

Educational Quality in
CHILDCARE
CENTRE DAYCARES
(INSTALLATIONS DE CPE)
HIGHLIGHTS



WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE *GRANDIR EN QUALITÉ 2003* SURVEY?

For the first time in Québec, we have a detailed and representative portrait of the quality of daycare experienced on a daily basis by children 0 to 5 years of age in government-regulated daycares (i.e. *Centres de la petite enfance* — CPEs, home daycares and private daycares). This is being provided by the *Enquête québécoise sur la qualité des services de garde éducatifs* (Québec Survey on the Quality of Educational Daycare), also known as *Grandir en qualité 2003*. It is helping identify and better define measures likely to maintain and improve the quality of educational daycare in light of the strengths and weaknesses observed.

The results of this survey are timely given the context of the rapid development of early childhood daycares in combination with the implementation of the educational program by the *ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille* (MESSF) (Ministry of Employment, Social Solidarity and the Family). It fulfills both the need for information expressed by the daycare network and the recommendation of the Auditor-General to evaluate the quality of daycare provided to children and families.

Many studies in the field of early childhood have shown that the quality of daycare plays a key role in child development in the first few years of life. This reinforces the utility and pertinence of the results of the *Grandir en qualité* survey.

The survey was conducted by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* (ISQ) (Québec Institute of Statistics) in partnership with educational daycare associations, university researchers and the MESSF (who funded it). A detailed report on the survey was published in June 2004.

The results are also being published in three summary reports, highlighting the main findings of the survey in Childcare Centre daycares (*installations de CPE*), home daycares (coordinated by CPEs) and private daycares. This summary report is primarily addressed to people who work in Childcare Centre daycares, be they managers, administrators, pedagogical consultants, program coordinators or educators. It can also provide useful information for parents who have children in these daycares.

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FOURNIER, Claire and Carl DROUIN (2004). Educational Quality in Childcare Centre Daycares (installations de CPE) — Highlights, Summary Report n°. 1, *Enquête québécoise sur la qualité des services de garde éducatifs*, Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec, 16 pages.

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Ce fascicule est aussi disponible en version française.

This summary report presents the main results of the survey on the quality of education experienced on a daily basis by children in Childcare Centres daycares (*installations de CPE*) across Québec in 2003. It is divided into two parts — the first on daycare provided for infants under 18 months of age and the second on that provided for children 18 months to 5 years of age (preschoolers).

The means by which educational quality was measured in this survey are presented in the box on [page 5](#). Awareness of these will help in understanding the results presented in this summary report. Certain aspects of the methodology of the survey are also presented on [page 15](#).

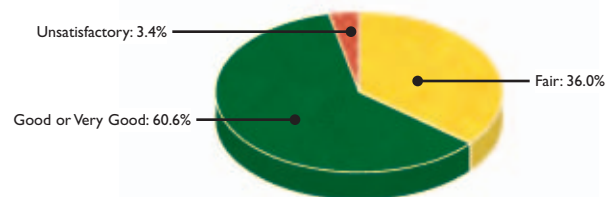
QUALITY OF DAYCARE FOR INFANTS (0 TO 18 MONTHS OLD)

OVERALL QUALITY OF INFANT DAYCARE — GOOD

On average, the infants in Childcare Centre daycares were receiving *Good* quality service overall based on the fundamental principles of the educational program. Indeed, the survey revealed a total mean score of 3.05 on a scale of 1.00 to 4.00. The score takes into account all items of the measurement tool used to observe quality in these daycares.

Since this result is an average, it is important to examine the distribution of infants by categories of overall quality of daycare provided. As indicated in Figure 1, the majority of children in Childcare Centre daycares (61%) were benefiting from *Good* or *Very Good* educational quality in general.

FIGURE 1 — OVERALL QUALITY OF INFANT DAYCARE IN CHILDCARE CENTRE DAYCARES, QUÉBEC, 2003



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Grandir en qualité 2003*.

