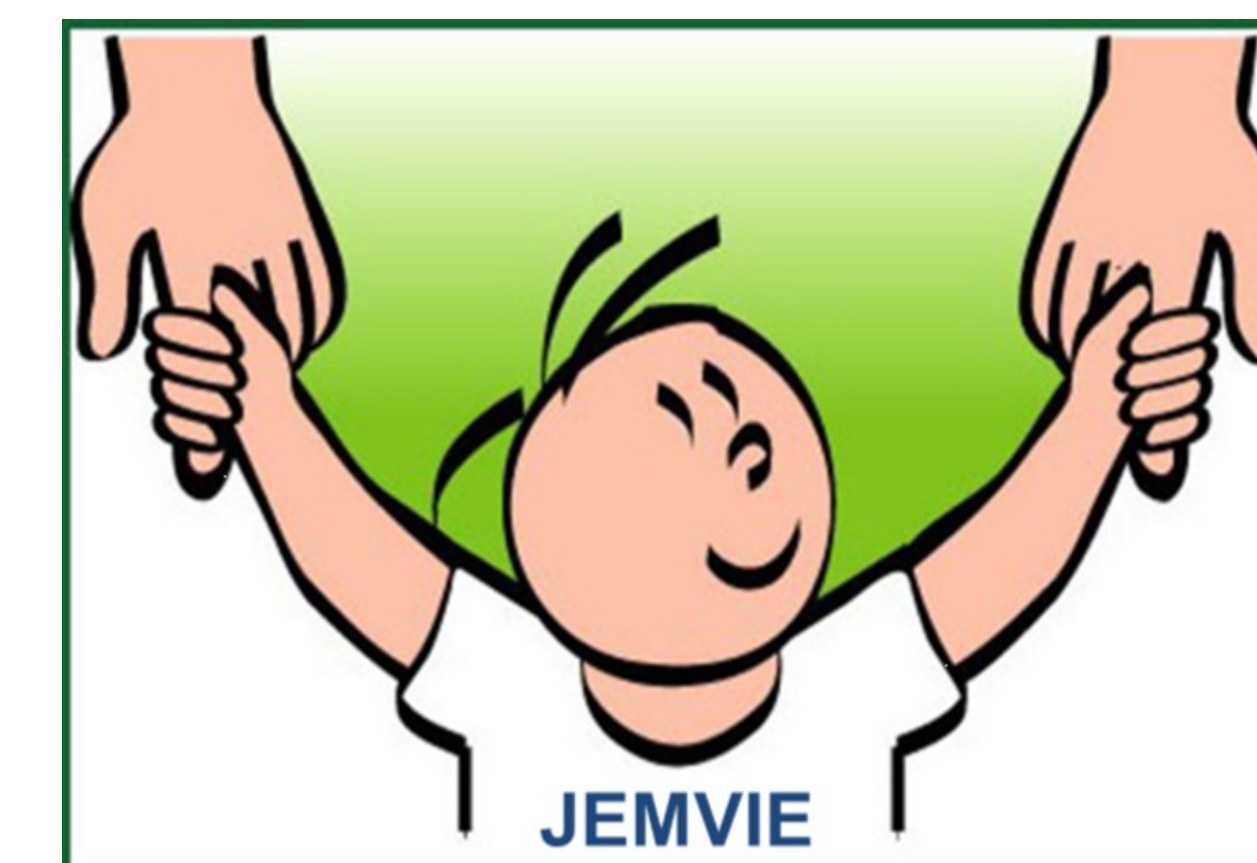


# Respecting Play, but not Sustaining it?

## “Interactions Valuing Play” in Center-Based and Home-Based Childcares

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### BACKGROUND AND AIM

- Play is at the heart of many curricula designed for children aged 0-5 [8].
- Still, children seem to spend more time in adult-directed large group activities and less time in free choice activities in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten [6].
- In childcare, observations of process quality suggest that educators' interventions do not value children's play [2].
- These results are concerning as young children's development and learning appear to be best supported through play [7].
- The aim of this study was to **examine and compare the extent to which early childhood educators' (ECE) and home childcare providers' (HCP) interactions valued children's play**, for 1- to 3-year-olds.

### METHODS

Part of a longitudinal project conducted in Quebec (Canada) and focused on childcare and 188 children's development.

