover the underlying mindsets that may be hindering the effective communication of your evidence.

**On day two**, the experts and advocates repeatedly emphasised the need to place people’s understanding of the facts and evidence about brain science within the broader context of the social determinants of child wellbeing. The stories we heard experts share that they want to tell is how brains develop within enriching and supportive environments. They want to lift the audience’s gaze to a systems level to be able to see what evidence-led approaches need to be in place to enable those supportive environments for children and whānau.

**The sector shared a set of interrelated stories during the two day wānanga that it wishes to communicate to its key audiences. These are outlined below. These stories are grounded in the facts and evidence about what best supports early brain development, but are not themselves a summary of the evidence. Instead, they are a summary of the story that experts want to tell, using that evidence. Three main themes emerged.**

<sup>5</sup> Notes taken by DPMC staff on the facts and evidence detailed in day one presentations are found in Appendix 2.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, programmes that present facts and evidence about early brain development such as the Brainwave Trust’s programme <https://brainwave.org.nz/content/uploads/2020/11/Tiakina-te-Tamaiti-Organisational-Brochure-low-res.pdf> and SKIP’s Te Hinengaro Mīharo – The Amazing Brain resource <https://resources.skip.org.nz/assets/Resources/Documents/te-hinengaro-miharo.pdf>.



## Story One:

Māori and Pasifika ways of thinking and practices are foundational for supporting early brain development

1

The first story is how Māori and Pasifika ways of thinking and practices are foundational for supporting early brain development and conveying messages about the importance of early brain development.<sup>7 8</sup>

The early brain science is just now catching up to understanding some of the things that are necessary for children's wellbeing that were already well understood and practiced by Māori and Pasifika cultures. Western science tradition has much to learn from these practices, based on whakapapa and the nurturing and caring practices of the collective. This includes tikanga that women, and especially those that were pregnant/hapū, were highly valued and well treated. Key to this first story is trusting and respecting the integrity of these holistic mātauranga Māori and Pasifika knowledge systems, and acknowledging that they are taonga/treasure, locally specific, ever-evolving and held and protected by the holders and not something to be extracted and used by others.

Mātauranga Māori understands that children should also be highly valued and respected, need care by the collective, and learn best by playing. An example of current practice grounded in whakapapa that was shared by the wānanga was the empowerment that mothers feel when they receive early nutrition education and learn about epigenetics in antenatal sessions and recognise the power they have over their descendants.<sup>9</sup>

The action that the sector wants to see related to this specific story is to make sure that research, policy and practices value mātauranga Māori and Pasifika ways of knowing and doing around early brain development with a focus on the collective. However, these should not be co-opted or simply added on to western frameworks.

<sup>7</sup> From wānanga day one presentation by Debbie Rawiri, Brainwave Trust.

<sup>8</sup> From wānanga day two presentation by Nanai Mua'au, Joy Sipeli-Antipas, Dr Denise Guy, Hannah Aldersley, Tualoaina Latu To'omaga.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.pacifichealthhutt.co.nz/anofale-fa-atupu-ola-pasifika>



## Story Two:

The Government's role in enacting support for children, whānau and communities

# 2

The second story is about the need for people in government and government agencies to enact a set of policies and practices to make the upstream changes that will support whānau and communities to provide an environment for children to thrive in.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the changes that the sector wants to see related to this upstream work is for people in government to build the necessary social and environmental supports around children, whānau and communities. These are things such as supportive physical and enriching play and learning environments,<sup>11 12</sup> secure and affordable housing, stable employment for parents and caregivers, sufficient family income in the first 1000 days of a child's life, support for employment practices that enable parents and caregivers to have time with their children, and quality early childhood education. More broadly, wānanga participants advocated for a culture of supporting children and families.

<sup>10</sup> This story was expressed in wānanga day two workshop discussions and in a number of presentations on day one, including by Dr Teuila Percival.

<sup>11</sup> From wānanga day one presentation by Darrío and Kimiora Penetito-Hemara.

<sup>12</sup> From wānanga day one presentation by Professor Gail Gillon, Director UC Child Well-being Research Institute.

It's worth noting that although in this second story experts focused specifically on the role of government in creating conditions that will support children, whānau and communities, in the later exercise looking at audiences, participants at the hui also drew attention to the roles of the media, funders and influencers in setting and changing narratives about early brain development. In particular, participants identified that the media plays an important role in shaping public understanding of the conditions that enable early brain development. Participants also noted that funders play a role in influencing policy-makers when they decide where to spend their own funds. For example, participants talked about the opportunity for funders to support efforts to change structural conditions like income levels.



## Story Three:

The important work of whānau and those supporting them

# 3

The third story is about the importance of the work being done directly with children and whānau to develop a set of protective factors for children, for example, on language development.

Although the second story acknowledges the critical need for people in government to make changes upstream to policies and resourcing that will make the biggest difference to children and whānau, this third story reminds us of the need to continue to support the work being done 'midstream' by communities and organisations with whānau to create supportive environments for early childhood development. This story needs to be centred around children and whānau. Māori and Pasifika approaches to this work focus on connection to whakapapa and intergenerational storytelling.

The sector also reiterated that this work should be strengths-based, mana-enhancing and by Māori and Pasifika, for Māori and Pasifika. Parents, whānau and communities are already doing things that can be celebrated, and this story is about providing them with additional tools to support their relationships with their children. The action that the sector wants to see related to this downstream work is for people in government to put in place the things required to help whānau and communities foster language acquisition and support early brain development and to make sure that the work being done by organisations with children and whānau is well resourced and valued.

**7** From wānanga day one presentation by Debbie Rawiri, Brainwave Trust.

**8** From wānanga day two presentation by Nanai Mua'au, Joy Sipeli-Antipas, Dr Denise Guy, Hannah Aldersley, Tualoaina Latu To'omaga.

**9** <https://www.pacifichealthhutt.co.nz/anofale-fa-atupu-ola-pasifika>



## Key insights:

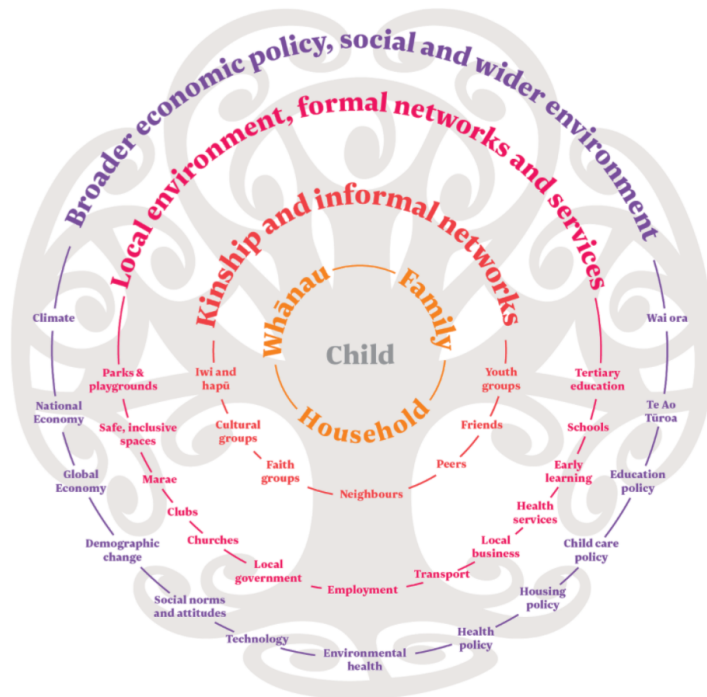
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- Early brain development science is only now catching up to mātauranga Māori in its understanding of what best supports early brain development.
- Māori and Pasifika cultural practices based on whakapapa and the nurturing and caring practices of the collective need to be valued to unlock their potential to support early brain development – without taking an extractive approach or co-opting them into western frameworks.
- Wānanga participants expressed the desire to shift the gaze to the upstream level where people in government who have the ability to make changes that will make the biggest difference will enact a set of policies and practices to make the changes that will support whānau and communities to provide an environment for children to thrive in.
- The media, funders and influencers didn't feature strongly in the stories that experts want people to understand about early brain development, but they did feature in their analysis of the key audiences who need to understand these stories, and as actors who play an important role in setting and changing narratives about early brain development.

# Who needs to understand these stories?

Participants at the wānanga worked in small groups to identify the groups of people, or audiences, who need to understand these key insights about early brain development.

These audiences were mapped using an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, which uses a series of concentric circles to illustrate how different groups of people relate to a child (who sits in the centre of the model).



## The concentric circles in this model are:

- Whānau, family, household
- Kinship and informal networks
- Local environment, formal networks and services
- Broader economic, policy and social environment

Participants pointed out the shortcomings of this model, including the Western lens it applies to relational connections between and across the 'circles', and the difficulty of defining where many groups of people would sit. For example, would gangs sit in the 'kinship and informal networks' or in the 'formal networks'? Having raised those concerns, participants nonetheless used the model to map audiences, identifying a wide range of people at each level of the model who needed to understand the key insights summarised above.

---

## Mapping the audiences

**At the household level, participants identified mothers, fathers, grand-parents, aunts and uncles, siblings, and friends as people who needed to understand early brain development.** The group particularly identified fathers and grandparents (especially those grandparents playing a central role in raising their grandchildren) as being key audiences for messages about early brain development.

**At the local level, including both formal and informal networks and services,<sup>13</sup> the following groups and audiences were identified as needing to understand the key insights about early brain development:**

- Local government
- Iwi, hapū, marae chairs, committees
- Churches
- Clubs and informal education settings
- Formal education settings
- Services
- Local businesses
- Gangs
- Sports clubs, gyms

**At the broader social and economic policy level, the participants identified a wide range of people who needed to understand the key insights about early brain development including:**

- People who can vote
- Ministers/ politicians
- Ministries/ policy makers
- Iwi leaders

**Participants noted that politicians and policymakers across a wide range of policy and service areas needed to understand the key insights about early brain development. Those areas included:**

- Justice (including Corrections and Police)
- Education (including ECE)
- Health (including mental health)
- Social development (including income support and Oranga Tamariki)
- Transport

**Two new groups of audiences were identified by the participants. Both these groups were identified as playing an important role in both the narrative and practice around early brain development and as having influence across all of the other levels. They were:**

- Funders
- Media

---

<sup>13</sup> The groups identified at the level of kinship and informal networks, largely overlapped with the audience mapped at the local, formal network level (both groups identified churches, gangs, community organisations and sports clubs, for example) so we have combined those two levels for this report.

