



Chapter 3:

FRAMING THE ISSUE

For Advocacy On Behalf of Early Education

Susan Nell Bales encourages advocates to “provide the right lens so your audience can focus.”¹ Bales, who is president of the FrameWorks Institute, a nonprofit think tank that studies public thinking about social issues and helps reframe public discourse, points out that “to lead, you have to be able to explain because leaders bring others along. Human reasoning is frame-based, not fact-based ... and if the facts don’t quite fit the frame, it is the frame that triumphs over the facts.”

What is a frame? Reese, Gandy, and Grant define frames as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time. They work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.”²

Experts encourage advocates to consider what is in people’s heads and understand their thinking and feelings in order to move the public conversation in the desired direction. Be careful not to lose entire constituencies on policies that they would otherwise endorse. You must carefully orchestrate the three basic frame elements:

- Who speaks
- How they explain the problem, and
- What values they invoke

Framing is effective when it is presented in a pragmatic manner, without any preachy or moralistic tone. Use a causal sequence to interconnect a string of causes and effects that explains how the problem works. Then, invoke a value (the responsible management of the future) that provides the lens through which the audience will view all information concerning the issue.

¹ Susan Nell Bales, [*Framing Issues for Public Consideration*](#), Chamber Executive, Summer 2008

² Stephen D. Reese, O.H. Gandy, Jr., and A.E. Grant, *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*. (Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001: page 11).

Many framers also invent their own “simplifying model,” an analogy that transforms an abstract issue into something concrete.

Always emphasize solutions to the problem or issue – how do you want people to respond or what do you want them to do?

The following links provide more information and resources for framing your issue:

[Framing Issues for Public Consideration](#). (2008). Susan Nall Bales

[Changing the Public Conversation on Social Problems: A Beginner’s Guide to Strategic Frame AnalysisTM](#). (2009). FrameWorks Institute

[Developing Your Message](#). (2010). EE and the Media Gazette (a media training site for those interested in improving their media skills - originally created by the Pennsylvania Center for EE)

[Why Stories Matter](#). Marshall Ganz. (March 2009) Sojourners Magazine.

[Public Story Worksheet](#). Marshall Ganz. (2007). Kennedy School of Government. (Available from [The New England Grassroots Environmental Fund](#).)