



# Guide to Interpreting the Assessment Report

Measure to Assess and Improve Educational Quality at Educational Childcare Establishments (Groups of 0- to 5-year-olds)

## 2023

Original text in French

**Content**

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## Introduction

Years of research have allowed us to determine that quality of educational childcare establishments is a determining factor in the development of young children. “Educational childcare establishments that score high in level of educational quality promote the cognitive, language, social, emotional, physical and motor development of young children” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 2).

In terms of educational quality, most of the players in early childhood education approach this from the perspective of structural quality and process quality (Lemay and Lehrer, 2022).<sup>1</sup>

Structural quality refers to the basic structures needed to ensure quality, and is obtained through the application of laws and regulations. Reference is often made to factors such as management practices, training, experience, group size and the adult/child ratio.

Process quality refers to the diversity and richness of the children’s daily experiences at the childcare establishment, the structure of the premises and learning environment (space, materials, activities), interactions within the group (adult-child and child-child), and parental involvement. (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 3)

It is, in particular, to ensure that children have access to educational childcare establishments that support their overall development and promote their educational success that the Ministère de la Famille (Ministère) du Québec has progressively been implementing, since 2019, the Measure to Assess and Improve Educational Quality at Educational Childcare Establishments for which these two major types of categories (structural quality and process quality) are assessed.

Under the Ministère’s Measure, a report is produced by the assessment firm and this report is sent to the educational childcare establishments and to the Ministère. The report presents the results of the assessment and proposes possible solutions for enhancing educational quality, when required. This interpretation guide is intended to complement the Ministère’s Explanatory Guide (2023) and it was developed to support mainly the managers in reading the various sections of the Assessment Report. Interviews<sup>2</sup> with educational childcare establishment managers revealed the need for them to have supporting materials at hand to help them interpret the Assessment Report results with a view to maintaining and improving educational quality (Lemay et al., 2019). In response to this need, the objective of this guide is to help make connections between the Assessment Measure implemented by the Ministère, the Assessment Report and the Accueillir la petite enfance educational program (Ministère de

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent publications deal with the concept of quality, from the perspective of structural quality, process quality, as well as the quality of guidelines. This last category of variables is not assessed in the measure implemented by the Ministère. It will however be dealt with in the Guide to Using the Assessment Report (Lemay, Lemire, Bouchard and Brault-Foisy, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> The interviews, that lasted an average of 40-45 minutes, were held with 51 educational childcare facility managers (26 childcare centres, 13 non-subsidized day care centres and 12 subsidized day care centres) who had undergone the assessment process. These managers were interviewed in the winter of 2019, following their participation in the 2018 pilot project concerning the Ministère’s measure for groups of 0- to 5-year-olds.

la Famille, 2019). The following sections deal, one by one, with the dimensions assessed in the Ministère's Measure.

➤ **Structural quality and associated factors**

➤ **Process quality**

1. Quality of the interactions between the educational staff and the children
2. Quality of premises layout
3. Quality of child observation and planning practices
4. Quality of interactions between the childcare establishment staff (educators and manager) and the parents.

This Guide first describes each dimension of the quality being assessed, and then it specifies why each one of them is important. The Guide also identifies, for each of these five dimensions, some strategies from the *Accueillir la petite enfance* program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019) that will enhance the level of quality offered in educational childcare establishments. Lastly, it also provides additional references for anyone who would like to take a deeper dive into each educational quality dimension.

## Dimension 1 - Structural Quality and Associated Factors<sup>3</sup>

### What is it?

As previously mentioned, “structural quality refers to a set of variables that indirectly influence process quality. For example, the adult-child ratio, group size and staff training, governed by regulations, are all elements to consider” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 29). Most of the time, structural quality concerns variables that are regulated. It supports the process quality, which, it should be remembered, includes the Quality of the Interactions between the Educational Staff and the Children, the Quality of Premises Layout, the Quality of Child Observation and Planning Practices, and the Quality of Interactions between the Childcare Establishment Staff and the Parents. In other words, structural quality represents a set of basic conditions implemented by an educational childcare establishment to support the educators in their work with the children.

### Why is it important?

Research shows that structural quality has a significant impact on process quality and, thereby, on the children’s development. The set of conditions in which educators work on a daily basis directly influence the quality they offer children, in particular in terms of their interactions with them, a high-quality premises layout, their child observation and planning practices, and their interactions with the parents.

An educational childcare establishment’s management team plays a crucial role in structural quality because the decisions it makes directly influence the quality of the education provided to the children, across all its dimensions. In particular, some management-related aspects (structural quality and associated factors) that influence process quality in an educational childcare establishment are qualifications required at the hiring stage, choices made when implementing an educational program, instructional support provided, planning time given to staff, continuous education and team meetings offered, as well as supervision practices of the educators.

### What does the report indicate about this dimension?

The Assessment Report deals with the Structural Quality and Associated Factors dimension at the outset by painting a picture the context in which the assessment took place. Contrary to the other educational quality dimensions assessed, this one does not have a score. Reporting the manager’s and the educational staff’s comments during the individual interviews, the Context within the Childcare Establishment section describes the situation of the assessed facility with respect to the different categories of variables, for example “information on the childcare establishment’s general operations, the qualifications of its

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<sup>3</sup> DIMENSION DE LA QUALITÉ ÉDUCATIVE ASSOCIÉE : La qualité structurelle, Accueillir la petite enfance (2019)

educational staff, the management practices used to support the educational staff's work, and so on.” (Ministère de la Famille, 2023, p. 14). This section helps shed light on the results of the assessment. The Context section is useful for understanding and reflecting on the overall results of the assessment.

The Summary section at the end of the report shows the different strengths and avenues for improvement identified for Structural Quality and Associated Factors, connected with the set of results obtained by the educational childcare establishment. For the staff of an educational childcare establishment that wishes to identify possible structural or organizational actions to take that are likely to maintain, or even improve, the levels of process quality obtained during the assessment, the proposed improvements listed in the Summary of Structural Quality and Associated Factors, along with the structural quality and associated factors are an essential starting point. The suggestions presented below come up frequently in the Assessment Reports and are important levers for process quality.