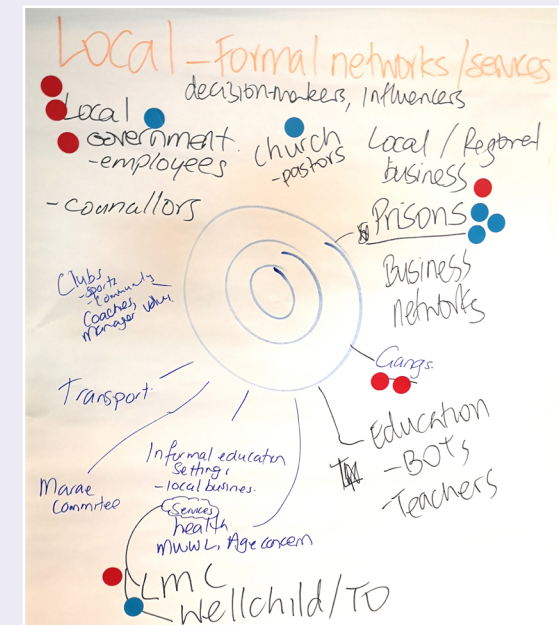
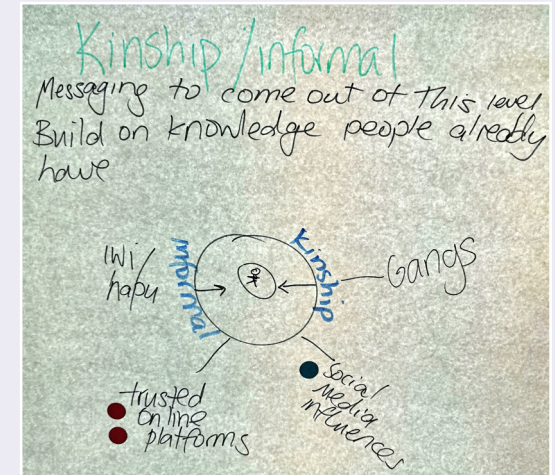
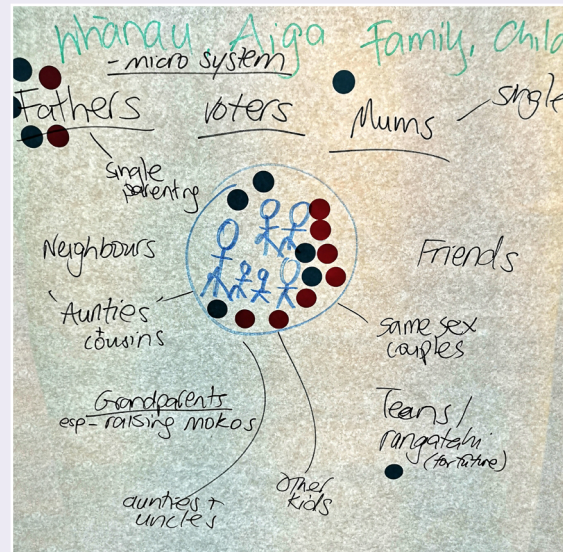
## Prioritising these audiences

Once all the groups had completed this initial mapping process, the participants voted on which of those many audiences was the top priority for narrative and mindset shift. In other words, on which audiences would you focus your efforts for narrative and mindset shift on if you had to choose one?

While some people voted for audiences at every level of the ecological model, participants in the wānanga used their 'dot votes' to prioritise audiences at the broader economic and social policy level, including funders and the media, as having the greatest need for narratives to assist with mindset change.

Alongside this strong focus on shifting mindsets using narratives at the policy, funding and media levels, participants also identified a need for some household and family members to understand these key insights, with a particular focus on fathers.

A set of four photos from the two day wānanga showing the distribution of 'dots' placed on the diagrams by participants to illustrate which audience they wanted to focus on shifting the narrative with. Clockwise from top-left these are 1) whānau, family, household, 2) kinship and informal networks, 3) local environment, formal networks and services, 4) broader economic, policy and social environment.





# What do these audiences currently think?

A partial map of the existing landscape of mindsets and narratives.

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## Why map the landscape of mindsets and narratives? How?

In the process of narrative change, an important step is developing a good understanding of the current landscape of helpful and unhelpful thinking about the issue. What do people currently think about the issue?

As noted above, this can be done using a range of research methods including analysis of media coverage, in-depth interviews with experts and advocates, focus groups with members of the public, public surveys and more. In this case we have gathered and analysed insights from the experts and advocates who were at the wānanga. As such, we are presenting a partial map of current thinking and narratives. More work to map the existing narrative landscape would be a next step (see the section on next steps below).

Having prioritised the audiences, participants at the wānanga then worked in small groups to discuss the current understanding and thinking of each audience, in relation to early brain development. They were invited to consider both helpful and unhelpful ways that the groups of people in these audiences currently think.

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## The audiences mapped by the small groups were:

- Policy makers and Ministers
- Media
- Whānau especially fathers
- Funders
- People who vote (with a note that people who vote have particular influence over politicians, but people who don't vote are also important in the work of narrative shift)

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## Findings: what do audiences currently think?

Participants in the wānanga noted that while there are bright spots of clarity and understanding about the science of brain development across the audiences identified, overall there is patchy understanding of brain development, including at the policy-making level.

A number of themes emerged, in terms of helpful and unhelpful thinking and related narratives about early brain development. Those themes are summarised below and then presented in more detail in the following two tables. The first table sorts the ideas by theme, the second sorts them by audience.

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## Summary of key themes

This section outlines common narratives and mindsets that were identified repeatedly across multiple audiences.

### **Helpful: focus on structural change and collective benefits**

Narratives that emphasise collective action and benefits, and draw people's attention to upstream structures and systems. These narratives are helpful because they surface and deepen understanding of the broad, structural context, and build support for the system-level and structural changes that experts and advocates say will make the most difference to build supportive environments for early childhood development.

### **Unhelpful: individualism/ individualistic narratives**

Individualist narratives that focus on individual behaviour change and individual parental responsibility. These narratives are unhelpful because they surface and reinforce unhelpful and shallow thinking about the barriers to early development, and therefore surface shallow ideas about the solutions that will work. These unhelpful narratives and mindsets were identified across a broad range of audiences from whānau to government and public.

### **Helpful: Valuing Indigenous knowledge and ways of being.**

Narratives that value Indigenous knowledge and are led by and for Māori. Narratives that value cultural connection, such as role models from one's culture. Experts and advocates noted that helpful ways of thinking about early childhood development, including brain development, were grounded in mātauranga Māori and other non-Western wisdom about child and family wellbeing.

### **Unhelpful: Pākehā and Western-centric narratives**

Narratives that centre and value Pākehā ways of being, doing and knowing things to the exclusion of other ways. Narratives that centre on Western views. Conversely, in almost every audience, experts and advocates identified unhelpful ways of thinking about early childhood as those that centred on Pākehā and Western norms, practices and ideas, to the exclusion of other ways of thinking.

## Helpful and unhelpful thinking and narratives by theme

Theme	Helpful thinking	Unhelpful thinking
<b>Valuing Indigenous knowledge and cultural connection</b>	<p><b>Ways of thinking that value Indigenous knowledge and are led by and for Māori, and ways of thinking that value cultural connection. Examples of these ways of thinking include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Recognising grandparents as playing a valuable role in sharing experience, wisdom, stories, and culture.</li> <li>» Positive role models from your culture.</li> <li>» Whānau self-determination.</li> <li>» Recognising childhood brain development and child wellbeing as te Tiriti o Waitangi issues.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ways of thinking that centre Western knowledge, for example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Funders “not valuing Indigenous knowledge enough, valuing biomedical western knowledge too much”.</li> <li>» Policy making process using a “Western lens”.</li> <li>» Justice system focused on “individual responses, nuclear family model, Pākehā system bias”.</li> <li>» Media prioritising “new” Western research.</li> </ul>
<b>Structural change upstream</b>	<p><b>Ways of thinking that emphasise collective action and structural change.</b></p> <p>The importance of having a broad, structural understanding of and approach towards childhood brain development was a strong theme across almost all groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Acknowledging the need to lift stress off families off parents, families and communities so that they can care for their children as they want to.</li> <li>» Acknowledging the role of systemic drivers like income levels, housing quality and cost.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Individualism was commonly identified as an unhelpful way of thinking that was preventing meaningful change.</b></p> <p>Failure to understand and address systemic or upstream causes.</p> <p>Specifically, the mindset of individual parental responsibility for raising children, and the myth of meritocracy.</p> <p>Individualism was a harmful mindset identified across a broad range of groups – from the close whanau level to the government and general public.</p> <p>An example of this thinking from the public and politicians was the idea that “some of the things that children need don’t require money”, like parents giving them time and attention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Specifically, the individualism mindsets lead to people focusing on what parents can fix (e.g., making more time for their kids) without acknowledging the “layers of stress that make it hard to provide these”.</li> </ul>

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Theme	Helpful thinking	Unhelpful thinking
<b>Collective wellbeing and connection</b>	<p><b>Focus on collective wellbeing and shared, collective benefits.</b></p> <p>Ways of thinking that acknowledge the intergenerational nature of the issue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» At the family level how each generation of parents passes on parenting ideas and understandings to future children and parents</li> <li>» Also groups of people pass their wisdom and their trauma through generations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Focus on individual benefits for children.</b></p> <p>Participants said that there is “no link made between babies’ brains and its benefit to the country - people don’t see that it is good for all of us if babies are cared for.”</p>
<b>Holistic child wellbeing</b>	<p><b>Taking a broad and holistic approach to child wellbeing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» The phrase “child wellbeing” broader than “early brain-development”</li> <li>» Think “about babies and wholehealth”</li> <li>» “More focus on kids’ wellbeing”.</li> <li>» Linking human health with planetary and environmental health.</li> </ul>	<p><b>“Old” and “traditional” Western/ Pākehā ways of thinking about parenting and child-development are inhibiting change.</b></p> <p>These “traditional” mindsets about parenting and children are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Pākehā-centric</li> <li>» Gendered/ patriarchal,</li> <li>» Centring the nuclear family, and</li> <li>» Individualistic</li> </ul>

## Helpful and unhelpful thinking participants identified in each of the key audiences

Audience	Helpful thinking	Unhelpful thinking
<b>Whānau &amp; household</b>	<p>Some parents understand they have a strong influence over their child’s brain development.</p> <p>Whānau self-determination, being empowered to influence your child’s development.</p> <p>Whānau and parents recognise the importance of expressing love and care for their babies.</p> <p>An open-minded and hopeful attitude to child-raising.</p>	<p>Some parents do not understand the influence they can have on their child.</p> <p>Fathers were described as holding unhelpful beliefs, such as focusing on control, taking the lead and providing, or thinking “This was never done with me, why should I do it?”</p> <p>Parents have internalised individualism and place blame on themselves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “I should be able to...”</li> <li>» “I have to hold it together because no one else will”</li> </ul> <p>Grandparents can hold similar unhelpful mindsets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “It’s my fault...if I had done a better job we wouldn’t be here”.</li> </ul>
<b>Wider policy level</b>	<p>Ministers and public sector generally realise the importance of brain development and see brain development as a “circuit breaker”.</p> <p>Interconnected understanding of the conditions that enable early brain development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» The importance of inter-agency action/ cooperation was stressed.</li> </ul> <p>Specifically, by sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» CYWS shows “brain development knowledge”</li> <li>» Health has “pockets of brilliance”, “recognition of importance of early years” and “strong understanding of determinants of health”.</li> <li>» Education and justice also have a level of awareness.</li> <li>» Oranga Tamakiri “supporting justice system building a strong relationship of brain development”</li> </ul> <p>Ways of thinking that focus on solutions in the long-term.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “agreed values [of] future child wellbeing that don’t change with the government”.</li> </ul>	<p>Dominant thinking about brain development is Pakeha-centric and rooted in individualism.</p> <p>Ministers don’t see the connection between babies’ brains and collective wellbeing – i.e., good for all of us if babies are cared for.</p> <p>Ministers think about outcomes in Western terms: “What good looks like is thought about in white mans’ terms”.</p> <p>Don’t understand interconnectedness. Siloed thinking about where responsibility for the conditions that enable early brain development.</p> <p>Specifically, by sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Health sector “lots of data, but not front and centre”</li> <li>» Education “focus on behavioural management not causes”</li> <li>» Courts - “mixed understanding of separation impacts”</li> <li>» Police - “early intervention knowledge patchy”</li> <li>» Oranga Tamariki “knowledge of trauma but practice doesn’t stack up”</li> </ul> <p>Lack of “handover between ministers” meaning “having to constantly start again” on this issue. Being too reactive, valuing short over long-term thinking.</p> <p>Influenced by unhelpful public mindsets and narratives about individual responsibility, e.g.,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “Raising children is a parental responsibility only”</li> </ul>