The participants are the adults who worked with the same 72 children when they were aged:

- 18 months-old (49 ECE; 23 HCP);
- 24 months-old (50 ECE; 22 HCP);
- 36 months-old (52 ECE; 20 HCP).

Each time, trained observers evaluated childcare quality with the *Educative Quality Observation Scales* [3, 4, 5]:

- Developed to measure quality based on Quebec's educational program;
- Composed of + 100 items, divided into four scales and nine subscales (Table 1);
- Subscale 3.1 gives a mean score of "interactions valuing play" (< 2.5 = unsatisfactory quality; 2.5 – 2.99 = fair quality; ≥3 = satisfactory quality).
- This mean score was calculated from 8 items scored on a four-point scale: 1 (inadequate), 2 (minimal), 3 (good) and 4 (very good).

**Table 1.** Scales and subscales of the *Educational Quality Observation Scale* [3, 4, 5]

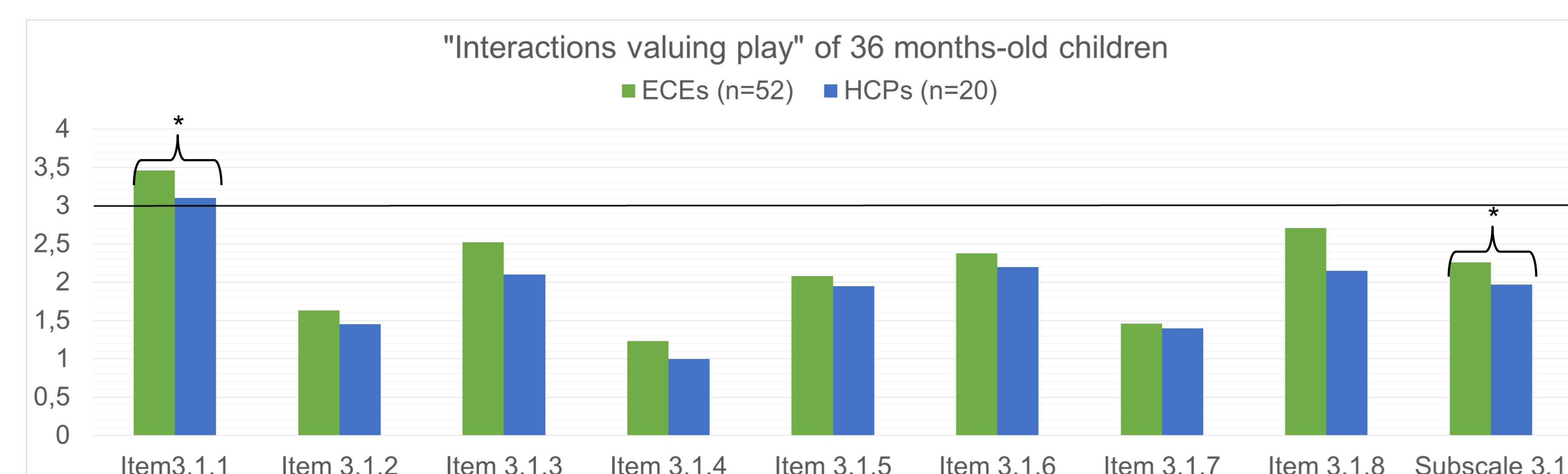
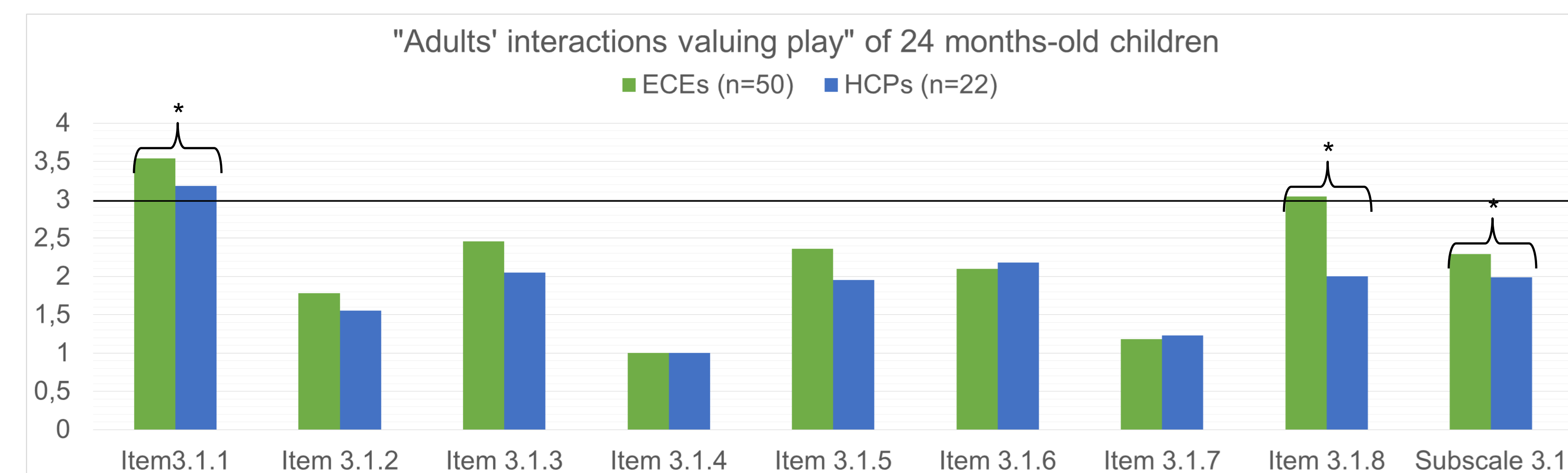
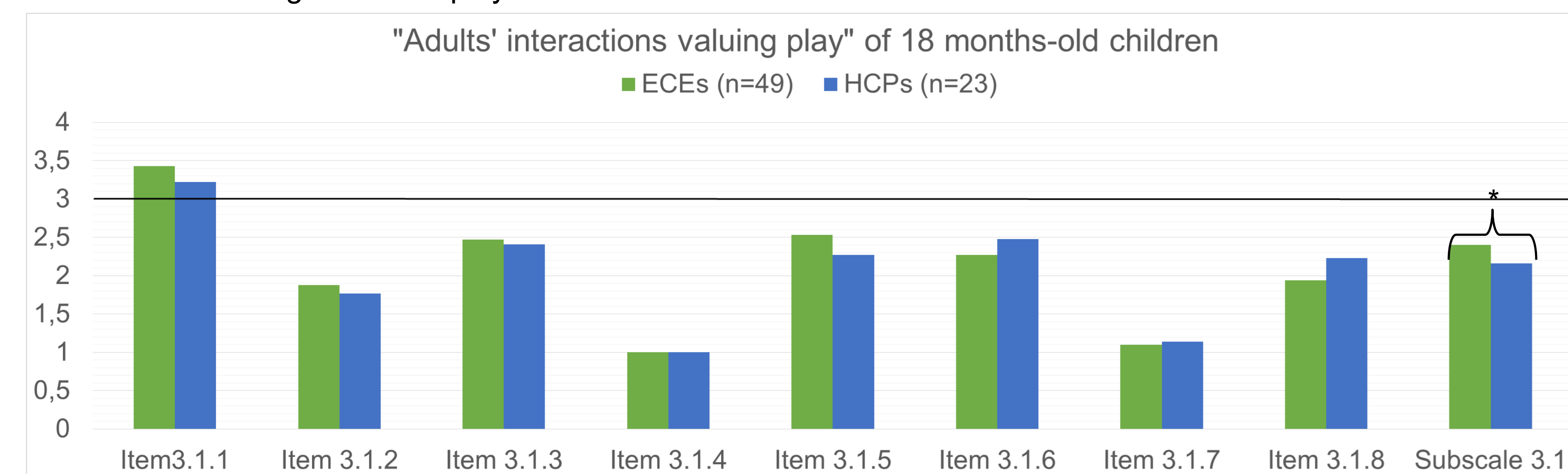
Global process quality calculated from the scales and subscales of the Educational Quality Observation Scale			
1. Physical setting	2. Programming	3. Interactions with children	4. Interactions with parents
1.1 Space	2.1 Planning	3.1 Interactions valuing play	
1.2 Material	2.2 Observation	3.1.1 respect children's play	
	2.3 Schedule	3.1.2 support their initiatives	
	2.4 Activities	3.1.3 create a playful climate	
		3.1.4 support children's planning	
		3.1.5 show flexibility	
		3.1.6 support children's doing	
		3.1.7 support children's reviewing	
		3.1.8 modify the setting/ material to sustain play	
		3.2 Intervention	
		3.3 Communication	