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## Four suggestions for enhancing the quality of this dimension

1. [Apply a recognized educational program and make sure the educational staff has mastered the guiding principles of this program](#)

The establishment of an educational program with instructional principles known to all guides the work of the educational staff in terms of educational activities carried out with the children, and drives the choices of the management team (e.g. training sessions offered to staff, topics dealt with at team meetings, materials purchased). This enhances educational quality at the facility by creating a common lens through which the work with the children (and their parents) is carried out, and through which existing educational practices can be discussed and considered.

2. [Offer support to the educational team](#)

The contributions of an instructional and technical support consultant and/or a specialized educator helps the entire team expand their knowledge in the area of teaching and provides support to children with special needs. In addition, strategies such as granting planning time each week, and holding staff meetings on a regular basis and professional development activities on an annual basis helps the educational team enhance its practices, consolidate its skills and absorb more information that is conducive to increasing the quality provided at the educational childcare establishment.

3. [Regulate the work of the educational staff on an individual and group basis](#)

Management practices that involve formal oversight and monitoring activities for the educational staff's work are advantageous on several levels. Firstly, individual meetings allow the time for discussions with each team member to better understand his or her needs and to set personalized objectives together at his or her own pace. For this type of meeting, it may be interesting to use the self-assessment, which



should be completed by the manager and the educator individually beforehand. The two versions can then be compared at the meeting.

For groups, formal and systematic supervision activities help to identify the strengths in the team, but also to ascertain the improvements to be made and to thereby determine where the instructional support or training needs are for the staff. Whether for individuals or groups, the supervision of the work of the educational staff should be based on recognized educational quality observation tools, such as the *Échelle d'observation de la qualité éducative* (EOQE; Bourgon et al., 2013a; Bourgon et al., 2013b), the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Hamre et al., 2014; La Paro et al., 2012; Pianta et al., 2008) or other such tools; these tools help provide specific and objective feedback, based on observable criteria, and in connection with the educational program (or educational approach) being used.

#### 4. Collaborate with external organizations and resources

External organizations and resources propose a wide variety of services, in terms of both supporting the children's development and integrating them into the community. For an educational childcare establishment, getting the expertise of an external, specialized resource helps to better meet the varied needs of children and their families, as well as to support the educational staff and provide them with the tools they need for their day-to-day educational activities with challenging children. Moreover, collaborations between the educational childcare establishment and external organizations and resources also lead to other types of enriching projects, for instance with seniors' residences, neighbourhood schools, the public library or local merchants in order to forge various ties in the community.

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## Dimension 2 – Quality of the Interactions between the Educational Staff and the Children<sup>4</sup>

### What is it?

Quality of the interactions between the educational staff and the children refers mainly to the actions, words and responses of the educational staff, which have a direct impact on the creation of a positive and comforting relationship with each child in the group, as well as on the development of their full potential. Theory and research distinguish two main domains grouping the most important interactions, those that support the child socially and emotionally and those that are more focused on cognition and language.

Through interactions that provide social and emotional support, the educational staff aims to create a warm, respectful atmosphere and to provide a safe environment based on the needs and interests of the children.

Through interactions that support cognition and language, the educational staff supports the children in their experiences, their explorations and their learning to increase their understanding of the world around them, in particular by allowing them to use their thinking and language skills, and to push these skills even further.

While the nature of the educational staff's interactions with young children remains more or less the same between ages 0 and 5 (see Figure 1), the manifestations of these interactions become more complex as the children progress in their development, as they grow from infant to toddler, and then into 3- to 5-year-olds.

For example, interactions that support a child's language are important at every age, but the support provided by the educational staff is different based on the development level of the child being addressed. The staff could possibly repeat sounds to an infant and reply to his or her attempts at communicating, or they could designate objects to a toddler and provide explanations for words, or they might ask open-ended questions and provide advanced-level vocabulary to an older child.

This is a good illustration of the complexification of interactions as children develop. But regardless of the children's level of development, some constants remain to support their learning and their development: interactions are better if they are warm, sensitive, democratic and proactive at the social and emotional level (Domain Group A in the Assessment Report), and intentionally stimulating at the cognitive and language level (Domain Group B in the Assessment Report).

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<sup>4</sup> DIMENSION DE LA QUALITÉ ÉDUCATIVE ASSOCIÉE : La qualité de l'interaction entre le personnel éducateur ou les responsables d'un service de garde éducatif en milieu familial et les enfants, Accueillir la petite enfance (2019)

