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## CONTEXT

**Neglect** : deficit in meeting a child's basic needs, including the failure to provide basic physical/health care and educational needs (LPJ, 2007)

**Canada**  
Annual incidents of 10 per 1000 children aged under 18 years old in 2008 (Blumenthal, 2015)



**Quebec**  
Annual incidents of 7,1 per 1000 children aged under 6 years old  
Nearly 5,000 neglected children in 2015-2016 (ACJQ, 2016; Observatoire des tout-petits, 2017)

Language is the **most compromised area** among neglected children (McDonald et al., 2013), since its development requires notably **warm adult-child interactions** and **high-quality language input** (Evans, 2001; Poll, 2011)

- **41,7 %** of neglected children have a significant language delay at age 3 (Sylvestre & Mérette, 2010)
- More precisely, starting at age 2 ½, neglected children produce **shorter utterances** than their non neglected peers (Beeghly & Cicchetti, 1994; Eigsti & Cicchetti, 2004), which is very worrying considering that mean length of utterance [MLU] is a **strong predictor** of reading skills (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Durand et al., 2013).

**High-quality early childhood education [ECE] settings can help enhance language skills** of young children as they are characterized by rich learning opportunities, stimulating material and positive interactions (Weiland et al., 2013).

- Among components of ECE experience, **quality of interactions**, as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System ((CLASS) Pianta et al., 2008) is the strongest predictor of language skills (Sabol et al., 2013).
- **Very few researchers** have investigated the relationship between ECE experience and the language skills of neglected children (Dinehart et al., 2012; Kovan et al., 2014; Merrit & Klein, 2015), and **none** have specifically considered the quality of interactions. Previous research in this area has mostly considered ECE attendance in neglected children.

## AIMS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

- 1 **Describe** the quality of interactions in ECE settings frequented by 4 year-old neglected children
- 2 **Examine the relationship between the domains of quality of interactions and language skills**, as measured by **MLU**, among the population of 4 year-old neglected children

## METHOD

Recruitment in **4 Child Welfare Services** in the Province of Quebec, including 2 University affiliated centers

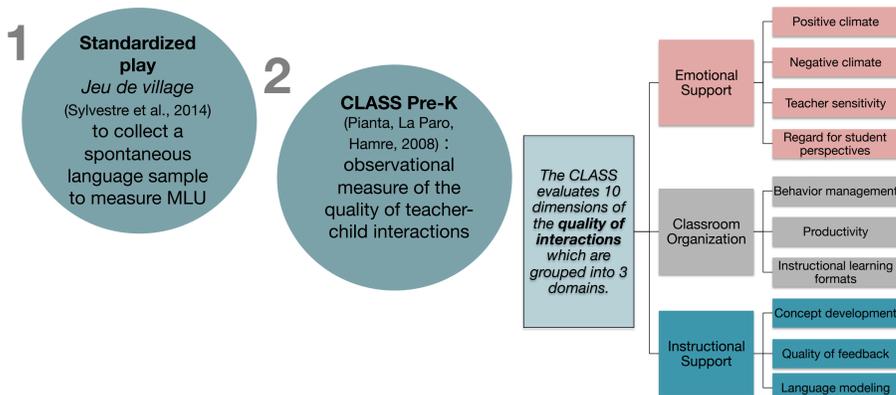
- **24 French-speaking neglected children** ( $M = 48.3$  months,  $SD = 0.39$ )  
Exclusion : children presenting a biological condition associated with language disorder (e.g. autism, deafness)

	Neglected children % (n)
Sex (male)	75.0 (18)
Non intact family	58.3 (14)
Family living under level of poverty (Quebec, 2014)	50.0 (12)
Level of education of principal parental figure < 12 years	50.0 (12)
MLU (words) under clinical threshold (< 3,3 words)	37.5 (9)

