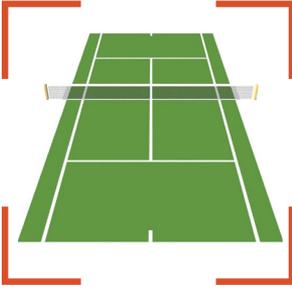


Serve and Return

A metaphor for responsive interactions between children and adults



The story you're telling:

"Brains are built through back-and-forth interaction, much like a game of tennis, ping-pong, or volleyball. Healthy development occurs when young children 'serve' through babbling, gestures, or words, and adults 'return' by getting in sync with the child."

Strategic way to redirect thinking away from patterns such as:

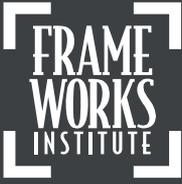


- Ageing Up
- Black Box model of development;
- Children are containers/sponges
- Family Bubble
- Good environment = safety
- Learning doesn't start until school
- Naturalism: kids just develop
- Information is everything
- The Fill It Up model

Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

- **The way early brain development occurs is like a game of tennis or ping-pong, where back-and-forth interaction is the essence of the game:** communicates, in simple terms, the basic process of how neural connections are made through mutually contingent reciprocal interactions.
- **Children 'serve' and adults 'return' by responding appropriately:** establishes that contingent interaction is about adults getting in sync with children, not merely children copying adults.
- **Even infants want and need to be partners in this game:** helps to communicate that that even pre-verbal children seek and need this interaction from the earliest stages of life.
- **The 'ball' in this game is any kind of bid for attention – eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, babbling, shared focus, and eventually, words:** establishes that interaction comes in many forms, including but not limited to language.

(Continued on reverse)



Serve and Return

*A metaphor for responsive interactions
between children and adults*

- **Serve-and-return can happen between any two partners, but net games are at their best when partners are familiar with each other:** opens space for extra-family relationships but also highlights that consistent, long-term, supportive relationships between adults and young children are essential to healthy development.
- **If the serves are not returned, or not returned appropriately, the game is interrupted:** If a child's outreach is not returned, the interaction is not complete. If children do not have many positive responsive interactions each day, development can be disrupted. If these interactions are severely lacking, as in the case of chronic neglect, serious problems are sure to occur.
- **Serve-and-return is the essential process that establishes brain architecture – it literally shapes the developing brain:** the interactions that occur, or don't occur, in the early years have a significant and lasting effect on all the development and learning that follows.
- **Now that we know how important serve-and-return is, let's think about the kind of environments that allow for lots of good serve-and-return:** connect the dots to point to policy-level conditions that help or hinder serve-and-return, such as child-teacher ratios, age-appropriate curriculum, quality child care centres, parental leave policies, access to appropriate mental health supports.