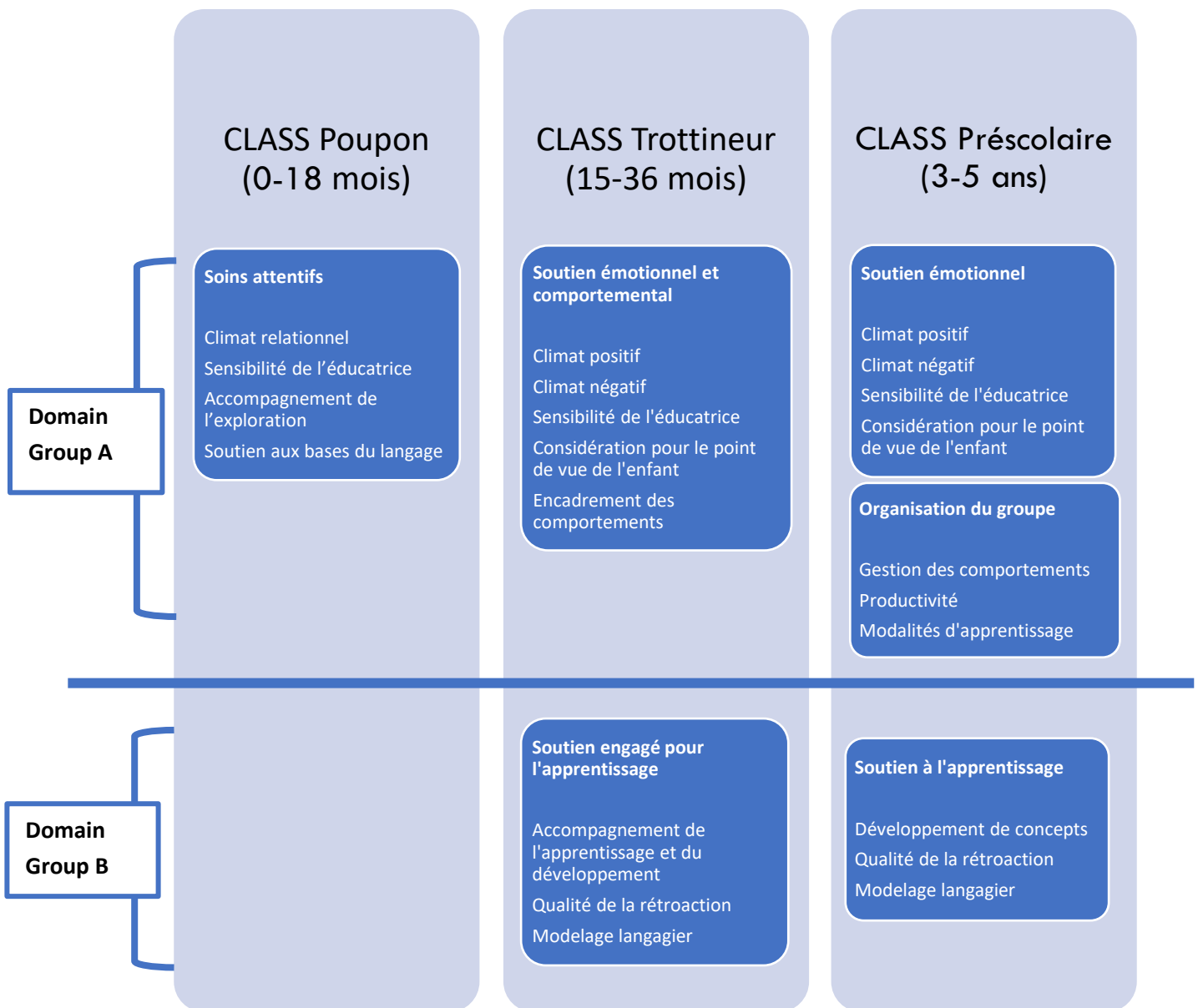


Figure 1. Dimensions and domains of the CLASS tool for Infants, Toddlers and Pre-K found in Domain Groups A and B

### Why is it important?

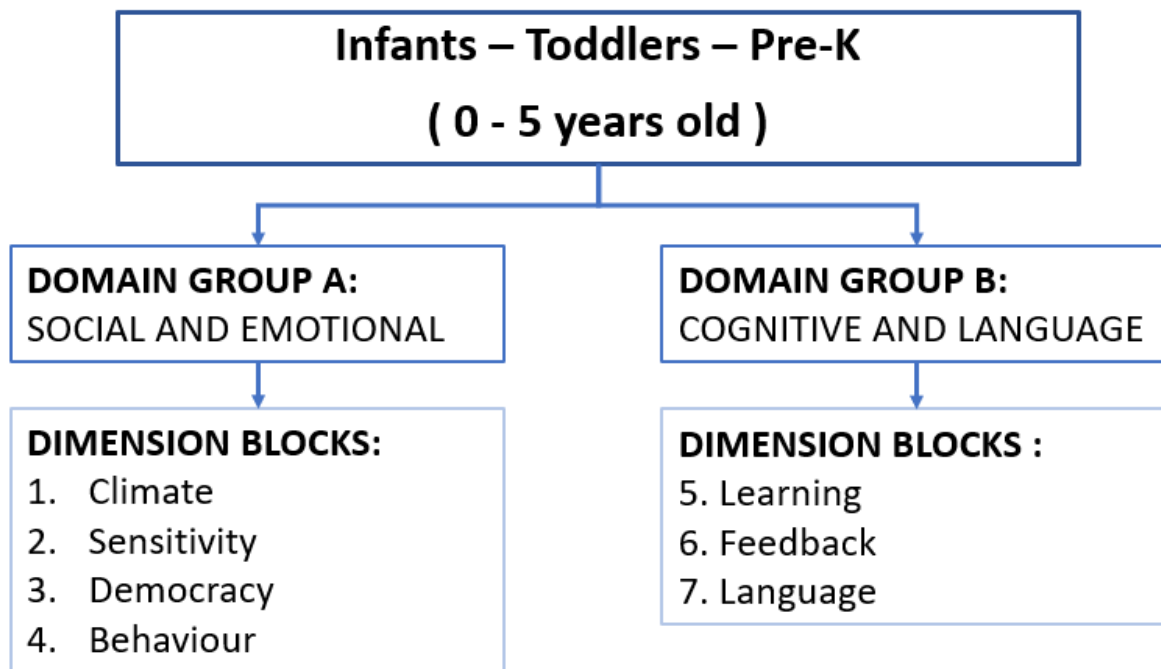
“Specialists in the field of early childhood agree that the most decisive component of quality for the development of young children is the interaction of the educational staff ... with them” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 30). Through these interactions, children form a comforting attachment with the educator and with each child in their group. The positive relationship created has an impact on the emotional safety of the children, on their sense of belonging to the group and on their motivation to

explore and invest themselves in their own learning. The sense of emotional security is therefore closely connected with children’s ability to discover the world around them.

### What does the Assessment Report indicate about this dimension?

The Assessment Report groups together interactions by type: firstly, social and emotional, and secondly, cognitive and language. During the assessment, data was gathered from the infant, toddler and 3- to 5-year-old groups (based on the educational childcare establishment’s own structure and way of operating). It is useful to reiterate that the Measure used by the Ministère is not an assessment of the educational staff, but rather a group picture of the quality of the education provided in the community in order to motivate the entire educational team to improve. Remember that this dimension is assessed using the CLASS instrument.

And so, in order to maintain the confidentiality of each member of the educational staff whose group was assessed, and provide them with detailed feedback in the Assessment Report, the report groups together the results of the infant, toddler and 3- to 5-year-old groups by combining interactions of the same type, between CLASS versions. More specifically, the average scores of each group in the CLASS dimensions and domains are presented under “domain groups” (Domain Group A – Social and emotional and Domain Group B – Cognitive and language) and under “dimension blocks” (firstly: 1 - Climate, 2 - Sensitivity, 3 - Democracy, 4 - Behaviour; and secondly: 5 - Learning, 6 - Feedback, and 7 - Language).