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Audience	Helpful thinking	Unhelpful thinking
<p><b>People who can vote</b></p>	<p>People know that early brain development matters (if not what needs to be in place to foster it).</p> <p>Understand the important role of parents and caregivers.</p> <p>Some understanding of, and support for, early intervention, but often think about it at an individual rather than system level.</p>	<p>As with policy makers and funders, dominant thinking is Pākehā-centric and individualist.</p> <p>“Opinionated about the subject matter with little knowledge”</p> <p>Individualism was the basis of a lot of unhelpful thinking reflected in the mindsets held by people who vote, and potential voters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “Raising children is a parental responsibility only”</li> <li>» “Naughty children = bad mother”</li> <li>» “I’ve worked hard, I’ve overcome X” - often don’t acknowledge privilege”</li> </ul> <p>An unhelpful mindset is that we don’t have a problem in New Zealand, so if things are going badly for a family, that must be their fault, e.g.,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “No real poverty in New Zealand”</li> <li>» “We have a benefit system”</li> <li>» There are jobs for the people who want them”</li> </ul> <p>This reflects a mindset of poverty as “an issue of basic needs being met”.</p> <p>The voter/public audience were also described as having individual rather than collective views about the benefits of change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “How does it benefit me immediately”</li> </ul>
<p><b>People who fund</b></p>	<p>Some funders understand the needs of parents, young babies and children and have a good understanding of what is needed to thrive and grow.</p> <p>Many funders have a good understanding of individual change (but not the importance of system and structural change).</p> <p>Some understand protective factors.</p> <p>Some funders are committed to whānau self-determination.</p> <p>Patches of understanding of the broader systems and policy settings that need to change to release pressures on families and foster brain development. Need this to spread.</p>	<p><b>As with policy makers, politicians and the public, dominant thinking is Pakeha-centric and individualist.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Narrow understanding of what it takes to foster brain development</li> <li>» Lack of understanding of criticality of Indigenous knowledge and practice</li> <li>» Focus on individual behaviour change focus rather than structural change</li> <li>» Focus on benefits for individual rather than collective benefits</li> </ul> <p><b>Examples from participants:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “Don’t understand possibilities that collectivism offers to change things”</li> <li>» “Fail to connect brain development to structural issues”</li> <li>» “Focusing on funding specific projects but no interconnected kaupapa”</li> </ul> <p><b>Siloed and individualist approach (e.g., “programmes around individual change”), rather than structural approach to the issue of brain development.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Need to move from simple answers to the more complex solutions</li> <li>» Need a broader scope - e.g., to “help drive policy toward families having wage they can live on”</li> <li>» E.g., Mums in prison, what interventions (at system level) would you fund keep those mums out of prison and with their children?</li> </ul> <p>Generally, “lack of recognition of broad, longitudinal needs” and “lack of lived experience”</p>

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Audience	Helpful thinking	Unhelpful thinking
<p><b>People in media</b></p>	<p>Stories of connection, cultural strength and community.</p> <p>Stories that show how improving social, economic and cultural conditions for a community can improve the conditions for early childhood development (stories that show systems).</p>	<p>Dominant thinking about family and childcare are Western-centric, gendered, heteronormative and ageist.</p> <p>Stories that focus on the nuclear family. Individual stories that focus on the behaviour of parents, leaving out the systemic issues.</p> <p>Overall the media narrative is skewed to and by extreme stories, with a bias for stories of conflict and harm. 'Clickbait'</p> <p>Tendency to report on new Western research without seeking wisdom or input from other sources of wisdom, including mātauranga Māori.</p> <p>The idea that balanced reporting involves hearing from 'both sides' even when one side is spreading harmful and untruthful narratives.</p> <p>Lifestyle media focus on personal experiences and often miss wider systemic factors.</p> <p>Famous people's opinions are newsworthy even if they are wrong and harmful.</p>

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## Summary of helpful mindsets to surface using narratives

### **Focus on structural change and collective benefits**

Narratives that reflect a broad, structural understanding of and approach towards childhood brain development. Narratives that emphasise collective action and benefits.

### **Interconnected thinking**

Narratives that highlight the interconnectedness of many different aspects of a family's life, the social, economic and cultural context, and the work and roles of many different agencies, groups and people.

### **Valuing Indigenous knowledge and ways of being.**

Narratives that value Indigenous knowledge and are led by and for Māori. Narratives that value cultural connection, such as role models from one's culture.

### **Enabling whānau self-determination**

Narratives that value and advance whānau self-determination, and being empowered to influence your child's development.

### **Holistic child wellbeing**

Narratives that surface a holistic understanding of and approach to child wellbeing, which ties in with the seeing brain development as a structural and interconnected issue.

### **Intergenerational and long-term**

Narratives that surface understanding that early brain development is an intergenerational issue, and that it requires long-term consistent responses.

This is where it is useful to revisit the key difference between your set of facts and information about early brain development and what is required to support it, the story you want to use that information to tell, and your audience's understanding (mindset). Audience mindset is the filter through which your audience will make sense of your facts, information and evidence. If these mindsets are unhelpful (i.e., individualist and Pākehā-centric), then even your good quality information will be processed through that mindset and people may arrive at shallow explanations about your complex issue. Narrative shift is less about how to better communicate your set of facts and evidence, and more about how you shift underlying mindsets so that when people come to your evidence they filter it through a much more helpful filter.

Having identified the kind of thinking experts and advocates want to avoid, and the more helpful thinking they want to surface, the next question is: how do you do that? How do you redirect people's thinking? To do this, we use the five building blocks of narrative change.



# The five building blocks of narratives for change

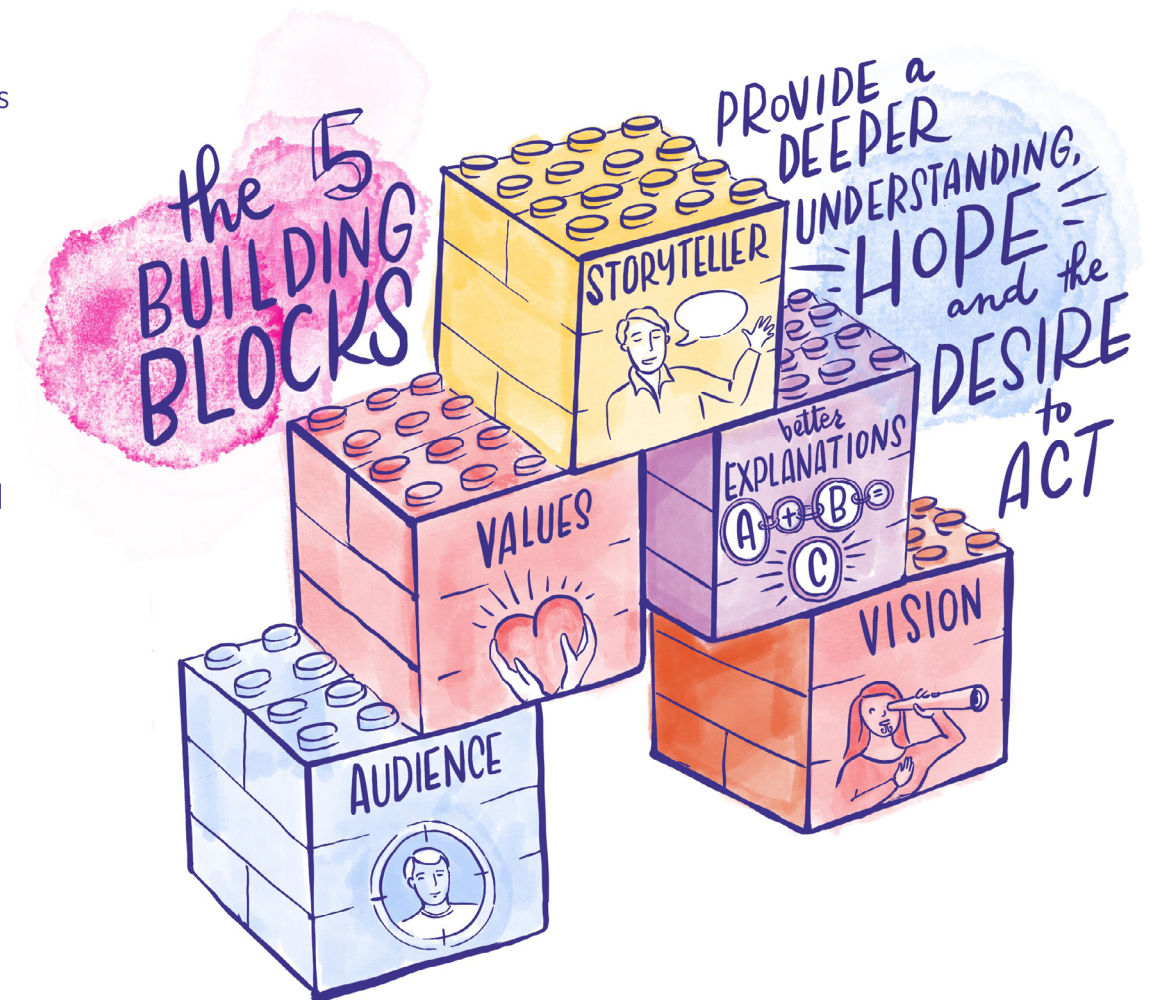
At The Workshop, we've drawn on research from various disciplines to create a five-part framework of communications tools and strategies to build new narratives and redirect your audience to more helpful thinking.

## This framework will:

1. Help you build new narratives (or surface existing helpful ones that are recessive)
2. Help you communicate your evidence – whether that be from science, mātauranga Māori or lived experience – and deepen people's thinking.

## The five building blocks we have developed are:

1. Be clear about your audience
2. Lead with a concrete vision
3. Lead with shared intrinsic values
4. Offer people better explanations
5. Use trusted messengers.





## Building block 1. Audience: who you should communicate with

The way you think about your audience matters when you are building new helpful narratives.

# 1

### Generally speaking, there are three main groups of people to consider when you think about your audience:

- People who are already persuaded.
- People who don't yet have a fixed view or who have mixed and sometimes competing views on child and family wellbeing (and early brain development) and what is needed to support it (the persuadables).
- People who are fixed in their thinking about how we should support families and children (hard to persuade).

### Don't focus on people who are hard to persuade:

- If you think about and talk mainly to those who are fixed in their thinking about your message you will reinforce dominant narratives and unhelpful thinking. This can be hard to resist because those people are often loud and demand your attention.
- Engaging with people who are hard to persuade often leads us into myth busting and negating false arguments. This amplifies those myths and unhelpful thinking for others and is both ineffective and potentially harmful.
- Instead, treat this small noisy opposition as an inevitable and fundamental part of shifting thinking and systems.