It is noteworthy, however, that over a third of children in this age category (36%) were in educational daycares judged to be of *Fair* quality. As defined by the survey, *Fair* means that the daycare fulfilled the principles of the educational program in general without being judged as *Good* or *Very Good*. Only 3.4% of infants were in daycares deemed to be *Unsatisfactory* in terms of overall educational quality.



THREE OF THE FOUR ASPECTS OF QUALITY WERE JUDGED TO BE GOOD ON AVERAGE

Examining in detail the four aspects of educational quality of infant daycare in Childcare Centre daycares can reveal strengths and weaknesses, and in the case of the latter, indicate changes needed to be made in order to achieve a higher level of quality.

On average, educational quality was judged *Good* for the following three aspects — interaction between educators and parents (3.38), interaction between educators and infants (3.12), and structure and variation of activities (3.02) (Table 1). However, it should be noted that the score in the aforementioned third aspect was very close to 3.00, just above the upper limit of *Fair*.

TABLE 1 — EDUCATIONAL QUALITY OF INFANT DAYCARE IN CHILDCARE CENTRE DAYCARES BY ASPECT, QUÉBEC, 2003

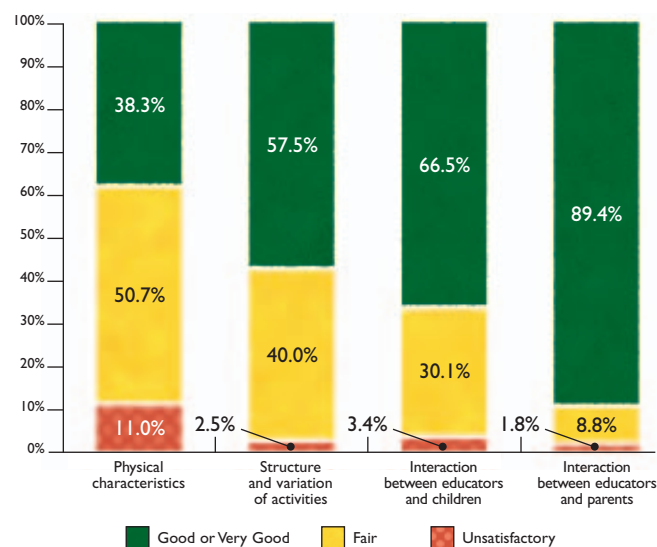
	Mean Scores (from 1.00 to 4.00)	Educational Quality
Physical characteristics	2.91	Fair
Structure and variation of activities	3.02	Good
Interaction between educators and children	3.12	Good
Interaction between educators and parents	3.38	Good

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Grandir en qualité* 2003.

As shown in Figure 2, more than half the infants were in daycares deemed *Good* or *Very Good* in terms of the above three aspects. Interaction between educators and parents was very positive, as nearly nine in ten infants (89%) were in a daycare judged *Good* or *Very Good* with regards to this particular aspect.

However, in terms of physical characteristics, infant daycare was on average judged to be of *Fair* quality (2.91). This reflects that half (51%) of the infants were in daycares where the physical environment was considered to be *Fair*, while slightly more than a third (38%) were in ones where it was considered *Good* or *Very Good* (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 — DISTRIBUTION OF INFANTS IN CHILDCARE CENTRE DAYCARES BY LEVEL AND ASPECT OF QUALITY, QUÉBEC, 2003