While the distinction between Domain Groups A and B stems from the way in which the results are reported in some quality rating and improvement systems in the U.S. that are similar to the Measure used in Québec, the fact of then grouping interactions of a similar nature into the Infant, Toddler and Pre-K CLASS in dimension blocks is a Québec innovation. This solution helps us strike the right balance between offering the educational childcare establishment detailed feedback and maintaining the confidentiality of the groups assessed.

While the scores of Domain Groups A and B (and their associated dimension blocks) are both scored out of 7, they should be considered differently. First of all, Domain Group A, related to the child's social and emotional development, is definitely the priority. To produce real and beneficial effects on the child's development, research has indicated that the average scores for this domain should be 5.00 (out of 7) and over, which is a high level (Teachstone, 2022, p. 50). The same goes for moderate scores in each dimension block (1 to 4) in this domain. **Therefore, in terms of improving quality of interactions, the dimension blocks connected with Domain Group A should still be dealt with first, before even making any efforts to enhance those connected with Domain Group B.**

Next, Domain Group B, related to the child's cognitive and language development, is also important to the quality of interactions. Research has identified that the average scores for this domain should be 3.25 (out of 7) and over, which is a moderate level, to make a significant impact on the child's development (Teachstone, 2022, p. 50). An educational childcare establishment with a high score for Domain Group A and its associated dimension blocks can then focus its thoughts on improving dimension blocks 5, 6 and 7.

As mentioned in the Explanatory Guide (Ministère de la Famille, 2023, p. 28-29), worldwide, the results for Domain Group A and its dimension blocks are higher (generally moderate to high) than those for Domain Group B (generally moderate to low). Even if the first reflex is to want to work on the actions in Domain Group B, whose results are lower, it is recommended to take another look at the quality levels of dimension blocks 1, 2, 3 and 4, which, if they are low or moderate, should be the first thing on which the educational childcare establishment puts its entire focus.

In some establishments, all the observations are similar and at the same educational quality level, which allows us to work with the entire team to reach common objectives. In other establishments, the observations are too nuanced to properly reflect the different levels observed throughout the groups, which requires us to work with the educational staff both individually and as a group. The suggestions for improvement below were developed to help educational childcare establishments with this.

## Four suggestions for enhancing the quality of this dimension

1. Establish a pleasant atmosphere, take care of the children’s emotions and needs, and prioritize a democratic approach

In groups where a positive climate has been established, adults and children show that they have fun spending time together: the educators and children sit close together, share in the activities, talk about a multitude of topics, smile and laugh, show each other affection (verbal, physical), refer to each other by their first names, look at each other when they talk, have a gentle touch, and show each other respect. The educators are attentive to the emotions and needs of the children, decipher them and respond to them with sensitivity, within a reasonable amount of time. They then make sure that the support provided is soothing for the children as they re-engage in activities. Educators who share the power with the children are interested in finding out what the children’s interests, ideas, suggestions and points of view are, and in incorporating them into the day’s activities. They “also give the children responsibilities and help them achieve these responsibilities, based on their skills and their interests” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 30). The children are free to express themselves, to talk amongst themselves, to move, and to walk around in the room.

2. Give clear instructions, ensure effective monitoring, emphasize desired behaviours, and avoid making the children wait

It is also advisable to provide “clear and constant guidance so as to give children a balance between their desire for freedom and their need for security. The following educational practices should be used: having expectations adapted to each child, giving instructions that the children understand, organizing routines and making sure there are reference points in time, and helping the children self-regulate their emotions and resolve conflicts” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 25). Actions such as ensuring constant monitoring, giving clear rules in a coherent manner, being proactive and effectively redirecting behaviours, while positively emphasizing desired behaviours, are strategies that allow educators to reduce inappropriate behaviours in the group and avoid too many wait times. In addition, educators maximize the time allocated to learning in their group by providing a variety of activities, simple routines, short transitions that, ideally, include opportunities for the children to learn, while being prepared with the situations they are offering the children.

3. Be actively involved with the children, provide them with opportunities to explore and learn, invite them to think, provide feedback on their actions and comments, and use language throughout the day

By diversifying the mode (e.g. auditory, visual, motor) and the materials made available to the children, educators provide a variety of learning opportunities. The children can handle and explore the materials, thereby being active in their learning. The educational staff is involved with them to support their learning and development. They call on the children’s thinking skills and let them go even further with what they have just learned by explicitly relating it to their previously acquired knowledge and their day-to-day lives.

In addition, the *Accueillir la petite enfance* program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019) reminds us that educators enhance the quality of their Instructional Support interactions when they invite the children “to reason, explore, experiment and create” (p. 31). The educational staff that fosters understanding in children give them feedback on what they say and do in the form of multiple back-and-forth exchanges to provide clues, to clarify or add information, and to encourage perseverance. Furthermore, educators who support the language development of children use the following language stimulation techniques abundantly throughout the day (e.g. during play, routines and transitions, both inside and outside): enjoying conversations, asking open-ended questions, repeating the child’s sounds or words and then elaborating on them, describing out loud their own actions and those of the children, identifying objects, using a rich and varied level of language, including speaking in complete sentences, as well as giving children language forms to use and new vocabulary that they take the time to connect to words the children already know.

#### 4. Support the educational staff in its interactions with the children

Through the decisions and management practices that it implements, the educational childcare establishment’s management team plays a key role in the quality of the interactions between the educators and the children. To support these interactions, the team benefits from using well-established work schedules that include breaks that allow the staff to really recharge their batteries. The management team would also benefit by implementing policies that integrate new children into the educational childcare establishment as well as strategies that ensure the children always have the same educational staff. This may also involve juggling schedules to provide a break from teaching, setting up mentoring between co-workers, allocating a budget for continuing education for the team, and applying measures to facilitate work-study balance so that all the educational staff can acquire recognized qualifications in early childhood education (e.g. encouraging the early childhood work-study program; [Guide to Using the Assessment Report](#), 2023 p.16)

In groups with children with special support needs, a supportive management team ensures that each educator has the necessary resources (e.g. human and material). It also implements strategies that allow for the individual coaching of each member of the educational staff.