## PROCEDURE



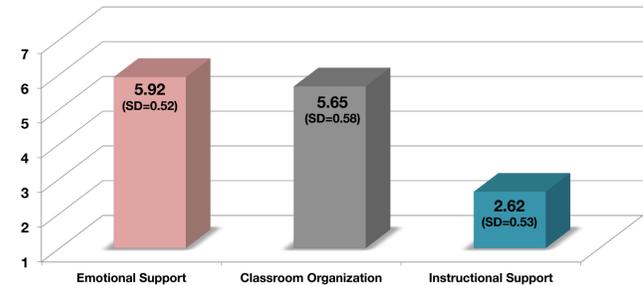
## INSTRUMENTS



## RESULTS

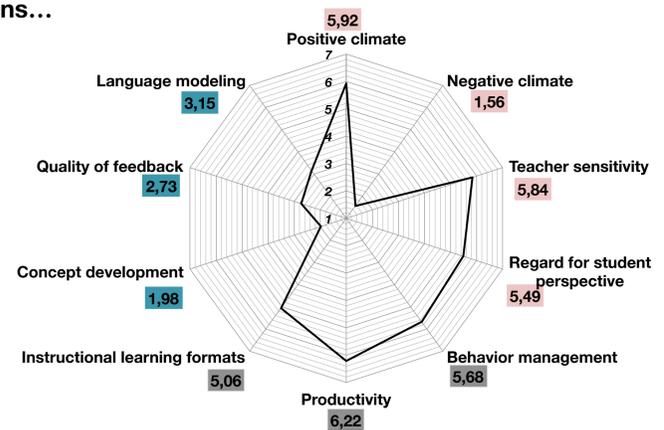
### Portrait of Quality of Interactions in ECE Settings

By domains...



Quality level	Low (1-2)	Middle (3-4-5)	High (6-7)
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By dimensions...



In the weakest domain (Instructional Support), **concept development** ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ), which refers to the integration of new concepts to previous activities/connections to real world and the support of high-order cognitive and language skills, such as predicting and reasoning, represents the dimension where the **level of quality is the lowest**.

Linear regression ( $n=23^*$ ) analysis was used to test if the domains of the quality of interactions predicted neglected children's MLU. Results of the regression indicate that the three domains are not significant predictors of MLU ( $R^2=.067$ ,  $F(3,19)=.453$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

\*One participant was excluded from the linear regression analysis because he did not produce the minimum of 25 utterances required for the measure of MLU during the standardized play.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Our results regarding the level of the quality of interactions in ECE settings are consistent with previous local and international research on quality of interactions in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten (e.g. Bouchard et al., 2017; Duval et al., 2016; Early et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2016; Pianta et al., 2008; von Suchodoletz et al., 2014).

We identified two main hypotheses to explain the absence of significance in our study, other than sample size.

**First, conceptually closer instruments to measured outcomes**, in this case language, could be preferred (Zaslav et al., 2016). For example, a measure of the language stimulation techniques provided by the caregiver could be considered.

**Secondly**, according to different authors (Burchinal et al., 2011; Weiland et al., 2013), the relationship between the quality of ECE settings and the outcomes on child's development is **stronger when the quality level is within the high range**.

- In our study, **Instructional Support**, which is known to best support children's language skills (Logan et al., 2011), ranges in the **low level of quality**.
- A **minimal level of quality of interactions must be reached** in order to observe a positive impact on language skills (Weiland et al., 2013). Some researchers suggest that this minimal level of quality is 3.25 for the domain of Instructional Support (Burchinal et al., 2010). In our study, only 8.3% ( $n=2$ ) of the ECE settings met this criterion.
- A slight **improvement** on the scale of quality of interactions allows to observe significant effects on children's language skills (National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2013).
- The **professional development** of caregivers is thus an interesting research path to pursue to reach this minimum threshold for the domain of Instructional Support. Caregivers working with neglected children, whose language difficulties are of great concern, should be targeted for this intervention.

According to these findings, subsequent studies, conducted on a wider sample, will provide further insights into the relationship between language skills of neglected children and their ECE experience.

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