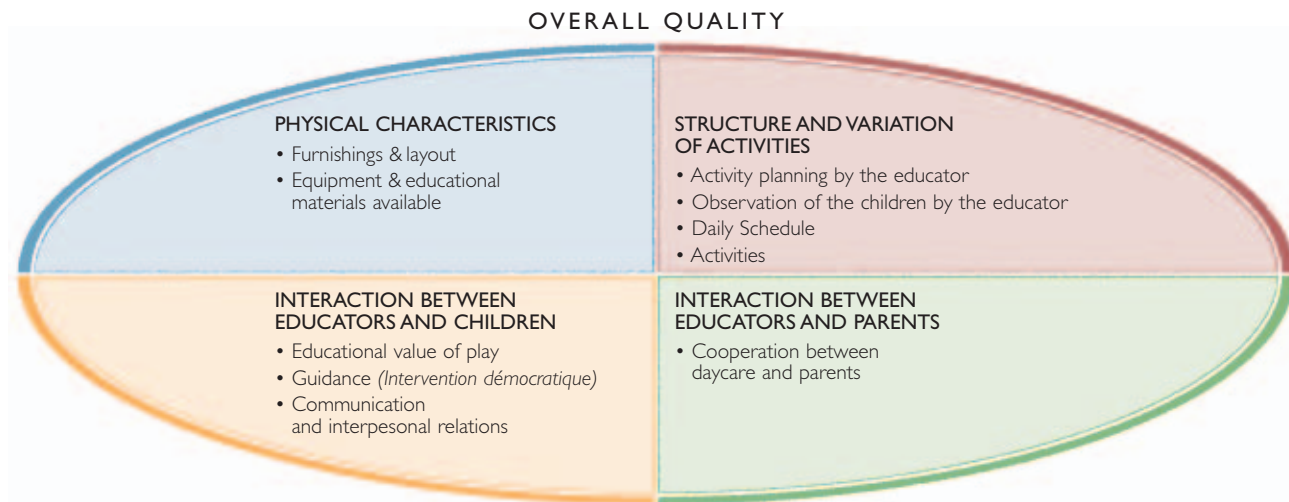


Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Grandir en qualité* 2003.

MEASURING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY IN CHILDCARE CENTRE DAYCARES

The survey measured quality based on the approach outlined in the government's educational program recommended for daycares in Québec. Specialists in the field created two observation scales adapted to the specific characteristics of infants and preschoolers. Using these scales and scoring guides, approximately 120 items related to daycares were evaluated, producing data on overall quality, and four major aspects and sub-aspects of quality.

THE FOUR ASPECTS OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, GRANDIR EN QUALITÉ 2003 SURVEY



The mean scores of quality, namely the measurements of quality calculated for all groups in the same age category, were derived from an index of six categories of quality (from *Very Poor* to *Very Good*). The three lowest indicate *Unsatisfactory* in terms of the underlying principles of the educational program (mean scores under 2.50). Above 2.50, considered minimal in terms of these principles, are *Fair* (2.50 to 2.99), and *Good* or *Very Good* (3.00 to 4.00), the highest ratings of educational quality. The colours red, yellow and green provide a means of distinguishing these three main groups of the index used to present the results of the survey.

GUIDE TO INTERPRETING THE MEAN SCORES OF QUALITY IN THE GRANDIR EN QUALITÉ 2003 SURVEY

MEAN SCORE	EDUCATIONAL QUALITY	FOLLOWS THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM
3.50 to 4.00	Very Good	SATISFACTORY
3.00 to 3.49	Good	
2.50 to 2.99	Fair	
2.00 to 2.49	Low	UNSATISFACTORY
1.50 to 1.99	Poor	
1.00 to 1.49	Very Poor	

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Grandir en qualité 2003*.

NUMEROUS STRENGTHS...

The majority of items in the observation scale used to evaluate infant daycare in Childcare Centre daycares received Good or Very Good scores in terms of quality. The following examples mark the many strengths upon which these daycares can consolidate their achievements and continue to pursue their goal of providing quality service.

■ Positive characteristics of the physical environment

- *The physical setup of the daycares strongly fulfilled the needs of the educators in terms of doing their job (mean score of 3.98).*
- *Moreover, the facilities were very welcoming (3.94), especially in the cloakroom or cubby area, which was well designed to receive the families (3.62).*
- *Healthy lunches (3.66) and snacks (3.56) being served, as well as respect for the rules of cleanliness during lunch (3.49), were also indicated by the data. These three items include characteristics such as sufficient portions, variety of foods, size of the bites or mouthfuls, and certain healthy practices related to food consumption. The physical characteristics or setup of the environment in which lunch was served fostered a calm atmosphere (3.80).*
- *At drop-off time, the physical characteristics of the daycares (design of the cloakroom or cubby area, furnishings, etc.) facilitated the smooth transition of care from parents to the daycare (3.46).*