As for the crucial role that educational childcare establishment managers play in interactions between the educators and the children, the *Accueillir la petite enfance* educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019) states: “One would be tempted to think that the quality of the interactions between the educational staff and the children rests exclusively on the interventions of the educators, but this is, in fact, not the case at all. [...] The staff’s work schedule, meals and changes in educator, among other things, can positively or negatively impact the quality of these interactions. And so, if it is impossible to inject the least bit of flexibility into the meal schedule, for instance, there is the danger that any slight delay is stressful for the educator and the children in his or her group. It is by acknowledging the difficulties and discomforts experienced by both the children and the educational staff, and by being creative in finding appropriate solutions with their team, that it will be possible for managers to support the quality of these essential interactions” (p. 32-33).

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## Dimension 3 – Quality of Premises Layout<sup>5</sup>

### What is it?

Quality of Premises Layout refers to the furnishings, equipment and information sheets, signs, and displays in the physical environment, as well as to how they are arranged. It also concerns accessibility to adapted and stimulating materials in sufficient quantities for the children. This dimension highlights the need to adapt the premises to take into account the needs and interests of the children, which can change in the middle of an activity, a day or even a year. The purpose of a high-quality premises layout is to provide a comfortable, warm and healthy living space that is flexible (e.g. variety, versatility) and adaptable. It facilitates active learning and diverse experiences for the children, while meeting the special needs of certain children, the needs of the educational staff, as well as those of their families. Besides the classroom, common spaces such as the cloakroom and the yard are assessed in this dimension.

### Why is it important?

First of all, the layout of an educational childcare establishment has a significant impact on the quality of the interactions between the adults and the children (Teachstone, 2022). Also, the educational program *Accueillir la petite enfance* (Ministère de la Famille, 2019) reminds us that high-quality premises promote learning and the overall development of the children: “A high-quality layout of the premises makes the educational childcare establishment a functional, safe, friendly and warm living environment. The materials made available to the children – materials that are adapted to the children’s level of development in all areas and that meet their particular needs and interests – help to support their learning and facilitate their overall development” (p. 39).

With a well-thought-out space and well-planned resources, the educational staff also creates a feeling of belonging in the children, meets the children’s needs, and enriches their experiences, their active learning and their autonomy. In a literature review (2019), Berti, Cigala and Sharmahd state that a high-quality layout of the premises is associated with wins for the children, in particular when it comes to cognitive and socio-emotional skills.

Premises layout is central to a number of educational approaches and educational programs recognized in the field of early childhood education. For example, in the Reggio Emilia approach, the physical environment is considered a “third teacher” (after the parents and educational staff).

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<sup>5</sup> DIMENSION DE LA QUALITÉ ÉDUCATIVE ASSOCIÉE : La qualité de l’aménagement des lieux et le matériel, *Accueillir la petite enfance* (2019)

## What does the Assessment Report indicate about this dimension?

The Assessment Report shows the results of the items assessed for both age groups (infants and children 18 months to 5 years old), and provides a few clarifications based on age group. More specifically, while the majority of the items assessed are similar for these two age brackets, some are exclusive to infant groups and others are only for groups of children aged 18 months or older.

Generally speaking, this quality dimension is assessed after observing the children in their physical environment for two hours. It should be pointed out that it is mainly the layout of the educational childcare establishment that is being assessed, and not the materials in it. For this reason, at no time does the staff doing the assessment ever open up drawers or cupboards, either inside or outside, when they visit an establishment.

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## Four suggestions for enhancing the quality of this dimension

### 1. Divide the premises up into separate and complementary areas of activity

Dividing classroom up into separate areas of activity makes it possible to simultaneously hold activities in subgroups (diverse, active and less active), thereby meeting the different needs and interests of the children in the group. Classrooms would benefit from offering children “different play areas, or ‘corners,’ [that] contain the materials used for a given type of game, for example symbolic games, construction games and figurines, arts and crafts materials, board games and manipulative play, or materials for learning to read and write” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 41).

In high-quality classrooms, the layout of these areas is well thought out. For example, compatible areas, such as symbolic and construction play areas, are near each other. Or, areas that require more quiet, such as the reading area or the soft place to retreat to, are away from the traffic areas and the areas with more noisy activities. The arts and crafts area is close to the sink. Lastly, all the classrooms benefit from having an individual space, an “intimate and protective corner with soft cushions” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 39) to meet the socio-emotional needs of children who want to be alone for a while.

### 2. Make sure the room meets the diverse needs and interests of the children

To meet the motor needs of infants, the layout of the classrooms (e.g. space, furniture, gradients) should be adapted to their diverse abilities, whether the child is at the crawling stage, or is learning how to walk or is walking. For example, the smallest ones do well with dividers that let them crawl on the floor and explore in complete safety. Others take advantage of bars secured to the wall and safe furniture to lean against before standing up. The space should be open and divided up in a safe way so that children who are starting to walk or who already walk can practice their new skills, either walking or running.

To properly meet the needs and interests of 0- to 5-year-olds, educators keep their classroom materials at the eye level of the children. These materials could be the children's projects, photos of their family, and decorative items that are of interest to them or that are adapted to their level of development. In addition to seeing to it that the children have a welcoming room, all of these gestures contribute to developing the children's self-esteem as well as their sense of belonging to the group. High-quality classrooms also contain furniture (chairs, tables) sized to the children, a place just for their personal belongings (e.g. blanket, transitional object), and another place to store their creations. For the comfort of children who sit on the floor, there are cushions and removable mats. For the small ones, the layout should make sure the transition object is accessible to the child at all times.

### 3. Meet the needs of the educational staff

High-quality layouts are also designed to meet the needs of the people who work directly with young children, that is, the educators. In infant groups, the furniture is such that the children can access the changing table with a minimum amount of help from the educational staff, the mirrors are arranged so that all the areas can easily be observed, and an ergonomic stroller is available for walks. For all of the groups, the Ministère's educational program insists on the importance, for the educational staff, "of having access to a chair and a sink at their height, to a locker to safely store their personal items, to a sturdy stool, to a storage space for heavy objects no higher than shoulder level, to a place to write comfortably, and to a rocking chair" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 43). The educational childcare establishment provides a well-laid-out space for the staff that includes an accessible telephone and a resource centre with early childhood education reference tools.

