

Excerpt, used with permission, from:

Mustard, J. F. (2011). Introduction. In N. M. McCain, J. F. Mustard & K. McCuaig (Eds.), *Early Years Study 3: Making Decisions, Taking Action* (1-8). Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation.

<https://earlyyearsstudy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/EYS3.pdf>

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"Investing in expectant mothers and their young children is a powerful equalizer and a key tool for economic and social stability. States that invest in women as active members of the labour force show much better population performance in education, behaviour and health than countries that do not invest. The Scandinavian countries and Cuba invest in pregnant women and young children. They have put in place high-quality centre-based programs involving parents, that are accessible and affordable. For example, the high rate of adult literacy in Norway indicates the benefits of its widespread early childhood programming. By comparison, Canada, with its spotty family policies, has 3 million illiterate adults.

Brain plasticity allows us to consider later interventions to improve outcomes for children who have had a poor start. However, it is better for the child, and less costly for society, to provide a positive beginning, rather than having to resort to remedial action later on.

Findings from early intervention and population studies are compatible with what we know about developmental neurobiology and the importance of early experiences on reading and literacy later in life. Countries with developed preschool systems link their programs to education. Since early human development directly affects performance in the school system, this is a very sensible policy. Pregnancy and the first two to three years of life are critical periods in early human development. Parental leave policies that recognize the benefits of breastfeeding and parental attachment, and that allow new parents to ease back into the workplace, are also essential.

With socioeconomic changes, have modern societies lost the art of nurture to ensure equitable development for all young children? Our understanding of developmental neurobiology in the early years shows us how the development of the architecture and function of the brain in early life affects health, learning and behaviour until we die. Canada's tomorrow depends on our ability to leverage

what we know into policies and practices that support families and benefit children today. Now, as never before, the knowledge needs to be harnessed to serve not just every individual in our society, but every society around the globe" (Mustard, 2011, pp. 7-8).