■ Activities that foster quality

- *Whether at the time of drop-off in the morning (3.93) or pick-up at the end of the day (3.83), the infants were offered significant choices; for example, they could choose a toy from a range of those available or choose their playmates.*
- *The activities provided for the infants were appropriate in light of their developmental level, interests and needs (3.79). In addition, very good conditions for the development of free play were observed (3.75). For example, the time for free play was sufficient to allow infants to concentrate and develop their play and/or infants had direct access to materials.*

- *The professionalism of the staff when two groups of children were brought together or integrated (3.79), or three or more were brought together (3.74) is to be highlighted. These high scores can be attributed to a number of characteristics, such as the level of mutual support among daycare personnel, their ability to appropriately and consistently interact with the children, and their respect for the rules of confidentiality when communicating with each other or the parents.*

■ Good skills in relating to the infants

- *Educators had good skills in listening to the children (3.47). They effectively decoded what the infants were trying to communicate (3.82) and used very appropriate language to talk to them (3.73).*
- *Educators had positive personal qualities that fostered the establishment of solid relationships with the infants, such as warmth, attention, patience, availability and enthusiasm (3.65).*
- *Educators did a good job of stimulating the children to express their feelings and needs (3.44).*
- *During pick-up time, towards the end of the day, they acted in such a manner as to maintain a positive atmosphere (3.40) and attended to all the children (3.76).*

■ Strengths in guidance (*intervention démocratique*)

- *Educators shared decision-making with the infants in ways that were developmentally appropriate (3.57). The very good level of quality in this regard was attained because the educators respected the interests, needs and rhythm of each child.*

- Skills in giving instructions adapted to the level of the infants (3.83) and consistency and impartiality in applying these (3.76) were also demonstrated by the results of the survey.
- The educators showed very good skills in positioning themselves so as to be able to keep an eye on all the infants in the group for whom they were responsible (3.71).

■ Good interaction between educators and parents

- Ongoing communication between the daycares and parents was very good — informal conversations, written communications, and one-on-one meetings (3.51).
- In a similar vein, various means of communication were used to inform the parents at pick-up time about their child — his/her activities, development, eating habits and diet, mood, etc. (3.75). Examples of this include posting a list of the day's activities on the bulletin board, or putting a letter or note in the child's locker or cubby area.
- Infant educators in Childcare Centre daycares established constructive interpersonal relations with parents, both at drop-off (3.45) and at pick-up time (3.62).



... BUT ALSO WEAKNESSES IDENTIFIED

The data from the survey on quality of infant daycare in Childcare Centre daycares across Québec also revealed weaknesses. Here are a few examples of areas identified as needing improvement to increase the quality of daycare being provided to young children.

■ Lack of equipment and educational materials

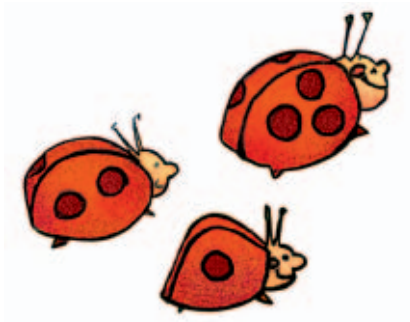
- *Equipment and materials available for play or games in the yard or at the park were inadequate for fostering development in the children, whether sensory-motor (2.33) or other aspects of child development (1.19), mainly because they were lacking in quantity. This was also found to be the case in winter conditions with snow on the ground. To achieve a Good or Very Good rating in educational quality, the children would have access to a variety of equipment and materials in appropriate quantity, not only inside, but outside, such as swings, pails and shovels, balls, hoops, wagons, blocks, toy animals and figures, etc.*
- *In addition, educational materials in the infant daycares rarely reflected the cultural and family diversity found in society — e.g., music from around the world, posters illustrating family and cultural diversity, dolls of both sexes (1.57).*
- *The physical setup of the space in daycares did not lend itself enough to the children having direct contact with educational materials to choose, handle, arrange or put them away (1.71).*