### Engage people who are persuaded, but don't focus only on them:

- If you talk only to those who already understand your issues and are persuaded by your evidence and proposed solutions (your base), you won't develop new communication strategies, narratives or deeper understandings.
- If you test out ways of communicating your issue and evidence on this group, they will often make sense of confusing or ambiguous messages because they are already persuaded.
- So while your base of persuaded people are important to your work, and for carrying your message to others, treating them as your core audience and testing messages on them is often unhelpful.

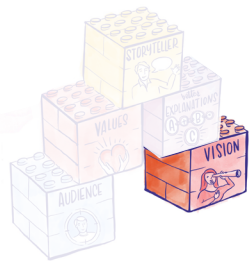
### Focus on people who are persuadable:

- Instead, focus on communicating with people who don't have a fixed view or who have mixed and sometimes competing views on the issue. We call these people 'persuadable' or 'fence-sitters'. On most issues, they are the majority.



#### Key insight:

Effective strategic communications will activate the people who are already persuaded by your message and convince people who are open to persuasion.



## Building block 2. Lead with a concrete vision for a better world

- A vision builds hope – this is important because people are constantly being reminded of all the problems in the world.
- A vision can help overcome some of the cognitive biases that undermine support for change.
- A vision creates an invitation for people to consider the issue as important to them.
- When the front door is blocked by despair, fatalism or cynicism or powerful cognitive bias such as status quo bias, a vision can open a side door for your evidence to be heard.

### Key principles of vision-making

#### **Make your vision concrete, believable and specific.**

- Paint a vivid picture of how the world will be better in concrete terms for families and children, and as a consequence all of us, when early brain development is well supported. How will children's day-to-day lives be better? In what concrete ways will their health and wellbeing and that of their whānau be improved?
- When you talk about these concrete future benefits, be explicit about the interconnection of the benefits for children, families, and the wider community.

#### **Sell the cake, not the ingredients.**

- It's the cake that motivates us to gather the ingredients and follow the recipe. Your vision is the cake, so lead your communications with that. Not the list of ingredients or steps needed to make it.
- If we spend a lot of time researching and thinking about what is needed to create change, it's natural to want to lead our messages with the detail of those recipes.
- While your ingredients are really important, they are not a vision. Lead with a vision of the outcome of your recipe - the cake!
- Avoid leading with policy, legal or technological solutions, for example changes to welfare or child care policies and funding.

## Ensure your vision is inclusive of all people and their needs.

- Create inclusive visions in partnership with those most negatively impacted by current social conditions. This is likely to improve long-term engagement also.

## Show credible human-driven pathways to achieving the vision.

- A vision is motivating and can inspire hope. But without a credible pathway to achieve that vision, hope won't last long. This is where your recipe comes in. Having led with a vision, now identify the steps to achieve the vision. These may include local level changes such as government organisations providing better resourcing to local organisations that are working with whānau.
- Put people in the picture. Persuadable audiences often don't have a clear idea of who can create change, especially at a system level. You can increase people's sense of control and agency if you identify the people in a system who can act to achieve the vision, e.g., people in government, people in government agencies, hapū and iwi, the local community, a particular community organisation or service provider.
- Avoid passive language, by including a human agent. Without clear agents, people default to thinking change is impossible. Name the agents who can build support for early brain development.

## Avoid negating or myth busting.

- Repeating myths or opposing stories in order to negate them just reinforces them in the minds of some persuadable people. Don't spend your precious energy and time doing that. Instead, focus on telling your positive story for action and reframe the debate.



### Key insight:

Lead your message with a clear vision of how the world will be better in concrete ways when the changes you are advocating for have all been made. This will motivate people to support your change, and build their hope that change is possible.

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## A vision for children and families

Participants at the wānanga worked in small groups to describe in clear, specific and concrete terms how the world would be better if everything needed to support early brain development was in place. These visions shared during the wānanga had a lot in common, including a strong emphasis on healthy, thriving whānau and communities and on the social, economic and cultural conditions that would be in place in a future where early brain development was supported.



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### Examples of the visions created by participants at the wānanga include:

- “We have a dream of a future in which whānau have everything they need to realise their mana motuhake.”
- “We will all have safe space, time, bandwidth for babies and children to feel safe and connect with their whakapapa, who they are.”
- “Whānau can dream, and they have the resources, support and self-determination to achieve those dreams.”
- “Whānau will have more time to spend together, and more safe spaces to play in together.”
- “Communities will have time and space to do things together - art, music etc - in a connected, vibrant, psychologically healthy community.”
- “Every home is built well, with gardens and spaces with opportunities for extended whānau living.”
- “A healthy planet, healthy environment, healthy nation and public service, healthy whānau, healthy home.”

“Our mokopuna’s mokopuna are immersed in their culture, reo, whānau, who they are, and are empowered to make decisions that are right for them.”

“Young parents are confident and enjoy having children. Children are cheeky and fun. Parents are relaxed.”

These visions offer some great starting material for people crafting narratives on what families and our wider society can be like to support early brain development. By leading with these kinds of concrete pictures of a better future, people advocating for change have a better chance of engaging and motivating persuadable audiences.

Some of the draft visions focused on the recipe rather than the cake, describing, for example, the changes that would need to be made to policies and funding processes to build a world supportive of early brain development. Examples include:

“We value and prioritise children, parents and nurturers in spending and policy.”

“The Treasury factors children and their caregivers into assessment of Budget bids.”

“Commissioning work at local community level.”

“Investment will have shifted from crisis response to prevention.”

As noted above, these pathways to change are critically important in your messages. But research shows that the order in which we present our message matters. A strong, compelling message starts with the ways people’s lives will be better in concrete ways, and then goes on to outline the changes that need to happen to achieve that, ideally naming the people who can make those changes.

**For example:**

“We can have a future in which whānau have everything they need to realise their mana motuhake. Most of us want whānau to have more time to spend together, and more safe spaces to play in together. Young parents are confident and enjoy having children. Children are cheeky and fun. Parents are relaxed. To create this future, we need people in government to value and prioritise children, parents and nurturers in spending and policy. People at the Treasury need to consider the impact of Budget bids on children and their caregivers and focus on prevention.”

This example draws on the visions proposed by participants at the wānanga, and existing research on narratives for change, but hasn’t been tested to see how effective it would be for engaging and motivating persuadable audiences in Aotearoa. Drafting messages like this, and testing them in Aotearoa, would be another possible next step for narrative change work (see section on next steps below).



## Building block 3. Connecting with what matters to people: values that motivate

Values are what matters most to us in life. They are at the heart of human motivations. Engaging with people's values is shown to help better communicate science.

# 3

- Dominant public narratives often tell us that money, personal success and our public image are most important. These are known as *extrinsic and individual values*.
- Many public narratives also surface fears for our own health and safety or that of our loved ones. These are known as *security values*.
- Research shows that what matters most to most people is taking care of each other and the planet, discovery, creativity and reaching our own goals. These are known as *intrinsic and collective values*.
- These intrinsic values are the ones most likely to engage people in deeper thinking about complex issues and improving systems for collective wellbeing.



### Key insight:

Use intrinsic and collective values to communicate about issues of collective wellbeing.



### Tip:

One way to identify the values in your message is to ask: What is/are the reason/s this message gives for why this change matters?

## Values for supporting families and children and early brain development

Some of the key intrinsic values that research has shown work to surface helpful thinking around childhood adversity and toxic stress include:

- **Social Responsibility:** This value gets people considering the collective responsibility of ensuring that children have the environment and resources they require to develop and helps them understand the need for societal and systems-level solutions.<sup>14</sup>
- **Interdependence and interconnectedness:** This value helps people see that our lives are connected and we depend on one another to be able to address issues in our lives. This helps people think about collective benefits and solutions.<sup>15</sup>
- **Community Strength:** This value helps build support to address issues like toxic stress in communities with evidence-based programmes to make them stronger.
- **Fairness across communities and families:** This value surfaces the idea that children should have what they need to be able to develop and have good health and wellbeing. It is shown to increase willingness for people to act and support solutions.<sup>16</sup>
- **The Human Potential Value:** This value helps people see that our communities are stronger when all people, including children who have huge potential, can realise their full potential.<sup>17</sup>

We think there might be other values that are particularly relevant in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, such as self-determination, and others that were shared with us (see below). It would be worth testing these in the next stage (see 'Next steps').

## What values are practitioners using when talking about early brain development?

The brain development collective wānanga shared the helpful, intrinsic values that they use in their communications and work.

- Collective responsibility for the care of children – whānau and communities
- Care and tenderness – grounded in pre-colonial ways that Māori treated tamariki
- Equity
- Reciprocity
- Hospitality and manaakitanga with whānau and communities that encounter their services
- Respect for the child and whānau
- Importance of wairuatanga and the spiritual life
- Forgiveness

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**14** Fond, M., Haydon, A., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2015). Communicating connections: Framing the relationship between social drivers, early adversity, and child neglect. A FrameWorks Message Brief. FrameWorks Institute. [https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/social\\_determinants\\_ecd\\_messagebrief\\_final.pdf](https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/social_determinants_ecd_messagebrief_final.pdf)

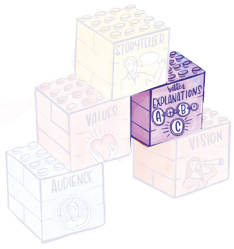
**15** Busso, D., Davis, C., & O'Neil, M. (2019). *Strategies for effectively communicating about toxic stress*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FRAJ8022-Genentech-Strategic-Brief-Communicating-About-Toxic-Stress-200709.pdf>

**16** L'Hôte, E., Hawkins, N., Kendall-Taylor, N., & Volmert, A. (2020). *Moving early childhood up the agenda: A core story of early childhood development in Australia*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FRAJ8033-CoLab-Strategic-Brief-200513-WEB.pdf>

**17** Bales, S., Volmert, A., Baran, M., O'Neil, M., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2015). *Talking human services: A FrameWorks MessageMemo*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/publication/talking-human-services-a-frameworks-multi-media-messagememo/>



## Building block 4. Provide better explanations



# 4

- In order to support your solution to a problem, people need to understand what caused the problem. If my understanding of the cause of a problem is shallow or inaccurate, I'm likely to support shallow solutions that won't work.
- If we describe a problem without a good clear explanation of what caused it, what impacts it has and the outcomes it leads to, people will 'fill in the gaps', using shallow thinking or narratives.
- As communicators for change, we need to offer better, more powerful explanations of the problems we are trying to solve including: how the problem happened, who is responsible, the effects and what needs to be done. In explaining complex issues we need to employ communication strategies and tools that work with people's fast thinking and a busy information environment
- To surface better understandings for people about early brain development and how to support it, we need to provide better explanations.
- In strategic communication a good explanation:
  1. provides a complete new story about early brain development and why it matters
  2. works with people's fast thinking in an overwhelming information environment
  3. avoids repackaging unhelpful thinking and narratives
  4. includes an intentional and helpful way of framing the issue
  5. is solutions driven
  6. uses facts as a character in a complete story about causes, effects and solutions.

- Some of the ways we provide better explanations are:

1. Understanding and using frames
2. Using better metaphors
3. Using facts in explanatory chains



### Frames

- **Frames** are pre-packaged explanations about how the world works.
- Frames surface particular ways of thinking about an issue. For example, health is often 'framed' as an individual responsibility, through the language, metaphors, and images we see.
- Frames are one of many cognitive shortcuts we take to make the mental effort of information processing easier.
- Frames are employed unconsciously and are often shared across a culture.
- We cannot avoid frames or negate or myth bust unhelpful ones, but we can replace them with better ones.

