



**EARLY CHILDHOOD:
WHY WE NEED
TO FOCUS
ON THE QUALITY
OF EDUCATIONAL
SERVICES**



WHY WE NEED TO FOCUS ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES



- The first few years of a child's life are particularly **critical for development**, especially between the ages of 0 and 3.
- Since educational daycare centres and preschool programs take advantage of this window of opportunity, they can have a **positive impact on children's overall health and development**.
- In order to have a beneficial effect, the educational services offered to the very young must be of **superior quality**.
- Surveys conducted in Quebec over the past few years have revealed certain quality issues in all types of educational daycare centres and 4-year-old kindergartens. **A significant proportion of very young children are attending facilities of poor or very poor quality**. This proportion is lower, however, in the case of CPEs.

Offering young children quality educational environments helps to ensure that the citizens of tomorrow have the opportunity to develop their full potential. The quality of educational childcare services is everyone's concern.



Educational daycare centres and preschool programs in Quebec

To foster the overall development and educational success of young children, reduced-contribution daycare centres were set up in Quebec following the introduction of the Family Policy in 1997. In 2014, 56.9% of all children under 5 were enrolled in a daycare recognized by the *Ministère de la Famille*.

Since 2013, full-day kindergarten classes for 4-year-olds have been set up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to improve children's school-readiness, prevent dropping out later on, and to fight poverty. These classes were added to half-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes that had existed since the 1970s.

According to the most recent data, the following number of spaces were available in educational childcare services for Quebec families:

Reduced contribution spaces (CPEs, home childcare, subsidized daycares) <i>December 31, 2017</i>	Spaces in non-subsidized daycares <i>December 31, 2017</i>	Children in full-day 4-year-old kindergarten <i>2016-2017</i>	Children in half-day 4-year-old kindergarten <i>2016-2017</i>
233,291	65,782	2,256^p	4,279^p

p: Provisional data for 2016-2017

In this document, educational childcare services include educational daycare centres and 4-year-old kindergarten.





ENROLMENT IN EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES

Educational childcare centres are less frequented in certain regions of Quebec: Lanaudière, Centre-du-Québec, Côte-Nord, Bas-Saint-Laurent and Abitibi-Témiscamingue. The distribution of spaces in the different types of educational daycare centres also varies from region to region.

Studies have shown, however, that fewer children from disadvantaged areas attend CPEs. Reasons provided by parents include lack of spaces, cost of service, location and lack of flexibility in services offered.

In 2011, on the Island of Montreal, the number of spaces in CPEs for children between 1 and 5 was generally lower in more disadvantaged sectors.

Early childhood:

The period when public investment offers the best returns

Since educational daycare centres and preschool programs take advantage of the window of opportunity offered in early childhood, they can have a positive impact on children's overall health and development. Children's experiences in daycare complement the stimulation they receive from their families.

Social and moral development

- Frequent contact with other children under the supervision of an educator/teacher teaches children how to initiate relationships with others, put themselves in another's place and resolve conflicts.
- Living in a group helps children learn to distinguish right from wrong.

Physical and motor development

- Children's movements during games develops their motor skills: agility, endurance and balance. They learn how to sit, crawl, walk and run.
- Drawing, colouring and crafts help develop their fine motor skills.

Language development

- Living in a group teaches children how to communicate their needs and ask questions.
- Talking and listening to their educator/teacher improves children's pronunciation and vocabulary.



In order to have a positive impact on children's development, the educational childcare services offered to the very young must be of high quality.

Cognitive development

- The material and activities offered promote the acquisition of knowledge while helping children to understand the world around them.
- The educator/teacher encourages children to reflect and develop their creativity.

Affective development

- When their educator/teacher responds quickly to children's needs, it helps them develop a sense of security.
- When the educator/teacher puts children's emotions into words, they learn how to express their emotions and develop self-confidence.

Some of the beneficial effects associated with quality educational childcare services can continue right through adulthood.



Stimulation of language, cognitive skills and social and emotional competence

Decrease in problems such as anxiety, depression, disregard for rules and aggressive behaviour in very young children



Better graduation rates

Less use of medication and/or drugs

Better results in reading, writing and mathematics among 12-year-olds in disadvantaged environments

Decrease in the proportion of children needing specialized services



Reduced criminality

Decrease in risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and type 2 diabetes

Higher incomes

Better family relations

Lower unemployment

**According to James Heckman,
winner of the Nobel prize in economics,
money invested in early childhood offers
the best rate of return on investment.**



Educational services for young children and children in disadvantaged environments

Attending educational childcare services in early childhood is therefore particularly beneficial for children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

- Children in disadvantaged areas who attend educational childcare services (such as a CPE) are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable when they enter kindergarten than those who did not.
- Children whose development is most at risk are also more receptive to intervention and stimulating environments.

