

PLAY IN QUEBEC'S CHILDCARE SERVICES: STATED CURRICULUM AND ENACTED PRACTICES

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- **Play is...**
 - **essential to children' development and learning** (Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2005; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2008; Zigler, Singer & Bishop-Josef, 2004).
 - **at the center of many ECE curricula** (Bertram & Pascal, 2002; OECD, 2012).
 - **disappearing due to increase pressures to prepare children for school, leading to more direct instruction** (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2009).
- **This situation is reported by American and little information is available on the state of play in Quebec** (Bouchard et al., 2014).

What about the situation in Quebec (Canada)?

THE CONTEXT OF QUEBEC (CANADA)

Area: 1 542 056 km²

Population: 8 214 672

Official language: French



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A unique approach toward children and families:

- A year of parental leave (5 weeks for fathers)
- A universal publicly subsidies network of non-profit childcare services (7.30\$-20\$ per day):
 - 1) seeing to the well-being, health and safety of the children entrusted to them;
 - 2) offering children an environment likely to stimulate their development at all levels, from birth to school;
 - 3) preventing the subsequent appearance of learning, behavioral or social integration problems.

(Gouvernement du Québec, 2007)



Childcare center (135,803 spots)

- One educator
- Setting designed for ECEC
- Homogenous age group
- Ratio: 1:5 (up to 17 months); 1:8 (18-48 months); 1:10 (4-5 years)



Home childcare (91,664 spots)

- One provider
- Setting is the provider's home
- Heterogenous age group
- Ratio 1:6 (no more than 2 under 18 months); 2:9 (if assisted by another adult).

Both need to implement a curriculum framework

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STATED CURRICULUM



1) Examines the place of play in Quebec's childcare services curriculum.

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Meeting Early Childhood Needs (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007)

- Towards the social pedagogy approach (p.60, OECD, 2007).
- Consider the « whole child » - a being who thinks, moves, interacts with others, communicates, etc.
- Respect the natural learning strategies of young children: learning through play, interaction, activity, and personal investigation.
- Children learn through play = a chore principle.

«Basically the product of internal motivation, play is a means of choice for the child to explore the world and experiment. The various types of play activities in which the child engages [...] call on, each in their own way, all of the child's dimensions.» (p.16).

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Based on:

- Piaget (1967; 1978) and Vygotsky (1978)
 - Importance of the physical and social environment to grow and learn.
- Active learning (Epstein & Hohmann, 2012)
 - Integrating both theoretical approaches;
 - Leads adults to adopt specific practices, like making an important place to play within the daily schedule.
 - Key ingredients: 1) material; 2) manipulation; 3) choices; 4) child communication, language and thoughts; 5) adult scaffolding.

How play is describe?

Preliminary results of a content analysis (Lemay, Bigras,

Bouchard, Cantin and Charron, in preparation):

Referring to play (N = 202)

Definition

n = 68 (31.63%)

- Description (4.41%)
- Types of play (**44.12%**)
- Exemples of types (10.29%)
- Criterion (35.29%)
- Settings (5.88%)

Functions

n = 26 (12.09%)

- Description (7.69%)
- Supports development (**73.08%**)
- Fosters learning (19.23%)

Children' and adults' roles

n = 108 (**50.23%**)

- Children's roles
 - Initiating (**100%**)
- Adults's roles
 - Description (4.17%)
 - Organization (**63.54%**)
 - Emotionnal support (11.46%)
 - Learning facilitation (8.33%)
 - Observe-plan- reflect-communicate (12.5%)

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ENACTED PRACTICES

2) *Explores early childhood educators (ECEs)' and home childcare providers (HCPs)' "interactions valuing children's play" at 18, 24, 36 and 48 months-old.*

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Sample

- Data were gathered from two larger longitudinal projects conducted in Quebec (Canada) focused on childcare and children's development – *Young children and their living environments* (YCLE I and II).