### 4. Support the educational staff in laying out their classroom

The management team plays a considerable role in the physical environment and materials offered to the children, in particular, through the decisions it makes on a financial level as well as the recommended instructional guidelines at the educational childcare establishment. On this topic, the educational program *Accueillir la petite enfance* (Ministère de la Famille, 2019) points out that "while it is the educational staff that chooses the most appropriate play materials for the children in their group, it is up to the managers to purchase these materials. [...] Their contribution to the layout of the premises is of the utmost importance. They make the decisions about the paint on the walls of the rooms, the furnishings, the organization of the kitchen at the educational childcare establishment, etc. Their contribution to the quality of the layout and the materials is crucial" (p. 43). Lastly, the individual support given by the management team to the educators reflects on of the quality of the layout of the children's classrooms.

In addition, the instructional principles associated with certain educational programs or approaches adopted by educational childcare establishments guide the layout of the classrooms by, for instance, prioritizing the free motor skills of the young children, by determining which permanent play areas to offer the children, or by using small tables that can only seat three or four children at a time. It is a good idea for the management team to go back to the instructional guidelines of the educational program or

approach recommended by the educational childcare establishment because they directly affect the layout of the premises, and to communicate this to the educational team.

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<sup>6</sup> Given the limited number of publications on the layout of premises in educational childcare establishments, this professional resource is being proposed because it is deemed to be relevant even though it is aimed at pre-school teachers rather than early childhood educators. While reading this resource, it is best to keep in mind the context of educational childcare establishments and the *Accueillir la petite enfance* educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019).

## Dimension 4 – Quality of Child Observation and Planning Practices<sup>7</sup>

### What is it?

First of all, the quality of the children’s experiences at the educational childcare establishment, which is one of the four educational quality dimensions in the *Accueillir la petite enfance* educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019), is mainly the result of the educational staff’s child observation and planning practices. Observation and planning are crucial steps in the educational response process, in which educators “choose, plan and carry out their educational actions based on their observations, and then evaluate and adjust them. This is how they support each young child at the educational childcare establishment in his or her overall development. This is a crucial step in the planning and targeting of appropriate educational goals when using active learning approaches” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019).

Child observation practices help educators “become familiar with the tastes, needs, abilities, as well as the current and future development of each child and of the group as a whole. The information thus gleaned is then used to guide the educational actions and to help the staff adjust these actions, if need be. It is also used in discussions with the parents. The observations are recorded in writing using different tools, making it easier to analyze and interpret them.”

Planning practices are used to “determine what needs to be implemented, based on the interpretation of the observations, to support the overall development of the children in their play as well as in their routines and transitions. They are also used to organize the materials and to prepare the physical environment so that every moment at the educational childcare establishment is harmonious.”

Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p.47

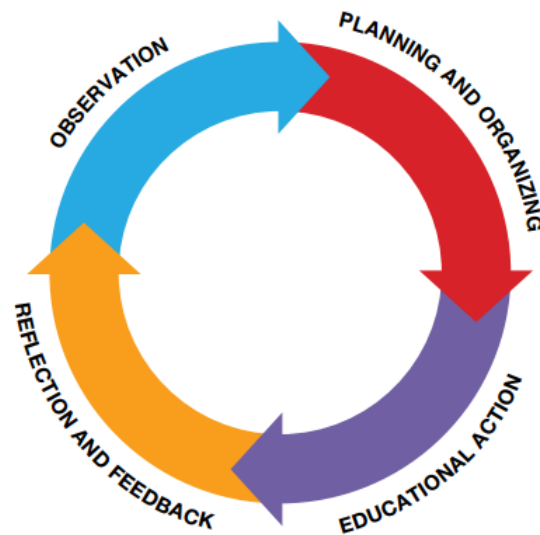
The observation phase sets the stage for the planning phase. These steps consist in reading the information collected (e.g. interests, needs, developmental level of the children), in interpreting them and in choosing the best actions to take based on the educational goals, which aim to support the development of each child in the group. Lastly, the *Accueillir la petite enfance* educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019) reminds us that “it is by taking into account the tastes of the children, their natural curiosity and their levels of development, based on the analysis of their observations, that the educational staff ... sets educational goals, at the planning stage, that support the children in their specific learning needs” (p. 56).

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<sup>7</sup> DIMENSION DE LA QUALITÉ ÉDUCATIVE ASSOCIÉE : La qualité des expériences vécues par les enfants, *Accueillir la petite enfance* (2019)

## Why is it important?

The educational response process, thanks in particular to the observation and planning steps, represents “a crucial step for stimulating active learning in young children. [...] To inspire young children to commit to their learning, this educational response hinges on their fields of interest, their level of development, their strengths and their needs” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 48). And to find out what these are, the educational staff must take the time to observe the children on a regular basis. In addition to encouraging active learning in children, the educational response process (see image below extracted from *Accueillir la petite enfance*, Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 48) helps guide the different components of the educational practice.



For example, according to *Accueillir la petite enfance* (Ministère de la Famille, 2019), “it is through observation that educators get the knowledge they need to provide an individualized educational response that will be able to meet the needs of each child. Through observation, the educational staff can get to really know each child in their group. Observation helps detect any possible difficulties experienced by the children and ascertain the context in which these difficulties appear” (p. 63). Observation provides food for discussion with the parents, but also with colleagues, and in certain cases, with healthcare professionals, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. It makes it possible to create an accurate picture of the child’s development, thereby facilitating his or her transition to school

Lastly, observation is the step prior to planning the different situations to offer the children (e.g. activities, materials, layout, educational action, routine, transition), which allows one to intentionally select active learning and the overall development of the children. “Moreover, good planning can avoid, among other things, interruptions during the children’s learning experiences, reduce to a minimum the time needed to carry out organization tasks in the presence of the children, and introduce stimulating opportunities for learning during transitions” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 31).