■ Educators did not wash their hands often enough

- *On average, hand washing on the part of educators in infant groups in Childcare Centre daycares was deemed to be inadequate (1.70). This item was assessed in terms of the frequency with which they wash their hands in situations where transmission of disease or contamination could occur, such as after changing diapers or wiping an infant's nose, and before and after meals.*

■ Weak activity planning

- *Planning of activities on the part of educators was on average inadequate (2.00). This low score is related to the fact that one quarter (25%) of infants had an educator who reported not doing any activity planning, whether informal or written. One aspect contributing to the quality of educational daycare is that the educator herself writes a daily or weekly activity programme and makes it available to her colleagues and the parents.*



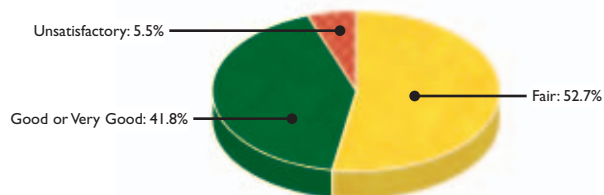
QUALITY OF DAYCARE FOR CHILDREN OF PRESCHOOL AGE (18 MONTHS TO 5 YEARS OLD)

OVERALL QUALITY OF PRESCHOOL DAYCARE — FAIR

The overall quality of educational daycare for children of preschool age in Childcare Centre daycares (*installation de CPE*) was evaluated as *Fair*, since the total mean score was 2.93. The reader is reminded that the box on [page 5](#) provides a brief outline of the meaning of the scores and the terminology used to interpret them.

As was done in the section on infant daycare, it is useful to examine the distribution of preschoolers according to the overall quality observed in their Childcare Centre daycares. Figure 3 shows that slightly more than half of children in the preschool age category (53%) were receiving daycare services judged to be of *Fair* quality, while 42% were receiving *Good* or *Very Good* educational daycare. A relatively small proportion of children were in daycares not fulfilling the principles of the recommended educational program (6%).

FIGURE 3 — OVERALL QUALITY OF PRESCHOOL DAYCARE IN CHILDCARE CENTRE DAYCARES, QUÉBEC, 2003



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Grandir en qualité* 2003.



QUALITY VARIED BY ASPECT

The quality of educational daycare for children of preschool age in Childcare Centre daycares across Québec varied by aspect. It was judged to be *Good* for two of the aspects measured — educators' interactions with the parents (3.18) and structure and variation of activities (3.02) (Table 2). However, it should be noted that the score for the activity aspect was just above the line differentiating *Good* from *Fair* (3.00).

TABLE 2 — QUALITY OF PRESCHOOL DAYCARE IN CHILDCARE CENTRE DAYCARES BY ASPECT, QUÉBEC, 2003

	Mean Scores (from 1.00 to 4.00)	Educational Quality
Physical characteristics	2.89	Fair
Structure and variation of activities	3.02	Good
Interaction between educators and children	2.85	Fair
Interaction between educators and parents	3.18	Good

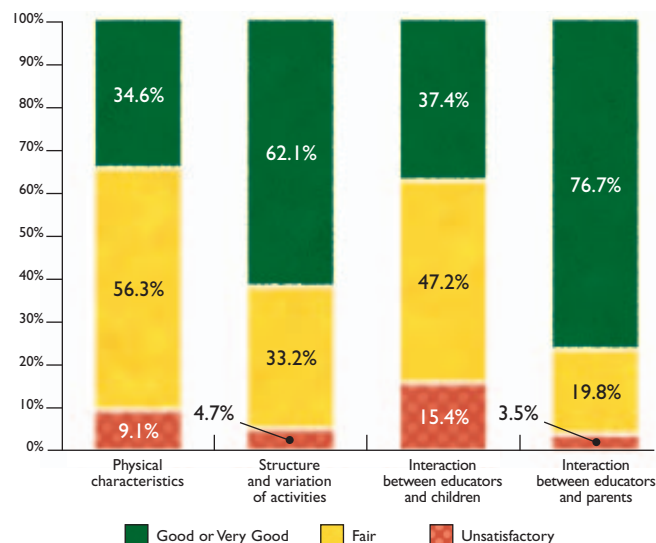
Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Grandir en qualité 2003*.

