



Early Child Development Toolkit: Case Study #4, Letter to the Editor

This document is a letter to the editor promoting statewide legislation to increase investment in early childhood education programs. This case study looks at the document before and after implementing reframing recommendations, and illustrates the importance of using tested values and more fully explaining the brain architecture simplifying model.

BEFORE:

It is Time to Invest in Vermont's Future!

We have a public responsibility to help ensure that children's early experiences are of good quality, available and affordable. Every child in Vermont deserves a good start, and it is our responsibility as adults to be stewards of our children's future. With a "can-do" attitude, we can meet the challenge of providing and funding adequate early childhood development services.

The early years of life matter because early experiences affect the architecture of the brain. As it emerges, the quality of that architecture establishes either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows – and getting things right the first time is easier than trying to fix it later.

High-quality early education is one way of assuring that children have positive out-of-home experiences that foster healthy brain architecture. Well-trained caregivers and educators can be those "invested" adults with whom children can build positive, caring relationships.

The time has come for legislation that validates the practice of using public education money to provide quality pre-k programs on a voluntary basis.

This legislation should:

Expand access to quality pre-k for hundreds of children (approximately 60% of communities statewide currently offer publicly funded pre-k, with many others moving in this direction);

Provide much-needed funding to early education programs, increasing quality for children across our State.

It is time to invest in Vermont's future.

Analysis:

The original letter includes the brain architecture simplifying model, and reminds the reader of the importance of healthy relationships for proper brain development. However, it promotes the concept of “investment” as a value, without adequately explaining how the coalition’s proposals will improve child development. This is corrected in the rewrite, and Prosperity and Ingenuity replace “investment” as the priming values to support the proposals. The language about relationships is also expanded and more tightly connected to brain development.

AFTER REFRAMING:

A Prosperous Vermont Tomorrow Starts with Kids Today

As adults, we all know we have a responsibility to be stewards of our children’s future. What we might not know is what science now tells us about how we can best prepare children for a healthy and productive future.

We’ve learned that the early years of life matter because early experiences affect the architecture of the brain. As it emerges, the quality of that architecture establishes either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows – and, certainly, getting things right the first time is easier than trying to fix it later.

Providing high-quality early education is one way of assuring that all children have the intellectual and social experiences necessary to foster healthy brain architecture. When we provide children with positive, stable relationships with well-trained caregivers and educators, we have started them on a strong skill trajectory. These types of experiences literally wire the brain for all learning to come.

We have an opportunity to ensure that children throughout Vermont are provided the experiences they need to develop into healthy, productive citizens. We know what works; we just have to roll up our sleeves and make Vermont a leader in stewarding our children’s future.

That’s why I ask you to join me in supporting House Bill 534, as it validates the practice of using public education funding to provide quality pre-k programs on a voluntary basis.

This legislation would: Expand access to quality pre-k for hundreds of children (approximately 60% of communities statewide currently offer publicly funded pre-k, with many others moving in this direction); Provide much-needed funding to early education programs, increasing quality for children across our State.

Every child in Vermont deserves a good start, and with a “can-do” attitude, we can work together to meet the challenge of paving the way for our children’s future.

(Thanks to Barbara Postman, Policy Coordinator of Voices for Vermont’s Future, for permission to use this example.)