## What does the Assessment Report indicate about this dimension?

The Assessment Report first presents and describes the practices associated with the observation of children, and then those associated with planning, by grouping together the data collected from infant groups and from groups of children 18 months and over. Because the information collected comes from interviews with educators, there are phrases in the report to indicate this. For example: “The educators mentioned that...” or “While the majority of the educators stated that...” Lastly, because the observation stage comes before the planning stage, and, in particular, because of the new obligation to produce the child’s education record, the level of quality associated with the practices of observing children is often higher than that associated with the practices of planning.

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## Four suggestions for enhancing the quality of this dimension

1. Observe the children every day, using a variety of methods, in order to collect all the relevant information

In a high-quality educational childcare establishment, the educational staff observes the children on a daily basis (and ideally even continuously) using a variety of methods. First of all, the staff records the information from its observations in various tools. This information can be recorded in “notebooks, anecdotal sheets, childcare logs, daily reports, observation charts, and rhythm charts” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 52). Photos and videos of certain life moments or of the children’s achievements can help support the interpretation of the observations.

As another observation method, educators adopt strategies to identify moments that are conducive to observing the children individually or to position themselves strategically in the room. With observation tools and strategies, much relevant information should be collected individually for each child: various needs, including physiological needs, interests, current level of development, mood, strengths and challenges, activities completed, behaviour, interactions, special events and the children’s words.

2. Regularly and frequently plan situations to offer the children and be flexible in applying the plan

**“In the context of active learning, planning cannot be limited to a series of activities proposed by the adult based on themes. Rather, it is prepared shortly beforehand by the adult directly responsible for the group of children, and adjusted daily”** (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 56). The educators do the planning themselves, on a regular basis (once a week or more frequently) and in writing, following the educational response process, that is, essentially basing themselves on the information that comes from their observations. They avoid using replicated plans. As the unexpected frequently occurs in educational childcare establishments, educators are aware that they must remain flexible in applying their plans. Remaining open to changing, revising or adjusting their plan every day reflects how concerned educators

are about adapting to the pace of the group of children and also about not compromising opportunities for learning that might present themselves and prove to be even more significant to them.

### 3. Make sure the plan takes every child into account, and that it is based on a recognized educational program or educational approach adapted to the children.

When developing their plans, the educators make sure that they take each child in the group into consideration using different methods. Firstly, they use their observations of each child in their group, made individually, to develop their plan. They take the time to consult the children. They also use other elements, such as their general knowledge about the child's development. Again, while developing their plans, the educators bear in mind the instructional principles associated with the recognized educational program or educational approach being applied to their group (e.g. *Accueillir la petite enfance*, HighScope, Montessori or others) as they contain the guidelines for their educational actions. In fact, the educators are very familiar with the foundations of this educational program (or of this educational approach), and they refer to it in order to select the situations to offer the children. They are able to establish clear links between the choices in their plan and the instructional principles of the educational program (or of the educational approach) being used in the group.

### 4. Support the educational staff in the educational response process

A supportive management team knows that the educational response process requires time and thought on the part of its staff, and it ensures that it is organized in an efficient manner. The team demonstrates creativity in finding solutions and in arranging tasks so as to provide the educators with time to do the planning. According to *Accueillir la petite enfance* (Ministère de la Famille, 2019), “the way in which the educators’ tasks, and sometimes the grouping of the children for certain time slots, are organized can facilitate observation, planning and organization, support the children in their play during the educational action, and offer moments that are conducive to reflection-feedback” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 61). In addition, the management team should articulate their expectations to the educational staff regarding their practices in observing and planning for children.

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<sup>8</sup> Given the limited number of publications on child observation and planning practices in educational childcare establishments, this professional resource is being proposed because it is deemed to be relevant even though it is aimed at pre-school teachers rather than early childhood educators. While reading this resource, it is best to keep in mind the context of educational childcare establishments and the *Accueillir la petite enfance* educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019).

## Dimension 5 – Quality of Interactions between the Childcare Establishment Staff (Educators and Manager) and the Parents<sup>9</sup>

### What is it?

Interactions between the staff of the educational childcare establishment and the parents refers to direct or indirect communication, its content, its frequency and its quality, which facilitates collaboration and partnership around the children, with a view to better supporting their development. “Partnership means the professional and the family working together to reach common objectives. The relationships are based on responsibilities, shared decision-making, mutual trust and respect” (Dunst, Trivette and Snyder, 2000, in Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 64). Partnership requires a high-quality parent-professional relationship (Dunst et al., 2007, in Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 64). Through discussions, a relationship of trust is built up between the educational staff and the parents, which is conducive to ensuring that information about the child is passed along to both sides, as well as to contributing the recognition of the expertise of each party, as mentioned in the family-centred approach (Keyser, 2006, in Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 69). The open-mindedness and respect demonstrated by the educational childcare establishment team are attitudes that help to not only create, but also to maintain, this partnership with the parents.

### Why is it important?

First off, and this reflects how important it is, the first basic principle of the *Accueillir la petite enfance* educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 7) states that: “The partnership between the educational childcare establishment and the parents is crucial to the harmonious development of the child.” The educational program even emphasizes that “the other principles necessitate the invaluable contribution of the parents in order to be applied to their full extent” (p. 64). It also states that “from an ecological perspective of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the quality of the relationship between the parent and the educator is more and more often being referred to as an important indicator of the quality of the services offered to the child” (p. 43). Children develop significant bonds with the educator who takes care of them every day when they feel that their parents trust this educator and that they, in turn, can also do so.

The collaboration built over time supports the responses with the child and ensures continuity between the two worlds that the child lives in: home and the educational childcare establishment. “Research shows a link between frequency of reciprocal discussions and communications between the parents and the

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<sup>9</sup> DIMENSION DE LA QUALITÉ ÉDUCATIVE ASSOCIÉE : La qualité de l’interaction entre le personnel éducateur ou les responsables d’un service de garde éducatif en milieu familial et les parents, *Accueillir la petite enfance* (2019)

educational childcare establishment and its benefits to the children and their family. Bi-directional communication contributes to the quality of responses to the child at the educational childcare establishment [...and] conversations with the parents can, for example, guide choices made when it comes to observation, materials for play, activities to be proposed, or responses aimed at making the child feel safe at the educational childcare establishment or at encouraging the child to speak during conversations” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 70). Thanks to bi-directional communication and a collaborative relationship, high-quality interactions between the educational childcare establishment and the parents therefore come to constitute a protective factor for the children and their family, particularly by giving them more social support and by expanding their network of resources.