In short, attending a quality educational childcare facility during early childhood helps create a more level playing field and may even reduce the gap in academic results between children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and their middle-class counterparts.

One of the targets of the United Nations Development Program is to “ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.”





Key requirements for quality educational childcare



The **schedule** is consistent but flexible, respecting the rhythm of young children. Transition periods are stimulating.



A **variety of books** is available.



Children learn how to play together and resolve their conflicts.



The **educator/teacher:**

- is familiar with and adapts to each child's level of development
- respects and supports children's games
- encourages independence
- provides clear instructions
- is attentive to children's needs and responds kindly
- encourages children to reflect
- deals appropriately with disruptive behaviour
- uses a rich vocabulary when talking to children.

Material provided encourages development (language, logic, motricity, creativity, etc.) and represents the cultural diversity of children's families.

The **outdoor play area** is well organized. Equipment is accessible, safe and allows for free play. The value of outdoor games is recognized.

The **premises** are safe, well lit and well maintained.



The educator/teacher collaborates with **parents** to ensure children's well-being.



Furniture is child-sized.



Food is healthy and varied, and the atmosphere at mealtimes is relaxed.

Free play is encouraged, with children allowed to make choices. A variety of activities is offered (art, music, science, role-play, etc.).

All **staff members** respect good hygiene practices and encourage young children to develop good habits.

Quality must be approached from what is in the child's best interest. In order for an experience in educational childcare to be described as "high quality," it has to foster children's overall development. Studies have revealed that certain key elements are indispensable to ensure a quality educational childcare environment.

The quality of educational childcare services in Quebec: An overview

Educational daycare centres

Quebec surveys on the quality of educational daycare called *Grandir en qualité* conducted in 2003 and 2014 by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* showed that, on the whole, educational daycare centres were of **acceptable quality**, with the exception of CPE nurseries (*pouponnières*), which were rated “good.” Certain individual aspects scored very poorly, however, while others were good or excellent, as shown on the next page.

Even though most educational daycares obtained an average acceptable rating, **a significant number of Quebec children are attending educational childcare facilities of poor or very poor quality**. This proportion is relatively low in the case of CPEs, however.

Between 2003 and 2014, however, there was **no significant improvement in the overall quality** of CPEs. Since CPEs were the only type of service evaluated by both editions of the survey, it was not possible to determine how quality had evolved in other environments.

2003

	Subsidized daycares (0-18 mos.)	Subsidized daycares (18 mos.-5 yrs.)	Subsidized home daycare
Material and equipment	●	●	●
Activity planning	●	●	●
Promotion of play	●	●	●
Personal care	●	●	●
Outdoor play	●	●	●
Educator-parent interactions	●	●	●
Drop-off time	●	●	●
Meals and snacks	●	●	●
Pick-up time	●	●	●

2014

	CPEs (0-18 mos.) ¹	Non-subsidized daycare (0-18 mos.)	CPEs (8 mos.-5 yrs.) ¹	Non-subsidized daycare (8 mos.-5 yrs.)
Material and equipment	●	●	●	●
Activity planning	●	●	●	●
Promotion of play	●	●	●	●
Personal care	●	●	●	●
Outdoor play	●	●	●	●
Educator-parent interactions	●	●	●	●
Drop-off time	●	●	●	●
Meals and snacks	●	●	●	●
Pick-up time	●	●	●	●

- Excellent quality
- Good quality
- Acceptable quality
- Poor quality
- Very poor quality

1. Only the most recent results (from the 2014 survey) are presented for CPEs.

Full-day 4-year-old kindergarten in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

An evaluation of the interactions between teachers and students was conducted by a team from the Université du Québec en Outaouais between 2012 and 2016 in five full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes².

Aspects evaluated

High quality	
	Emotional support

Moderate quality	
	Instructional support
	Classroom organization

-  High quality
-  Moderate quality
-  Low quality

2. Since this was an implementation evaluation and the number of classes assessed was small, these results may not be representative of all full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes that existed at the time.

The quality of 4-year-old kindergarten classes was also evaluated by a team from the Université du Québec à Montréal in 2015 in 15 full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes³.

Aspects evaluated

Minimal quality	
	Language and reasoning stimulation
	Interactions

Inadequate quality	
	Space and furnishings
	Quality of outdoor games
	Activities offered
	Program structure

The research team concluded that the quality of the educational environment in the full-time 4-year-old kindergarten classes they evaluated was **generally very low**.

 **Good to excellent quality**

 **Minimal quality**

 **Inadequate quality**

3. Since the research team observed only 15 groups very shortly after the implementation of the first full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes, these results cannot be considered representative of all kindergarten classes at the time.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES?