Educational quality was assessed as *Fair* for the physical characteristics of the daycares (2.89) and interaction between educators and the children (2.85).

Figure 4 shows that the two aspects of quality that received mean scores higher than 3.00 had high proportions of children benefiting from *Good* or *Very Good* quality. Indeed, approximately 77% of children were in daycares rated *Good* or *Very Good* in terms of educators' interaction with the parents, and 62% were in daycares with these same quality ratings in terms of structure and variation of activities.

In contrast, only 35% of children were in daycares rated *Good* or *Very Good* in terms of their physical characteristics, and 37% in daycares rated *Good* or *Very Good* in terms of interaction between educators and the children.

FIGURE 4 — DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN OF PRESCHOOL AGE IN CHILDCARE CENTRE DAYCARES BY LEVEL AND ASPECT OF QUALITY, QUÉBEC, 2003



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Grandir en qualité 2003*.

STRENGTHS...

As in the section on infants, examining the data by item allows a more detailed analysis of the main strengths of preschool daycare in Childcare Centre daycares. Many features of the daycares were rated as being of Good or Very Good quality, as indicated by the following examples:

■ Physical characteristics — positive points

- *The physical space of the preschool daycare facilities in Childcare Centre daycares was welcoming, receiving a mean score of 3.34. The cloakroom or cubby area facilitated the arrival of children and family members in the morning, receiving a quality rating of Very Good (3.66).*
- *The physical characteristics of the daycares was rated Very Good in terms of fulfilling the needs of the educators' in doing their job (3.71).*
- *Space in the daycare was very well-designed, allowing for flexibility, for example, in terms of conducting activities with one or more groups of children (3.73).*
- *Meals and snacks scored high in terms of being healthy (3.66 and 3.69 respectively). Respect for rules of cleanliness during lunch was rated Good (3.48). Another positive result was that the space used for eating fostered a relaxed atmosphere during meal time (3.86).*

■ Appropriate activities

- *The children could make significant choices in terms of play, at drop-off in the morning (3.77), during the day (3.60) or towards the end of the day (3.72).*
- *In general, good conditions for the development of free play were observed (3.75) and educators organized developmentally appropriate activities for the children (3.45). In addition, the activity of putting things away was organized in a manner that was stimulating for the children (3.48).*
- *Staff members showed great professionalism with the children or colleagues during times when two groups were brought together or integrated (3.61) or three or more groups were brought together (3.46).*

■ Educators had good skills in relating to the children

- *Educators demonstrated good skills in listening to the children (3.50). They used appropriate language in communicating with them (3.32).*
- *Educators had positive personal qualities that fostered the establishment of solid relationships with the children, such as being attentive, enthusiastic, warm, available and patient (3.49).*
- *They knew how to express their needs, expectations, feelings and limits to the children (3.56).*
- *At drop-off time, the educators were very good in helping the children handle more easily the transition between family and daycare (3.61).*

■ Good practices in guidance (*intervention démocratique*)

- *The educators knew how to give instructions adapted to the level of the children (3.90) and showed consistency and impartiality in applying these (3.66).*
- *The educators positioned themselves to be able to keep an eye on the whole group of children for whom they were responsible (3.52).*
- *The educators assigned responsibility to the children according to their capacity, contributing to developing their sense of pride (3.47).*

■ Educators interacted well with the parents

- *Continuity in interaction between educators and families was fostered by informal and formal communication with the parents (3.66).*
- *Educators established constructive interpersonal relations with parents, both at drop-off (3.12) and at pick-up (3.19) time.*
- *At pick-up time, a variety of means were used to communicate with parents (bulletin board, direct conversation, letter, etc.) and parents could in turn communicate and share information about their child (3.59).*

...AND WEAKNESSES

Aspects of quality judged *Unsatisfactory* in preschool Childcare Centre daycares were mainly the lack of equipment and educational materials or emphasis on play that advances the learning process. Weakness was also observed in certain items related to guidance intervention and the health and safety of the children. Many of these are discussed below, and can serve as indicators for suggested improvements.