Frames are a concept or idea off which we can 'hang' the rest of our communications.

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## Frames for the early brain development story to deepen thinking and inspire hope

Research done by the FrameWorks Institute on communicating specifically about toxic stress<sup>18</sup> and the impact it has on children, particularly to an audience who may have experienced significant adversity themselves, recommends five key frames that surface helpful thinking about this.<sup>19</sup>

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- 1. Use a ‘resilience’ frame** where you don’t talk about toxic stress without also explaining people’s capacity for resilience. This helps people to understand that negative experiences in childhood do not necessarily lead to negative outcomes later on and avoids the thinking that the damage from these experiences in childhood is irreversible. It also helps emphasise the role of effective services.
- 2. Frame the context in which parenting is taking place** so that parents do not feel guilty for the impact that external factors and stressors have on their ability to responsively parent.
- 3. Use a ‘self-efficacy’ frame** instead of ‘individualism’. Parents have self-determination and control and can make positive changes, while still recognising the impact that external factors and systems have upon them. What helps is to explain the external conditions that affect outcomes first and then tell stories about individual autonomy. This frame helps people move away from the idea that responsive parenting is simply a matter of good choices.
- 4. Frame toxic stress as a public concern in need of community-based solutions** to help build healthy environments for all children. Communities themselves are agents of change.
- 5. Don’t rely on the value of science alone.** Conversations about brain science are not always helpful – especially for communities who have good reason to not trust scientists. FrameWorks recommends that it is better to appeal to a collective process of knowledge production by saying something like, “We know a lot more than we used to about how toxic stress affects development” to include those you are speaking with along with scientists. In our view, this is a way to acknowledge the value that different ways of knowing such as mātauranga Māori bring to the topic, without being extractive of that knowledge.

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<sup>18</sup> See the following section on Metaphors to read about how ‘toxic stress’ is an effective metaphor.

<sup>19</sup> Busso, D., Davis, C., & O’Neil, M. (2019). Strategies for effectively communicating about toxic stress. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FRAJ8022-Genentech-Strategic-Brief-Communicating-About-Toxic-Stress-200709.pdf>

### Another frame that research has found to be useful is:

- Framing support for early childhood development as **leading to good health and wellbeing both now and in the future**. This helps people to think about the positive benefits of building children's brains and bodies for their health and wellbeing now and setting them up well for their futures.<sup>20</sup>

## What frames are currently working for practitioners when talking about early brain development?

The brain development collective wānanga shared some of the frames they identified in their work.

- Viewing children as a taonga for the wider community to value and care for.
- Mātauranga Māori, by Māori/Pasifika and for Māori/Pasifika.
- Whakapapa – this can also be used as a metaphor – ‘switching on DNA’.
- ‘Toxic stress’ as a way to communicate to an audience that can make changes that will make the biggest difference to whānau and communities (e.g., policy makers).
- Talking matters – especially in terms of providing a language rich environment for young children.
- Partnership.
- Whānau-centred – this is a strengths-based approach that acknowledges that parents and families know children best.

<sup>20</sup> L'Hôte, E., Hawkins, N., Kendall-Taylor, N., & Volmert, A. (2020). *Moving early childhood up the agenda: A core story of early childhood development in Australia*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FRAJ8033-CoLab-Strategic-Brief-200513-WEB.pdf>



## Metaphors

Metaphors are a simplifying explanatory tool we can use to help our audience quickly grasp better, deeper explanations for complex problems. A metaphor takes something we understand on a practical everyday level and connects it to the abstract or complex to make sense.

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### Some general principles for using metaphors

- ➔ Check your communications for metaphors you have used unintentionally. Because they are so common in our language, we often use metaphors without realising.
  - » Tip: images often contain metaphors – if possible, test images before use.
- ➔ Avoid untested metaphors where possible. If you don't have any tested metaphors to use, consider what ideas, beliefs and explanations any metaphors you use might surface.

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### Useful metaphors for talking about early brain development

We heard from experts and advocates at the wānanga that we need metaphors that show the importance of interventions at multiple levels in the system. The greatest need that the experts and advocates identified was not in explaining the brain science or how brain development works but to have narrative strategies that increase understanding of systemic and structural issues and shift away from individualist thinking. Metaphors are one helpful narrative strategy to shift thinking.

The sector was already familiar with and using a set of metaphors to help tell the early brain development story that were developed and tested in a collaboration between the FrameWorks Institute and the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University in the United States.<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that these metaphors may not work well in all cultural settings, but participants reported that they have some success in applying them in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. A next step may be to test them here.

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<sup>21</sup> A good summary of the six metaphors is found here: NSPCC. (2021). *Sharing the brain story: Using metaphors to explain child development*. National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/2547/sharing-the-brain-story-metaphors-summary-booklet.pdf>

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## **Metaphors to explain how brain development happens at individual level**

The first three metaphors on the right focus on describing how brain development happens and can be interrupted at the individual level. They are particularly good to use with parents and families to tell the story of the facts and evidence about brain science to see what they can and are doing to support brain development.

### → **Brain architecture**

This metaphor works to explain that brains are built through an active process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. It recognises that interventions that happen at any point in a child's life will improve their experiences and build/shape their brains.

### → **Serve and return**

This metaphor is the one we heard most commonly used. This empowers the adults in a child's life to actively build relationships and engage in turn-taking language interactions that help with language acquisition. Participants reported success in using this metaphor to help parents and whānau understand and engage in these simple interactions.

### → **Air traffic control**

This metaphor helps to explain the cognitive processes that children's brains have to develop (its executive function) with the support of those around them. These skills, or air traffic control systems, that manage 'mental airspace' of children develop with time and practice. Where this metaphor works particularly well is to help audiences understand children who have less well developed air traffic control systems.

## Metaphors to explain how wider systems create the conditions for brain development

Given that the priority identified at the wānanga was to shift away from unhelpful individualist narratives and towards deeper understanding of the collective benefits of brain development and the systemic and structural drivers of this, the three metaphors below have been tested to be helpful to show the wider systems and context in which brain development occurs.

These metaphors avoid undermining the importance of the grassroots/ downstream work that whānau, communities and organisations are doing with children, but also serve to lift people's gaze to recognise where changes can happen upstream. They are good to use with an audience that is people who can make the necessary changes to lift stress from families to help them see the supports required for brain development.

### → The stress metaphor

Toxic (harmful) stress is what a child experiences when in a harmful environment due to factors like extreme poverty or violence in a community. The metaphor emphasises that these factors are often outside of the control of the whānau. It is particularly useful in helping audiences understand that action can be taken by those with the power to make changes to the things causing the stress, such as providing appropriate resources to whānau and communities. It's important that the metaphor is not used to describe the child's environment or family.<sup>22</sup> It may not be especially useful to use with an audience that is parents and families.

### → Overloaded

The overloaded truck (lorry) metaphor illustrates the weight that stressors like poverty place upon families. When the truck is overloaded, it negatively impacts a family's capacity to care for their children's needs. When severe enough, the overloading can cause a breakdown. This metaphor is especially useful for lifting the audience's gaze upstream to see the broader social factors that cause family stresses that impact children. It makes it easier to identify the agents responsible for collective, society-wide solutions to these causes. It also works to explain to families why services or organisations have been brought in to help them 'lighten the load' before or in a situation of breakdown.

### → Tipping the scales

The metaphor describes a child's development as a scale that we want to tip towards the positive side of good developmental outcomes. This is done through the child's positive relationships and supportive environments and experiences. It highlights the multitude of factors that influence good outcomes and illustrates how protective factors (like language acquisition) can help weight the scales in favour of these good outcomes.



### Next steps:

Because all of these metaphors have been developed and tested in other settings, and are being used by some experts and practitioners here in Aotearoa New Zealand, a next step may be to test them here.

<sup>22</sup> An example of the use of the toxic stress metaphor by Brainwave Trust Aotearoa: O'Neill, K. (2021). *Stress in early development: A quick snapshot*. Brainwave Trust Aotearoa. <https://brainwave.org.nz/article/stress-in-early-development-a-quick-snapshot/>

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## Other metaphors being used in Aotearoa New Zealand

Our general advice is to use tested metaphors. However, international metaphors may not work equally well in all cultural settings. Without testing it is hard to predict how a metaphor will interact with existing mindsets and whether it will help navigate people away from unhelpful and shallow thinking. All of the above metaphors have been tested overseas and found useful – some to explain facts and evidence about early brain development, and some to explain the systems and structures to support this.

We looked at the literature in Aotearoa New Zealand and found the following metaphors described. We acknowledge here that more work is to be done on the most appropriate way to use metaphors that draw on Māori and Pasifika ways of knowing and doing to explain child development so that they are valued in their own right rather than used in an extractive way. Additionally, they have not been specifically tested to see what helpful or unhelpful thinking they surface in audiences. We think they would be good ones to test in our context and this could be a next step in the process (see 'Next steps').

### → Te whare tūpuna (meeting house)

Dr Tākīrangiri Smith shared this metaphor at the wānanga to tell the story of Māori understandings of wellbeing.<sup>23</sup> Te whare tūpuna was a place where the process of healing was carried out in a protected space. Dr Smith uses the metaphor to describe how cultural healing practices can be recovered to address patu ngākau (deep emotional wounds) and pōuritanga (darkness) experienced by Māori. These practices involve using tikanga (practices and protocols) and kawa (values) referring to the physical and metaphorical interior of the whare tūpuna to rebalance mauri (energy) and restore the natural balance between māramatanga (understanding/brainwave) and pōuritanga.

### → Harakeke (flax plant)

The harakeke (flax plant) metaphor is used by many, in many contexts, including by the Centre for Social Impact. It is based on the following whakataukī: “Hutia te rito o te harakeke, kei hea te komako e ko?” or “If the centre shoot of the flax bush were plucked, where would the bellbird sing?”<sup>24</sup> It illustrates how the child grows and is protected within a supportive whānau environment. It helps audiences see that what works best to support the child in the first 1000 days are culturally appropriate and evidence-led interventions that are designed by the community to support the wider whānau.

*Continued over page >>*

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<sup>23</sup> Smith, T. (2019). He ara uru ora: *Traditional Māori understandings of trauma and wellbeing*. Te Atawhai o Te Ao. <https://teatawhai.maori.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/He-Ara-Uru-Ora.pdf>; and from wānanga day two presentation by Dr Takirangi Smith.

<sup>24</sup> Centre for Social Impact. (2015). *Opportunities to make a positive impact in the first 1,000 days of a child's life*. Centre for Social Impact. <https://www.baytrust.org.nz/vdb/document/12>

## → Whakapapa

Although we have described ‘whakapapa’ as a frame, or set of explanations about how the world works, it may also work as a metaphor. Rameka describes it as connecting the child through its parents back to its ancestors and to a set of traits that it has inherited from them.<sup>25</sup> This metaphor also uses the value of wairuatanga or spirituality. The idea of ‘switching on your DNA’, or the traits you inherit through your whakapapa, was shared at the wānanga and links mātauranga Māori and early brain science.

The whakapapa metaphor is also used by Rangimārie Te Turuki Arikirangi Rose Pere to connect mātauranga Māori with the brain science to illustrate how the child’s brain is supported by different levels equated to its whakapapa.<sup>26</sup> The brainstem is the tīpuna, the limbic system is the mātua in the whānau, and the cortex is the tamariki that needs to be nurtured.