**Table 2.** Mean items and subscale quality score and *p*-values of the Mann-Whitney U test and t-test for independent sample comparing quality by childcare type

	18 months			24 months			36 months		
	ECEs (n=49)	HCPs (n=23)	<i>p</i> -value	ECEs (n=50)	HCPs (n=22)	<i>p</i> -value	ECEs (n=52)	HCPs (n=20)	<i>p</i> -value
Item 3.1.1	3.43	3.22	0.179	3.54	3.18	0.014	3.46	3.10	0.030
Item 3.1.2	1.88	1.77	0.499	1.78	1.55	0.337	1.63	1.45	0.414
Item 3.1.3	2.47	2.41	0.688	2.46	2.05	0.058	2.52	2.10	0.104
Item 3.1.4	1.00	1.00	1.000	1.00	1.00	1.000	1.23	1.00	0.125
Item 3.1.5	2.53	2.27	0.285	2.36	1.95	0.074	2.08	1.95	0.438
Item 3.1.6	2.27	2.48	0.402	2.10	2.18	0.583	2.38	2.20	0.378
Item 3.1.7	1.10	1.14	0.777	1.18	1.23	0.638	1.46	1.40	0.368
Item 3.1.8	1.94	2.23	0.105	3.04	2.00	0.000	2.71	2.15	0.020
Subscale 3.1	2.40	2.16	0.041	2.29	1.99	0.013	2.26	1.97	0.006

### RESULTS

**Figure 1.** Comparaison of early childhood educators' (ECEs) and home childcare providers' (HCPs) "interactions valuing children's play"



Note. \**p* < .05

Descriptive statistics to **examine** adults' "interactions valuing children's play":

- Minimal/unsatisfactory quality levels for the majority of items and the full subscale.
- The "respect children's play" item was the exception, with scores in the satisfactory range.

Cross-sectionnal analyses to **compare** ECEs' and HCPs' "interactions valuing children's play":

- Differences between ECEs and HCPs were examined with Mann-Whitney U tests for individual items. Two-sample t-tests were conducted for the subscale scores. ECEs were found to offer higher quality on:
  - The item "respect children's play" at 24 ( $U = 370, Z = -2.46, p = 0.01$ ) and 36 ( $U = 365, Z = -2.17, p = 0.03$ ) months;
  - The item "modify the setting and material" at 24 ( $U = 205, Z = -4.44, p = 0.00$ ) and 36 ( $U = 347, Z = -2.34, p = 0.20$ ) months;
  - The mean subscale "interactions valuing play" scores at 18 ( $t(70)=2.08, p = 0.041$ ), 24 ( $t(70)=2.55, p = 0.01$ ) and 36 ( $t(70) = 2.84, p = 0.01$ ) months.

### DISCUSSION

Based on predetermined thresholds of the *Educational Quality Observation Scale*, this study revealed **minimal/unsatisfactory quality** regarding "interactions valuing play". While adults respected children's play, the poor quality scores on all other items suggested that their interventions might not adequately sustain children's development and learning during play.

- Even though play is at the center of Quebec's childcares curriculum, pedagogical intervention targeting children's play seems rather scarce, as reported for older children [6].
- If ECEs and HCPs don't intervene to sustain children's development and learning during play, it seems relevant to examine what are they doing during this time (i.e. managerial tasks, giving emotional support, etc.) and why are they doing so (i.e. associate play with free exploration and adults' interventions with structured learning activities).

This low quality of "interactions valuing play" was even **more pronounced for HCPs**.

- HCPs have been found to be less likely to have a higher level of education and specialized training in early childhood, which may have an impact on their implementation of the early childhood curriculum [1].
- It seems relevant to focused on strategies to improved the quality of adults' interactions valuing children's play, specially in home-based childcares.

### LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This exploratory study has some limitations.

- We inferred play practices from a subscale and its items designed to measure process quality.
- Still, these data permitted an exploration of the quality of ECEs and HCPs practices regarding play.

**More research** is required in order to understand adults' practices and beliefs regarding children's play in educational contexts attended by 0 to 5 years-old children.

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