■ Too few materials, too little equipment to foster child development

- *Equipment and educational materials available for the children did not foster all aspects of child development (1.99). Moreover, they did not adequately stimulate the children's senses (2.35).*
- *A lack of materials that foster overall child development was observed during play periods in the yard or park, particularly with regards to developmental aspects other than psychomotor (1.60). The score was also low during winter with snow on the ground.*
- *The educational materials used rarely reflected family and cultural diversity (1.20).*

■ Educational value of play not fully achieved

- *Educators were not very receptive to children's initiatives (ideas/comments) during play (1.91). Strategies for achieving a Good or Very Good rating for this item include using children's suggestions to build on their play, motivating the children to think in creative ways and test their ideas, and asking them to express their thoughts with regards to the games they invent.*
- *Educators rarely organized periods of reflection or review of activities in which the children become aware of their achievements (1.48). Furthermore, they did not provide enough encouragement for the children to plan their specific activity or choose among a list offered to them (1.95).*

■ Weaknesses in guidance (*intervention démocratique*)

- The atmosphere created in the children's groups did not sufficiently lend itself to encouraging cooperation among the children (1.98). Educators did not frequently emphasize helping each other or sharing, and did not organize enough games or ways of playing involving cooperation.
- Educators did not share decision-making enough with the children (2.25) and did not provide sufficient opportunity for the children to resolve problems themselves and act with autonomy (2.09).

■ Weaknesses in health and safety

- The physical environment of Childcare Centre preschool day-care facilities did not always fully conform to government regulations and practices in terms of health and safety (1.77). This poor score resulted from the fact that the majority of children (71%) were in daycares with characteristics that could affect their health and safety, such as storage cabinets on wheels with no braking mechanism, unrolled electrical wires accessible to the children, unprotected electrical outlets, or not respecting the norms regarding the child/educator ratio at certain times of the day.
- In addition, the survey revealed that hand-washing was not frequent enough on the part of educators (2.30).

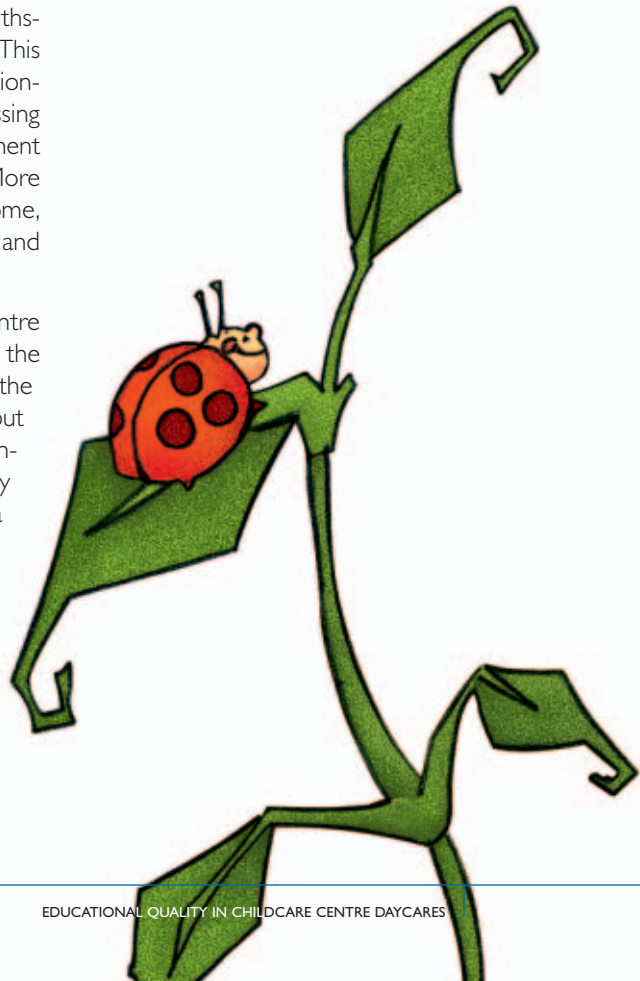


MAKING USE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM — AN ONGOING PRACTICE RECOMMENDED FOR CHILDCARE CENTRE DAYCARES