## → Seed and seedling

This metaphor is used to describe the context of a child’s learning environment that is created through relationships between whānau, adults who work with children, and children. A whakataukī tells the story of a child as a seed to nurture: “Kohikohia ngā kākano, whakaritea te pārekereke, kia puāwai ngā hua” or “Gather the seeds, prepare the seedbed carefully, and you will be gifted with abundance of food”.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, the Government’s Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy uses the whakataukī: “Whakatōngia te kākano aroha i roto i ā tātou taitamariki kia puāwai i roto i tō rātou tupuranga aranui orange” or “Plant the seed of love in our children and they will blossom, grow and journey towards the greatest pathway of life”.<sup>28</sup> We think this metaphor probably helps to lift the gaze to the systems and structures required to support early brain development.

<sup>25</sup> Rameka, L. (2015). Te Ira Atua: The spiritual spark of the child. *He Kupu: The Word*, 4(2). <https://www.hekupu.ac.nz/sites/default/files/2017-10/Te-Ira-Atua-The-spiritual-spark-of-the-child.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> McCaleb, M., & Mikaere-Wallis, N. (2005). Relationship-shaping: Teacher consistency and implications for brain development. *The First Years: Ngā Tau Tuatahi. New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education*, 7(2). [http://baby.geek.nz/Old\\_Site/Writing\\_files/Relationship-shaping.pdf](http://baby.geek.nz/Old_Site/Writing_files/Relationship-shaping.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Education. (2009). Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars. Ministry of Education. <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/TeWhatuPokeka.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC). (2019). Child and youth wellbeing strategy. DPMC. <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-08/child-youth-wellbeing-strategy-2019.pdf>



## What metaphors are currently working for practitioners when talking about early brain development?

**‘Serve and return’** is the most often used metaphor in the work of organisations with whānau. Organisations find this to be a successful, strengths-based metaphor that empowers whānau by helping them understand ways of interacting with their children that provide a rich language environment, an important protective factor.

This metaphor was designed to be used in the suite of metaphors described above. We recommend that as well as using it, it is also good to frame your communications in a way that highlights the role that people in government play in actively creating wellbeing for the population and environments that support early brain development. Used alone, the metaphor may inadvertently trigger the ‘individualism’ frame in the thinking of this audience, where they understand the most important thing about early brain development to be the individual actions of parents and families.

This also helps to navigate around the ‘fatalism’ frame - thinking that government organisations can’t cooperate or have a lack of capability of addressing problems. Focus your communications on collectivity values and policies and practices that support the environment of the child. (Although ‘serve and return’ has proved helpful, we are also interested in looking at what this metaphor might sound like if it was more culturally appropriate to the Aotearoa New Zealand context.)

### **Other metaphors that we heard you use were:**

- Whakapapa – ‘switching on your DNA’, also described above.
- ‘Rupture and repair’ – linked to the value of forgiveness.
- Fonofale model of health using a fale/house structure to show what is needed to support children and families.<sup>29</sup>

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## Using facts

- Facts are a character in the story you want to tell about what the problem is, who it affects and how, the need to act, who made it happen and who can change it and how.
- Facts are not the entire story. To help talk about facts more effectively use explanatory chains and make sure facts are 'fluent'.

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### Putting facts into a story: Using explanatory chains

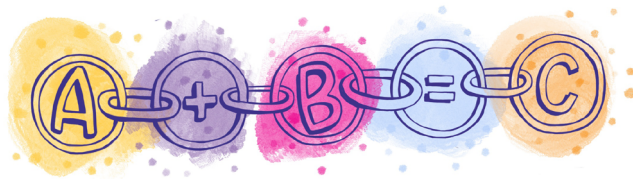
Explanatory chains are a tool to help us explain an issue and solutions using your facts.

People's existing understandings about issues are constructed in a chain with a cause and effect (like a story), so we need to replace that chain of explanation.

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#### Explanatory chain:

- foreground the issue positively (e.g., a short vision, values or why it matters)
- identify the cause of the problem upfront
- provide general conceptual accounts of the indirect and direct impacts
- end with solutions.



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#### Make facts fluent

To help tell your story, choose a few limited facts and talk about them in a way that makes them more fluent for people (they can understand and recall them better).

- Use fewer facts.
- Present the facts so people have an everyday context for them.
- Depict facts visually as a preference.
- Use strategies such as guess and reveal. E.g., ask people to make a guess at the fact and then reveal the answer.

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## Choose language that serves your narrative

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### **Use simple, clear language. Avoid technical language and jargon.**

Even when your audience has technical expertise, using clear and concrete language is more likely to serve the narrative strategies set out above. Jargon, technical and abstract language can obscure your meaning. While most of us recognise this, many of us find it hard to apply in practice especially when we are explaining complex science or policy issues. As noted above, a good metaphor can help to communicate complex explanations in clear and concrete ways.

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### **Use language that identifies the agents who can make changes**

We want people to understand that there are things they can do that will help make the biggest differences to fix issues. Headlines such as “# percent of children experience childhood adversity” don’t name a person or agent involved in the problem. This makes it hard for people to see who needs to act and what needs to be done. One way to help people lift their gaze and see what needs to happen is to name the specific agents of change within the system.

For example, we can talk about iwi, hapū, communities, and people in government and in government agencies who can make decisions that have a positive effect on systems and structures. It may sound like, “Our community can provide a rich environment for children to develop in if people in government make changes to better resource iwi and hapū in this work”. This helps to draw people’s focus to aspects of the broader environment that children are in that people do have control over and gives them a sense of competence.

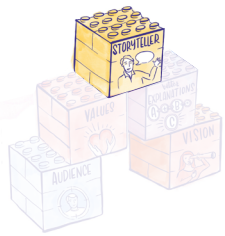
## What techniques work for practitioners?

Participants at the wānanga told us that shifting the way that policy makers, funders, and the media think about early brain development is a big priority for them, but they were not confident that they already had effective techniques for communicating with these audiences. This is one of the areas identified as a priority for further research.

Participants were more confident in identifying techniques that work when communicating with their inner circle of whānau, family, household, and kinship and informal networks about the early brain development and actions that whānau can take to support it.

### **These are the techniques identified by wānanga participants that they use with this audience:**

- Be authentic and honest.
- Messages that centre on the child are more engaging for whānau.
- Use humour to connect.
- Use evidence-based messages and make sure you simplify your scientific information.
- Use a wide range of cultural practices and approaches.



## Building block 5. Storytellers and messengers

# 5

- We use credibility and trust as one mental shortcut – it's less work to take a trusted person's advice than assess all the information ourselves (credibility mental shortcut).
- We also use mental shortcuts in deciding who to trust or who is credible, i.e., how someone looks, the institutions they come from, past experience with similar people or institutions.
- Expertise is about perception not technical expertise.

### Three principles on Storytellers:

#### Use trusted others to provide positive social proof and improve credibility of a message

- » We move to accept beliefs and positions that we see frequently repeated in order to fit in.
- » Repetition from trusted others confers credibility to the information you are trying to get across.
- » This cuts both ways – repeating unhelpful information gives it credibility.

#### Use messengers with shared values

- » It is important to find messengers that people can see represent their values.
- » Use surprising messengers – for example, people seen as conservative talking about climate action.

#### Pair the right messenger with the right message

- » Pair effective narratives with a messenger that is trusted/credible to your audience.
- » Choose messengers who will bring with them trust and credibility for your persuadable audience and who are in a position to transition/slide your audience into your helpful message.

#### What is social proof?

- » Showing people that others that they consider trustworthy are willing to make or support changes is a more effective strategy to garner support for things like emission reduction plans than presenting people with negative facts about the problem.

## Who are effective storytellers and messengers?

It would be useful for experts and advocates in the sector to have more opportunity to explore this question in more depth.

- Peer to peer works well.
- Use people who are trusted sources of information – especially when families don't always trust information that is coming from the government. This is not always you.
- Look for people who are trusted authorities in that specific community. In some communities this will be elders and church leadership.

# Putting it all together – an example message for early brain development

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## **Steps 1 & 2:** Articulate a positive and inclusive vision and identify helpful intrinsic values: the why

“We can have a future in which whānau have everything they need to realise their mana motuhake. A future in which we all have the space and time for babies and children to feel safe and connect with their whakapapa. We will all thrive in Aotearoa New Zealand when whānau and their babies are thriving.”

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## **Step 3:** What is preventing the realisation of this vision?

(Here is the opportunity to provide better explanations about the support required for early brain development: the who, the how, the where.)

“But in New Zealand today, too many whānau and communities are overloaded with pressures and stresses, like poverty and a lack of government support. This impacts their wellbeing over the long term, and interferes with their ability to support the development of their children.”

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## **Steps 4:** Present solutions

Attribute better outcomes based on evidence of the cause.

“People in government and policy makers can make changes that will offload sources of stress from overloaded communities and whānau, unlocking their capacity to support their children’s development.”

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## **Steps 5:** Present action/resolution (the what now?)

“We have an opportunity to build healthy brains and the wellbeing of tamariki and whānau together. You can hold people in politics accountable, and encourage them to fund evidence-led solutions to...”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Example adapted from NSPCC. (2021). *Sharing the brain story: Using metaphors to explain child development*. National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/2547/sharing-the-brain-story-metaphors-summary-booklet.pdf>

# Next steps

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## **The purpose of this report was two-fold:**

- 1.** To provide participants in the wānanga and others working to improve the conditions for early brain development in Aotearoa with useful initial insights and recommendations regarding narrative strategies to deepen understanding among key audiences; and
- 2.** To provide a foundation for, and recommendations regarding, further work that could be done to develop narrative strategies to deepen understanding about early brain development and the conditions required to support it.

**This section of the report focuses on options for that further work. Before making recommendations about further work, it is useful to outline the usual phases of work involved in the process of narrative change.**



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## Phases of narrative change work

There are many ways to think about the process of narrative change. One way is to break down the steps involved in developing and implementing effective, evidence-based narrative strategies to deepen understanding of a complex issue across audiences. Those steps can be sorted into three broad phases.

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### 1. Mapping: Map the terrain of existing narratives and mindsets, including:

- a. The story experts and advocates want to tell;
- b. The people who need to understand that story;
- c. What those people currently think (helpful and unhelpful mindsets);
- d. The narratives that are currently surfacing and reinforcing those mindsets; and
- e. Who appropriate messengers might be to speak to people who need to understand that story.

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### 2. Testing: Develop and test narratives strategies to deepen understanding, including:

- a. Reviewing existing framing and narratives research;
- b. Developing new messages using evidence-led narrative strategies;
- c. Getting input from experts (including the people most affected);
- d. Testing those messages with target audiences, using appropriate messengers.

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### 3. Implementation: Equip people to use those new strategies, this work can include;

- a. Developing guides and various other tools to support the use of these narrative strategies;
- b. Training, coaching and mentoring in use of the strategies;
- c. Ongoing practitioner and peer support.

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## What this report covers (and does not cover)

This report provides an initial and partial map of the existing narrative terrain (including a partial map of the story experts and advocates want to tell) and includes some very initial ideas about what kinds of narrative strategies might be useful to deepen understanding. This report will hopefully also provide people across the sector with some preliminary (untested, in this context) ideas about narrative strategies which they can use.