First sample (YCLE I)

- Adults who worked with the same 70 children at 18, 24 and 36 months-old;
- 50 ECEs; 20 HCPs.

Second sample (YCLE II)

- Adults who worked with a new recruited sample of 170 children aged 48 months;
- 141 ECEs; 29 HCPs

Instrument and procedures

- Each time, process quality was observed with the Educational Quality Observation Scales: Infant, Preschool and Home Childcare versions (Bourgon & Lavallée, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).
 - Designed to measure quality based on Quebec's curriculum.
 - Observation from 7:45 am to 12:45 pm
 - All versions consist of over 100 items, divided into 4 scales and 9 subscales.

Con't

- The “adult’s interactions valuing children’s play” subscale addresses whether the adult's interventions:
 - respect children’s play (item 3.1.1)
 - support their initiatives (item 3.1.2)
 - create a playful climate (item 3.1.3);
 - show flexibility (item 3.1.5);
 - support planning (item 3.1.4) –doing (3.1.6) –reviewing (item 3.1.7);
 - modify the setting and material to sustain play (item 3.1.8).
- Items scored on a four-point scale (1 = very poor, 4 = very good) and used to compute the mean subscale score (< 2,5 = unsatisfactory quality, 2.5-3 = minimal quality; > 3 = satisfactory quality).

Results

Mean items quality score offered to 18, 24, 36 and 48 months-old children by early childhood educators (ECEs) and home childcare providers (HCPs)

	18 months			24 months			36 months			48 months		
	ECE	HCP	<i>P</i> -value	ECE	HCP	<i>p</i> -value	ECE	HCP	<i>p</i> -value	ECE	HCP	<i>p</i> -value
Item 311	3.24	3.15		3.46	3.25		3.44	3.10		3.23	3.31	
Item 312	1.86	1.70		1.74	1.55		1.62	1.45		2.16	2.31	
Item 313	2.44	2.40		2.40	2.00		2.42	2.10		2.82	2.83	
Item 314	1.00	1.00		1.00	1.00		1.18	1.00		1.75	1.10	
Item 315	2.46	2.15		2.28	1.95		2.02	1.95		2.41	2.79	
Item 316	2.24	2.40		2.04	2.20		2.38	2.20		2.75	2.79	
Item 317	1.08	1.10		1.18	1.20		1.44	1.40		1.72	1.52	
Item 318	1.97	2.25		3.00	2.00		2.68	2.15		2.57	2.86	
Subscale	2.38	2.09	0.03*	2.25	1.98	0.04*	2.23	1.97	0.01*	2.51	2.55	0.80

Note. * $p < .05$

Note. Red= unsatisfactory quality; yellow = minimal quality; green = satisfactory quality.

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Discussion

Minimal/unsatisfactory quality, at all ages.

- **Why?** ECEs and HCPs could:
 - 1) confer a different meaning to play;
 - 2) have difficulty transferring their learning into practice;
 - 3) lack knowledge on how to enact such interactions.
- **What are they doing then?** They might be adopting other interactions not in this subscale.
- Further studies should explore more in depth adult's interpretation and interactions around children's play.

Lower quality in home childcares

- HCPs = less likely to have a specialized training in early childhood → impact their implementation of the curriculum (Bigras et al., 2010).
- While ECEs change yearly, HCPs stay the same. This structural difference:
 - Is worrying for children's development and learning because they were continuously exposed to low quality.
 - Could be an advantage if quality was to be increase.
- Improve quality through initial and ongoing training
 - Starting with the items that obtained the lowest scores
 - *supporting children in planning their free choice play, in their initiatives and in reviewing what they have done.*

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Conclusion

- This study explored interactions valuing play of younger children, at ages where play should be a large part of the day and one of the main activities to promote their development and learning.
- Results indicated that, while adults respected children's play, their interventions didn't adequately sustain children's development and learning during play.
- We need to improve ECEs' and HCPs' interactions sustaining young children's development and learning during play.