Thanks to the *Grandir en qualité 2003* survey, we have learned that, on average, daycare in Childcare Centre daycares (*Installations de CPE*) followed the principles of the educational program promoted by the *MESSF*, overall quality being judged as *Good* in the infant daycares and *Fair* in the preschool ones. These ratings result from the positive aspects, but also from the weaknesses observed, which reveal areas that call for improvement.

As shown by the results of the survey, most of the strengths and weaknesses in Childcare Centre daycares are characteristic of both the infant (0-18 months) and preschool (18 months-5 years) components. However, some are specific to each. This suggests that, among measures designed to improve educational quality, certain ones can be applied to a strategy addressing both, such as sufficient materials to stimulate child development and more stringent adherence to health and safety rules. More targeted actions for each age group would also be welcome, such as increasing activity planning in the infant section and emphasizing play-based learning in the preschool one.

Good quality education can be achieved in Childcare Centre daycares by implementing the many guidelines contained in the educational program. Progress in this regard depends on the involvement of not only educators and daycare directors, but also daycare associations, government ministries and agencies, and educational institutions. To this end, the survey report can serve as a practical reference tool. It presents a detailed portrait of educational quality, and underlines characteristics of daycares likely to enhance it.



METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

TARGET POPULATION

All children in early childhood educational daycares regulated by the government of Québec, except those which began operating after October 15, 2001, and certain others for minor reasons. Given these exclusions, the target population was representative of approximately 89% of all children attending government-regulated daycares at the time of the survey, namely slightly more than 145,000 children.

SAMPLE SIZE AND RESPONSE RATE

The sample comprised 905 groups of children in approximately 650 daycares selected at random from the list of educational daycares comprising the following five types:

1. *Infant daycare in Childcare Centres daycares (installations de CPE) for children under 18 months of age (128 groups)*
2. *Preschool daycare in Childcare Centres daycares (installations de CPE) for children 18 months to 5 years of age (228 groups)*
3. *Home daycares coordinated by a CPE (200 groups)*
4. *Private daycares for children under 18 months of age (124 groups)*
5. *Private daycares for children 18 months to 5 years of age (225 groups).*

In all, 87.8% of the randomly-selected groups of children participated in the survey.

PRECISION OF THE RESULTS

As indicated above, the *Grandir en qualité 2003* survey has produced data representative of children's experience of educational daycare in Québec. However, since all children in all daycares did not participate in the survey, the results are to be considered estimates — in other words, they have a certain margin of error. For more details on their precision, the reader is invited to consult the survey report.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS

Developed by specialists in the field of early childhood and adapted to the age groups and types of daycare, three observation scales of educational quality were used in the survey. The measurement of educational quality in these scales was based on numerous aspects of the daycare environment and the principles of the educational program recommended by the *MESSF* and the practices that derive from them.

Trained and accredited observers spent an entire day with the groups of children in the randomly-selected daycares.

Telephone or self-administered questionnaires were given to the directors, educators and home daycare providers as a further method of data collection.

DATA COLLECTION PERIOD

End of March to beginning of June 2003.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE *GRANDIR EN QUALITÉ 2003* SURVEY

- The **three summary reports** on the highlights of the survey can be downloaded from the survey website at www.grandirenqualite.gouv.qc.ca. The website also presents further information on how the survey was conducted and **tables** of mean scores for every item of quality assessed.
- The complete **survey report** is also available free of charge on the ISQ website at www.stat.gouv.qc.ca. The printed version can be purchased from *Publications du Québec*. It can also be ordered from the *Centre d'information et de documentation* of the ISQ by calling toll-free 1-877-677-2087.
- The **observation scales** and scoring guides used to evaluate the educational quality of the daycares are available on the website of the MESSF at www.messf.gouv.qc.ca under "Publications."