## What does the Assessment Report indicate about this dimension?

The Assessment Report presents the results of two main themes when it comes to interactions between the staff of the educational childcare establishment and the parents: communication and collaboration. For each item, for both infant groups and groups of children 18 months or over, the report first describes the results of the perceptions of the educational childcare establishment staff (educators and managers), and then it presents those of the parents, if they had answered in sufficient numbers. Since Quality of Interactions between the Educational Childcare Establishment Staff and the Parents is assessed in terms of perception using a questionnaire, phrases such as “according to the results of the questionnaires, all parents agreed with...” or “the educational childcare establishment staff and the parents report that the educators...” are used.

- Results of the educational childcare establishment staff: These results show the average of the perceptions of the educators whose group has been assessed, as well as that of the manager.
- Results of the parents: These results show the average of the perceptions of the parents in the entire educational childcare facility. Note that when too few parents answer the questionnaires (less than 20% of the parents of the entire facility), only the results connected with the perceptions of the educational childcare establishment staff members are presented (the results of the parents are simply missing).

If we compare the perceptions of both categories of respondents, sometimes they are quite similar, sometimes there is a significant gap between them, and sometimes opinions are divided within the same category of respondents.

## Four suggestions for enhancing the quality of this dimension

### 1. Initiate the sharing of information, find out more about each family, and provide relevant information about the educational program

Because each family is unique, their communication needs vary; the educational staff benefits from offering a variety of methods for ensuring that they reach each family. The educators are responsible for initiating the sharing of information about the children and for asking questions that show their interest in the families. “The parents are the specialists of their own child. [Members of the educational staff] should rely on the crucial information that the parents can provide to meet the needs of the child entrusted to them” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019, p. 69). It would also be beneficial to the educational childcare establishment to establish group communications with the family on a regular basis, such as emails, announcements on a bulletin board, as well as group meetings to convey information on the way the educational childcare establishment works, on proposed experiences and on the instructional guidelines of the educational childcare establishment. Moreover, the Ministère’s educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019) reiterates that it “is important to [talk to the parents] about the principles of the educational program as well as about the many different things that the children will learn through their experiences at the educational childcare establishment, including play” (p. 68). Such practices enhance the quality of the collaboration between the educational childcare establishment and the parents; they also help ensure continuity, in that the children are experiencing at home what they are learning at the educational childcare establishment.

### 2. Demonstrate an attitude of respect and openness, and recognize expertise

Each family has its own characteristics. Educators benefit from opening themselves up and taking interest in the various situations being experienced by the families, in their culture, as well as in their values, in order to really get to know each one. To this end, it is crucial to remain objective and avoid any form of judgement. Being well informed about the families lets the educators adapt their practices by taking into account their different characteristics, with a view to working together toward the same objective, the overall development of each child.

When the educational staff takes an interest in and shows sensitivity towards what each family is experiencing, it shows that the staff considers the parents to be partners. For the *Accueillir la petite enfance* educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019), “recognition of the parent’s expertise is manifested in the members of the educational childcare establishment team [...] through their openness and their acceptance of what each family is experiencing, through authentic interest, a respect for dignity, and the honesty and empathy they show them” (p. 69).

### 3. Invite the parents to participate in their child’s life at the educational childcare establishment

It pays to let the parents know that they are welcome anytime and to invite them to take part in the collective life of the educational childcare establishment, such as attending special activities (e.g. corn roast, Halloween, Christmas breakfast, sugaring-off meal), leading an activity in their child’s group, helping

with day-to-day activities in their own way (e.g. by bringing recycled materials or lending a children’s book for storytime before naptime), or helping out during a field trip. The presence and involvement of parents in the educational childcare establishment creates an environment conducive to close communication. Encourage the parents to form different committees (e.g. social activities, environmental protection) and get their opinions through surveys that leave room for power-sharing and decision-making for everyone.

#### 4. Support the welcoming of parents to the educational childcare establishment

The management team plays a big part in welcoming the parents to the educational childcare establishment. The values, various policies and ways of doing things that it implements determine how important a place the parents have in the collective life of the educational childcare establishment. In this regard, the educational program *Accueillir la petite enfance* (Ministère de la Famille, 2019) states that “managers have a significant impact on the way in which parents are welcomed at the educational childcare establishment, as well as on the opportunities offered to them to participate in meetings and events and to sit on committees. ... Their expectations as to the quality of the educators’ interactions with the parents necessarily influence the practices of the educational childcare establishment in this regard. ... Managers also have an important role to play in promoting the educational childcare establishment’s educational program to the parents, as well as the practices appropriate to the development of the young children implemented under this program” (p. 44).

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## Conclusion

This Guide to Interpreting the Assessment Report is intended mainly for the managers of educational childcare establishments. It was written to help managers understand the Assessment Report. The Guide deals with each educational quality dimension assessed under the Measure to Assess and Improve Educational Quality at Educational Childcare Establishments for Groups of 0- to 5-year-olds, a measure rolled out by the Ministère. For each educational quality dimension, there are explicit links to theories in the *Accueillir la petite enfance* educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019), and various suggestions to help enhance quality. Additional references (e.g. reference books, blogs, professional articles) have also been listed for readers who would like to take a deeper dive into the various theoretical content.

This Guide is a tool created to ensure cohesion between the Ministère's educational program and the Assessment Report. The objective of the guide is also to show just how much managers of educational childcare establishments, through their practices, values, guidelines and decisions, are key to the educational quality offered by the entire team at the educational childcare establishment. The influence that managers exert when it comes to structural quality on the quality of the processes offered to the children deserves special attention because it is of great importance.

In conclusion, when reading the Assessment Report, this Guide should be used along with the Explanatory Guide (Ministère de la Famille, 2023) and the *Accueillir la petite enfance* educational program (Ministère de la Famille, 2019). Once the Assessment Report has been read and understood, educational childcare establishment managers are invited to refer to the Guide for Using the Assessment Report (Lemay et al., 2023), a document specially written for management teams who want to use the report as a lever to work on improving and maintaining educational quality in their environment.

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