**The scope of this project didn't allow for a comprehensive map of existing narratives, nor did it include any scope to develop or test new narratives. So there is scope for further work across all three phases of the process of narrative change including for example:**

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### Mapping: Further work & possible next steps

#### Further work to map of the narrative terrain (through generative primary research):

- ➔ Broadening the map by having researchers speak to a wider group of people;
- ➔ Deepening insights through in-depth interviews with experts to better understand the narratives they are currently using, and why, as well as what they want people to understand;
- ➔ Some research to gather and analyse the current thinking of other audiences identified but not prioritised at the wānanga;
- ➔ Gather and analyse data directly from the audiences identified, e.g., through focus groups, to get direct evidence of their current thinking and the narratives that are influencing their thinking;
- ➔ Primary research on narratives. Experts at the wānanga identified some specific narratives which they think are either underpinning unhelpful thinking, or promoting deeper and more helpful thinking about the issue. A next step would be to look at the narrative landscape (e.g., media coverage) to see where, and in what form, those narratives appear;
- ➔ A more comprehensive review of literature in Aotearoa - the scope of this project was focused on framing and narrative research but a literature review with a broader scope might uncover more examples of how experts are currently framing brain development.

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## Testing: Further work & possible next steps

### Testing: further work to develop and test narrative strategies to surface helpful thinking:

- Developing a set of likely communication techniques, including values, metaphors, explanatory chains that have the potential to shift or deepen thinking on this topic.
- Survey experiments using quantitative methods to test the effect of particular communications techniques on people's knowledge, attitudes and motivations to act.
- In-group stress testing in which we put particular frames into group conversations to see how they are used in these group conversations and perform against other dominant frames already in use.

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## Implementing: Further work & possible next steps

### Implementing: developing tools to help people apply the insights in their work and communications. Some of the ways this can be done include:

- short message guide
- video explainers
- checklists
- templates for emails and op-eds
- training courses
- briefs for creative agencies.
- coaching and peer review

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## Advisory/Champions Group

To improve the quality and usefulness of the research insights and build a foundation for sector implementation, we recommend the involvement in some structured and ongoing way of people with lived expertise and advocates. This can be achieved through a well-supported and resourced (paid) advisory/champions group:

- An advisory group of advocates and people with lived experience who are champions for narrative change, and who can advise on the suitability of narrative strategies as they are developed and before they are tested.
- This can help identify and eliminate (before testing) any narrative strategies which might be 'effective' at deepening the thinking of persuadable audiences but which are inappropriate in some other way.

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## Priorities: Our recommendations for next steps

Assuming that choices would need to be made about priorities for any further work, and drawing on what we learned about the sector and the existing narrative landscape through this research and analysis, we would recommend prioritising the following options for further work.

- Advisory/Champions Group: We have found it very useful in our work to set up an advisory/champions group to help us make sense of the usefulness and appropriateness of our research insights and tested narrative strategies. It also helps to strengthen the capabilities of the community of practice in your topic area as this group acts as ongoing 'champions' for this narrative shift work.

- Further mapping work: we have identified in the list above a number of places where you could extend the narrative mapping work. However, if these were to be prioritised based on the most important gaps in this work, we would recommend two further areas for research:
  - » One on one interviews with knowledge holders and experts in mātauranga Māori and Pasifika ways of knowing, specifically to see what is working for them in talking about the things that support early brain development.
  - » Direct primary research on the current narrative landscape (e.g., analysing media coverage) to see where, and in what form, those helpful and unhelpful narratives appear.
- Testing: We would recommend research to test the appropriateness of the narrative strategies recommended in this report for the Aotearoa New Zealand context. We have developed a set of rigorous qualitative and quantitative methods for testing the impact of narrative strategies in New Zealand which we would recommend for this purpose.
- Implementing: Implementation is what matters most. Setting up a Champions/Advisory groups is one way we've seen implementation be improved. We have also developed, and tested with a range of sectors, a set of tools based on our research insights can help experts and advocates implement the insights in their work in a way that can lead (over time) to changes in narratives, mindsets and understanding.

# Appendix 1: Literature review search strategy

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## Research question

In keeping with the research brief and The Workshop's evidence-led framework of effective narrative strategies, emphasising the importance of framing, we examined the available literature on early brain development and child and adolescent wellbeing to provide a brief review of:

- research on framing the brain development story for deepening thinking and inspiring hope
- any existing materials on the narrative context in Aotearoa New Zealand on this topic.

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## We were interested in what framing strategies help:

- people understand the importance of early brain development for child wellbeing,
- and build support for evidence-led policies and practices that support early brain development.

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## We looked for examples of:

- appeals to intrinsic values
- Universalist framing of brain development
- communications that encompass vision making and are solution-led rather than problem-led
- any examples of framing and messaging approaches that were part of successful change processes.

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## Search strategy

An initial list of keywords related to this specific topic and to The Workshop's approach was drawn up. These search term combinations are shown in Table 1 below.

**We were primarily interested in framing and narrative strategy literature so a scoping search was conducted using the search word combinations on the websites of framing and narrative organisations that work on effective strategies for deepening people's thinking on complex issues, such as The Frameworks Institute. We scanned for Aotearoa New Zealand specific literature and on the websites of organisations with a specific focus on early brain development such as the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University and the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative.**

Potentially relevant articles were screened for mention of The Workshop's key search terms such as messages, narratives, framing, values and futures. Our rapid review found relatively little literature in the Aotearoa New Zealand context that outlined narrative strategies to talk about early brain development. The literature mainly addressed brain science. What framing literature there was drew heavily on the international work of framing organisations like the FrameWorks Institute, whose work we have outlined within the guide.

**Table 1: Initial search term combinations**

	AND						
<b>TOPIC</b>	Message/ing	Frame/ing (analysis)	Value(s)	Vision(s)	Communication(s)/ strategy/ies	Narrative(s)/ cultural	Metaphors
<b>(Early) brain development</b>							
<b>Brain science</b>							
<b>Child and adolescent development</b>							
<b>Child wellbeing</b>							
<b>Childhood adversity</b>							
<b>Toxic stress</b>							

# Appendix 2:

## Draft summary notes from day one presentations by DPMC staff, provided to The Workshop 27 April 2021

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### **Brain Development Collective Wānanga – presentation summaries**

The following is a summary of presentations made to the Brain Development Collective Wānanga hosted by the Child Wellbeing Unit (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet), held in the Icon Room at Te Papa Tongawera, Wellington, on 29 and 30 March 2021.

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### **Whakawhanaungatanga – getting ready to engage (Dee-Ann Wolferstan)**

Dee-Ann took the group through an ice-breaker activity to showcase approaches to whakawhanaungatanga while discussing its importance in te ao Māori.

#### **When undertaking whakawhanaungatanga, ensure you are:**

- ➔ prepared, e.g. waiata, kai, spiritual preparation to be open to see and hear need, know who you are engaging with. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable.
- ➔ open to share – building relationships is about understanding others. Allow the interaction the full measure of the time and space it needs.
- ➔ open to learn – use all your senses. Be brave. No-one is expecting you to know everything – turn up aware and willing to fully take on board what is said and how it's said. It's important to be able to talk openly, and not be too embarrassed to discuss uncomfortable things, e.g. colonisation.



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## **Pregnancy and childbirth, traditional knowledge, practices and keys for successful support and messaging (Debbie Rewiri)**

Science is only now catching up with mātauranga – how can we bring it to meet indigeneity? Care and tenderness are at the heart of Māori parenting practices, and whānau and hapū concern themselves with how all children are treated – there is now solid evidence that nurturing and caring approaches best support brain development and that this is best supported by collectives. Scientific evidence is showing that children learn best when playing, and play was a way of life for tamariki in precolonial times. These caring practices are in Māori whakapapa and DNA, and just need to be woken up.

### **Children in the Māori world view**

In a Māori world view, babies are closest to the atua – you do not damage or treat poorly taonga given to you from the gods. If a child spoke, people listened as if they were rangatira, as children are closer to the gods, and have messages to teach us.

Whakapapa is key to understanding who we are and how we construe ourselves, and unlocks potential – e.g. don't look at people in the prison system as people with problems, see them as the descendants of their tīpuna. Wairua is intangible, but it sits with us forever, and it's the foundation that babies are born into - healthy wairua is a foundational need for tamariki Māori. Mana cannot be taken away from children, it is gifted from a child's tīpuna. The importance of respecting mana needs to be understood to ensure any processes undertaken are safe for whānau.

In pre-colonial times, from the time of conception, practices revolved around holistic nurturing – e.g. special foods were gathered for the pregnant mothers, women were rangatira - treated well and stood proud and strong, time was taken in whanaungatanga to build rapport which reduces the stress response of meeting.

### **Risk factors are not determiners**

The presence of risk factors in a child's life does not mean there will automatically be poorer outcomes – these are multifactorial. No parents are perfect, or able to provide a perfect lifestyle. Whānau are resilient in spite of difficulties, e.g. poverty and being trapped in survival mode. They need to be supported to thrive. By Māori, for Māori is the key.

The wero to those in the room was to put this thinking into action – embolden and empower whānau and those doing the mahi.

## **Culturally responsive ways to support and accelerate cognitive flexibility and increasing language abilities (Professor Gail Gillon)**

Early literacy success can be a powerful protective factor for tamariki wellbeing – how can we support that? There are strong oral traditions in te ao Māori and this helps strengthen oral language. How can this be moved into literacy?

### **Supporting literacy through partnership**

Through partnership - engaging with whānau around the importance of early reading experiences and building on whānau strengths. Reading has a compounding benefit – the more experience with reading the more literacy improves, which improves other development factors (e.g. self-regulation and children being able to make themselves understood). Success breeds success. A language-rich environment is the key, and early learning experiences can make a big difference to life trajectory. This is an internationally shared finding.

There is a pressing need to decrease inequity, and the link between better literacy and health and education outcomes is getting stronger. Education is a powerful link to improving health and wellbeing.

### **Pilots and approaches**

There are pockets where amazing work is being done. We need to get the practices that we know help out there and embed them at a systemic level.

The Better Start Literacy Approach pilot (<https://www.betterstartapproach.com/>) is an evidence-based classroom approach that looks at how to accelerate the learning of tamariki who are coming to school with lower levels of oral language. It brings together evidence on the importance of things like being able to tell and retell stories and early print awareness

– central to this is engaging whānau to build skills early. This started in Canterbury and is being rolled out to different parts of the country. Programmes have previously been about addressing deficits and looking at what children aren't achieving, however, this approach is about what they are achieving, and what they can achieve next. There is an early childhood study looking at the efficacy of these approaches at scale.

The Hikairo Schema is a culturally appropriate way to support teachers in their own cultural confidence and learning. <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/hikairo-schema-early-childhood-education>

Words can POP – (books available at <https://www.betterstartapproach.com/childrens-readers-families-ece>). Resources developed with teachers, thinking about the additional value there is in books over and above reading the story. Being interactive takes reading skills to the next level. Resources like these can also be developed by putting a family's own stories in print and using the POP techniques.

### **Putting evidence into practice**

A large study was conducted into the feasibility of incorporating books into ECE and whānau life, particularly into the lives of the parents who have previously not engaged with ECE. This worked through communities, networks and church leaders, and followed children over time. Self-regulation and language acquisition are interconnected – by developing language you are building attention skills and close relationships. It was found to have a powerful intervention effect, with children being able to catch up with their peers – using systematic ways of building children's language abilities, the achievement picture can be turned around. This is more effective than the previous model, where we wait for children to fall behind before systematically supporting them.