The scientific literature has shown that certain conditions can be implemented to enable daycares and preschools to offer better quality services. The needs of young children are the same in any environment.

Staff training



Studies have shown the importance of having well-trained personnel. Educators with a high level of initial training offer children better personal care, are more sensitive to their needs and interact more with them. Educators with specialized training in early childhood offer children a stimulating environment that meets their needs. This kind of training teaches educators how to plan activities and set up an environment that better supports children's social, language and cognitive development.

In its 2017 report, the *Commission sur l'éducation à la petite enfance* (Early Childhood Education Commission) recommended that **educational personnel working** in educational childcare services **hold a *diplôme d'études collégiales* (diploma of college studies, or DEC) in Early Childhood Education** as an initial basic training. The Commission also recommended that **all new providers of home childcare services also hold a DEC.**

Under Quebec law, once CPEs and daycares (subsidized or not) have been in operation for five years after obtaining their licence, they must ensure that two-thirds of their educational personnel is qualified (one-third during the first five years). In other words, they must have a DEC (diploma of college studies from a CEGEP) in child education techniques or the equivalent.

Service providers in home childcare facilities must have received at least 45 hours of training within the three years preceding their application. They are also required to obtain six hours of professional development training every year.

Working conditions of educational personnel

Certain surveys conducted in educational childcare services noted that educators' working conditions had an influence on the quality of the establishment. The overall score was higher when educators perceived their work as stimulating and challenging, had time to plan their teaching activities and were satisfied with their relationships with management personnel.



Structure of educational service

3

The scientific literature has shown that the following factors could also have an impact on the quality of services received by children in daycare:

- Adult-child ratio
- Group size
- Physical layout
- Material and equipment
- Presence of an educational program

Quebec CPEs and daycares may not accept more than 80 children per establishment. The required educator-child ratios are as follows:

- 1:5 for children under 18 months
- 1:8 for children between 18 months and 4 years
- 1:10 for 4-year-olds

In 4-year-old kindergarten, one teacher may have up to 18 children in the class.



Conditions for setting up educational services

4

Studies conducted have shown that the following conditions for setting up educational services promoted the quality of services offered:

- Government funding or not-for-profit operation
- Integration of educational services with other services offered in the community (like health services and social services)
- Parents' involvement in the running of the educational service (sitting on the board of directors of the educational service, for example)



POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS THAT PROMOTE QUALITY

The importance of quality in educational services has been recognized by several Quebec policies and frameworks. Here are just a few:

Stratégie relative aux services éducatifs offerts aux enfants de 0 à 8 ans – Tout pour nos enfants (2018)

(Strategy for educational services offered to children between 0 and 8 years of age)

This strategy, developed in connection with the Policy on Educational Success, is aimed at acting as early as possible in children's educational lives, consolidating the various educational interventions involved, and facilitating the many transitions that children go through during this period.

An Act to improve the educational quality and foster the harmonious development of educational childcare services (2017)

This Act makes participation in an evaluation and quality improvement process mandatory.

Quebec government preventive health policy (2016)

The objective of the *Politique gouvernementale de prévention en santé* is to increase to 80% the percentage of children who start 5-year-old kindergarten without developmental vulnerability.

Gazelle et Potiron framework (2014)

Developed by the Quebec *Ministère de la Famille*, this framework aims to improve the overall development of children under five years of age through a healthy diet, active play and motor development.

CONCLUSION

Offering our children quality educational services

There are various collective drivers available to us that could improve the quality of educational childcare. Some of these factors are associated with a higher quality of educational childcare services, such as educator/teacher training, working conditions, group size, the adult-child ratio and communication with parents.

Research on the subject has also shown that government funding improves the quality of educational services. There is universal agreement on the importance of investment in the quality of early childhood educational services.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) calculates that an investment equivalent to 1% of GDP is necessary to ensure quality early childhood education. In Quebec, that would represent an investment of \$3.76 billion.

Offering young children quality educational environments helps to ensure that the citizens of tomorrow have the opportunity to develop their full potential. The quality of educational childcare services is everyone's concern.



**Every child deserves
the chance to develop
their full potential.**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Early Childhood Laboratory has produced a series of documents on the quality of educational childcare services in Quebec:



An information **video** to raise public awareness



A **brochure** presenting highlights of the report



A comprehensive 59-page **report**



Visuals for your presentations or use on social media

Consult our entire report on the quality
of educational childcare services at

tout-petits.org/qualite

OBSERVATOIRE des tout-petits

The mission of the Early Childhood Observatory is to help ensure that the development and well-being of Quebec's very youngest children has a place on the province's list of social priorities. In order to do so, the Observatory compiles the most rigorous data on early childhood (from pregnancy to 5 years of age) which it then disseminates to incite dialogue on collective actions in this area.

Tout-petits.org



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