There is a need for the scientific and government systems to see the value in the traditional practices that support language, and to understand and unlock their potential in a way that doesn't co-opt that knowledge.

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## He pipi paopao noho kōhanga, he pī ka rere! Learning to fly (Darrío and Kimiora Penetito-Hemara)

Kupu whakataki – atua Māori based physical activity and nutrition approach. It connects traditional Māori knowledge to modern activities, and tamariki to whakapapa – language, arts, waiata, knowledge of te ao Māori.

The kaupapa was created to look for opportunities to embed mātauranga Māori in places of early learning. Tikanga and te reo are huge influences in early life. Pūrākau and games can apply to almost every setting, with korero embedded into the way you jump into different activities. Manu pēpē sit in the kōhanga till they're able to take first flight – this uses that approach. It has been rolled out to a number of kōhanga. It is important to embed reo in early life as it gets harder to learn as people get older – embed what already exists in Māori spaces across the board. Tamariki must feel comfortable to engage with things. If they are in the rongo space (the space of peace), they are better able to connect and focus.

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### Ngā whainga – goals

- te ihi, te wehi, te wana: the joy of movement
- whakawhanaungatanga: connectedness
- te whai para: attainment of skills
- whakawhanaketanga: child development

### Each stage focuses on a particular area - three skills per wero

- mōhiotanga: observing and learning a new skill
- mātauranga: practicing and performing the skill
- māramatanga: harnessing and mastering the skill (confident in every aspect)

As a tamaiti demonstrates the skill, they get their tohu, then they lead the process for the others. In some settings, there is an ethos that no one moves on till everyone moves on.

Darrío and Kimiora demonstrated examples of pūrākau and games used.

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## Pacific Child Health and Wellbeing – knowledge and practices (Dr Teuila Percival)

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### A Pacific lens

To ensure a good life for all Pacific children a Pacific lens is needed on what resonates around brain development, and this needs to be reflected in the systems. Pacific needs are difficult to talk about in general as it is a diverse group of people and cultures – there are many nations, many islands, lots mixed ethnicity, and lots of Pacific people who are born in NZ. The focus of the day's discussion was on what themes are common throughout Pacific communities.

In the Fonofale model, the family is the bedrock and the foundation - culture shelters and supports. Strong deference to leaders and elders, connections with home islands, humility and respectful behaviour, reciprocity, hospitality, and spirituality are all important.

Pacific ways resonate with science and developing brains. Lotu Tamaiti is a day when children are celebrated. Babies and toddlers are never left alone – always interacted with. Grandparents and collectivism in parenting and childcare are valued. Importance is placed on the telling of family stories, and on education.

### Equity and brain development

Pacific people experience a number of equity issues. Data doesn't tell the whole story – e.g. story of homeless people sleeping on floor isn't captured in the homelessness stats. These equity issues get in the way of brain development.

The way out of the hardship data is to focus across sectors on baby brains, and on setting the little ones onto a trajectory toward economic wellbeing. The Yanuca Island Declaration on health in Pacific island countries and territories (<https://iris.wpro.who.int/handle/10665.1/12508>) noted that Healthy Islands are places where:

- ➔ children are nurtured in body and mind
- ➔ environments invite learning and leisure
- ➔ people work and age with dignity
- ➔ ecological balance is a source of pride
- ➔ the ocean which sustains us is protected.

It is good to talk about what would support children, but this will not be effective if we don't tackle the issues that are getting in the way. Interventions need to think about the neighbourhoods and communities, and how these can support healthy brain development. Minimum care standards for women and children (currently under development by the WHO) need to be considered when thinking about the design of supports.

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## From pōuritanga to māramatanga (Dr Takirangi Smith)

Māori and Pacific peoples are experiencing the effects of overrepresented in the negative statistics. Pōuritanga or ngākau pōuri is a state unique to Māori and Polynesian relatives with similar origins, and cultural understandings. It ranges from mild disappointment to a deep trauma with a focus on death, affects individuals, whānau and collective groups, is accompanied by a sense of powerlessness, and is generally caused by aituā or patu ngākau (a strike to the heart / central core).

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### Understanding pōuritanga

It is not generally recognised or acknowledged in clinical psychology. It is not a mental condition or state of mind, but an emotive internal state of being. Without cultural mediation and intervention, it can affect wider whānau and become intergenerational. It is a barrier to clarity and moving forward, and can promote riri, whakamā, and other negative states of being.

It occurs after a patu ngākau (an assault to the internal system) or trauma / shock life event. Following this, a loss of mana or sense of powerlessness causes or exacerbates existing pōuritanga. The entire internal system may be affected - there may be a reluctance to communicate and energy loss.

Traditionally, it's caused by an upset mauri. It's connected to mauri mate and ill health, as opposed to mauri ora (a state of good health and wellbeing).

When a negative event or life shock occurs, the mauri dissipates energy / light through the ngākau to the external world causing a state of internal darkness, or pōuritanga.

### The effects of pōuritanga

Whakamā is often translated as shame but is a condition where a perceived public loss of mana has occurred, which is accompanied by a sense of shame or embarrassment. Riri (anger/warfare) is a response that can arise from pōuritanga. Ngākau riri is the internal anger which is then expressed outwardly and can be a form of defence and a way of protecting the ngākau from a patu ngākau. Riri is also meant to set up barriers. Ririhau is a term generally associated with physical violence and warfare.

All Māori experience pōuritanga at some time in the same way that all people experience challenges and disappointments. It can be accumulative if unresolved. It can be passed generationally through tohu, generated verbally through narrative, or nonverbally through empathy and observation.

It is not a condition of the mind, but follows traditional cognitive pathways and ways of knowing, and is physiologically related.

It may sit unresolved or be triggered by an event or place that connects to the origin of the pōuritanga. The impacts of colonisation (e.g. land loss, cultural loss, historical abuses, racism) coincided with the loss of traditional and cultural healing mechanisms within Māori communities.

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## A journey to healing

In a traditional context, a person or whānau who experience a life shock metaphorically enters 'Te Whare o te Pōuritanga' (the house of darkness). They are considered tapu and given time and space to heal. After time and assistance provided, they would integrate back into the community. Ancestral houses were sanctuaries where healing could occur.

Te whare tīpuna is a traditional place of healing and protection. Those entering were recognised as being within the jurisdiction of ancestral guardians and protectors. The kawa (non-negotiable customs) originate from Hinenuitēpō, protector of the wairua and nurturer of the toiora of her offspring in the darkness. Using tikanga (a series of protocols) and kawa that refer to the physical and metaphorical interior or the traditional whare tīpuna, those affected would go to the back/dark part of the whare, and progress through different parts of the house, working their way to the front / light part – to māramatanga. Traditional practices focused on restoring the mauri and displacing internal pōuritanga, replacing it with māramatanga. Internal barriers and negative 'entities' or persona were ritually appropriated to the permanent darkness.

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## Contemporary strategies for engaging with pōuritanga include:

- recognising ngākau pōuri and pōuritanga as a valid condition sourced in Māori cognitive pathways and ways of knowing.
- acknowledging pōuritanga as contributing to negative Māori demographics and statistics
- recovering appropriate cultural healing practices and culturally safe ways that address historical and contemporary ngākau and pōuritanga.

**At the end of the presentation Sophie Munro outlined a research project, being run by Mātai Research Centre in Gisborne, that is informed by this mātauranga.**

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## Weaving knowledge and research together in practice, working with Pasifika families

(Nanai Mua'au, Joy Sipeli-Antipas, Dr Denise Guy, Hannah Aldersley, Tualoaina Latu To'omaga)

The group discussed approaches used by the Pacific Public Health Service, who work support child wellbeing in Pacific communities in the Hutt Valley (<https://www.pacifichealthhutt.co.nz/>)

### By Pacific, for Pacific is needed

Anofale Fa'atupu Ola Pasifika Project: anofale isn't just about a house but refers also to the essential components that turn a house into a home. The project was to construct anofale through sustaining relationships and cultural nuances to enable tamaiti and their ainga to cope with different conditions. Three new approaches are being established, underpinned by ainga / whānau / families. These models appeal to the rational mind through models and science, and to the emotions through film and poetry. They are driven by strong values of cultural respect – that a child is a gift from God. The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy framework has a number of aspects of anofale, but the problem and the challenge is to see how anofale fits into it.

For 21 years a by Pacific, for Pacific strategy has been applied, in recognition that in life there are aspects that no one can help with but oneself. This provides an opportunity to build faith in one's own nature and comprehend simple truths about Pacific people to help Pacific people. By Pacific, for Pacific will answer the questions when applied correctly.

## Strengths-based, aiga-centred models are effective

The aiga-centred model of wellbeing is not new, but it is important. Without it, programmes and approaches will always fail to deliver. A strengths-based approach is needed, where the intention isn't to go into a home and push an idea, but to support the positive things that are already there and developing within the aiga. The aiga-centred model focuses on their need over our need to tick boxes. E.g. maternal nutrition that's vital to brain development - mothers may not be familiar with supplements (e.g. folic acid), but are being motivated to talk to their GP or midwives about those options in a way that builds on the knowledge that's already there, and empowers them to take control over their and their children's health. When the concepts behind epigenetics are shared in anofale antenatal sessions, mothers are amazed at the power they have over their descendants. Early nutrition education is important to a prevention approach.

Being supportive of response relationships is a big part of the work, and looking at how to promote those relationships alongside the families, all of whom want the best for their children. A film was created to provide information about babies' abilities, how social they are, how parents can pick up on cues and build interactions in responsive and positive ways, and how to recognise early signs of distress and ways to comfort. This has been translated into a number of languages.

The FAN (facilitating attuned interactions) approach to home visiting is unique, and relationship based. This helps the workforce work with the families better, as well as supporting the families, and helps practitioners to stay balanced – working along-side the families rather than dictating to them.

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## The importance of cultural relevance

When building relationships in the community, the comms techniques used need to have cultural relevance. E.g. in the serve, return, rupture and repair model, repair is where kids learn a different way of responding. Forgiveness is a key value for Pacific people. Repair is an important thing to talk about with Pacific people as it connects to forgiveness, which then contextualises the science in a way people can understand.

Humour is another important technique to use when relating to Pacific people. Connecting science to humour helps the penny drop as to the effects their actions have on their children.

Preparation, planning and study is important – know who is in the room. With enough preparation, it's possible to listen, read the audience and answer spontaneously. Being able to build an immediate bond takes years of practice and preparation.

Latu To'omaga shared his poem 'Frangipani'.

## Pacific approaches work where mainstream ones fail

Pacific Baby Braintalks: Nāku Ēnei Tamariki works with the DHB to deliver the programme to reach to Pacific babies and families with under 5s. There are staff available on day the day to help transport the families to the service. The programme is offered free to unwaged attendees. Currently there can be up to 40 attendees, and there is feedback that the families want more. The model is being looked at for scaling up. Mainstream approaches could not attract young Pacific mothers to antenatal classes – it was found that what women wanted can't be offered within the mainstream setting, but this programme meets their needs. Marketing is important and needs to be prioritised – it's often treated as an 'add-on'.

<https://www.pacifichealthhutt.co.nz/post/2020/02/25/pacific-baby-braintalks>

By Pacific, for Pacific is the key – when dealing with families it's important to start with their needs rather than a system's tick boxes.



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