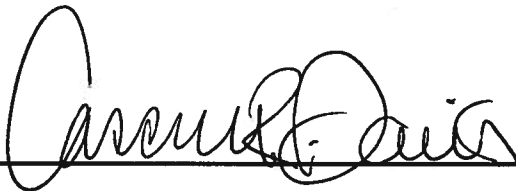


A Qualitative Analysis of Pre-Primary Education in France:  
Curricula, Family Engagement, and Diversity

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cassandra Davis", is written over a horizontal line.

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### *Abstract*

The early childhood education system in France is often looked to as a model for creating more equitable and accessible child care and public pre-primary education in other countries. However, little is known about how the uniformity of public early childhood centers and how well these centers meet the needs of “diverse” populations (e.g. immigrant students, children with disabilities, etc.). To address these gaps, this research explores the following questions: 1) What are the qualities or attributes of a high quality *maternelle* in different areas of France? How do they align with French early childhood development quality standards, particularly with regard to emotional and ethical development? 2) To what extent are immigrant and minority populations engaged within *maternelles* across France? 3) Do *maternelles* engage with family members? If so, how? 4) What is the demographic make-up of children in *maternelles* across France?

Using a grounded theory approach, this research analyzes interviews and focus groups composed of parents whose children attend *maternelle* and teachers in 17 different *maternelles* from six different regions across France to explore these questions. This study concludes with an analysis of themes highlighted in interview responses, including the need for the development of teacher-student ratio standards in French *maternelle* and reconsidering the recent shift to a four and a half day per week schedule. I highlight the need for more research regarding the experiences of minority children in *maternelles* and parent supports and child outcomes in *maternelles*, particularly for immigrant children.

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## *Significance and Specific Aims*

### **1. Overview**

In the United States, proponents of accessible child care and pre-primary education consider France a successful model when advocating for policy changes. However, as will be further outlined in this paper, more research is necessary to understand if the French education system as it currently functions is able to realize the full benefits of public pre-primary education. Indeed, high quality, accessible public pre-primary education has the opportunity to advance equity in society, particularly for marginalized populations. Yet, there are many gaps in the literature regarding variation in quality, engagement of diverse and marginalized populations, and family engagement in public pre-primary education centers across France. This paper seeks to address these gaps, through a qualitative study. First, I will contextualize the issue and further explain the aims of this study. Then, I will provide a review of literature and conceptual framework for my analysis. Next, I will present my methods and results, and finally, I will present my conclusions and recommendations.

### **2. Background**

Advocates for more expansive child care in the United States often praise the French child care system as a model for accessible quality child care and early learning. Studies have shown that since France expanded resources for *maternelle* care in the 1960s and 1970s, the proportion of French three and four year old children in *maternelles* (voluntary pre-schools funded by the French government) more than doubled (Dumas and Lefranc, 2010). At the same time, early childhood education funding in France has become decentralized during a series of reforms which gave more responsibilities to French communes, departments, and provinces.

While some literature explores the impact of France’s fairly recent decentralization—from 1980s reforms to most recent constitutional changes in 2005—it does not identify on a basic level how school resources vary from site to site in different regions across the country. Indeed, while the national government funds the majority of *maternelle* costs across France, some funding can vary across the country, with municipalities funding facilities and maintenance, and the federal government subsidizing the great majority of costs—staff (Directorate for Education; OECD, 2004; Adamson and Litjens, 2016). At the same time, the national *maternelle* curriculum has been reformed to allow for more flexibility in its implementation in regions across France, meaning that teachers can implement the curriculum in a variety of different ways (Directorate for Education).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the French government have attempted some oversight regarding curricula, equipment, resources, and equality of education to some degree, but these have not been the focuses of their reports. Further, there is a gap in the literature discussing how this variation presents itself on a more specific, basic level—whether there is any difference in toys, facility quality, books etc.—in regions across France.

Recent literature regarding French early childhood education emphasized the importance with the French government places on early childhood education for equality of opportunity for children across the country. (Ministry of Education, 2002; Directorate for Education; OECD, 2004; OECD, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2010) Indeed, the *maternelle* system in France is heralded as the foundation for education in France. It is thus important to understand how curricula and resources vary across the country.

Further, because equality of opportunity is highlighted as a priority, it is important to explore how children's diverse perspectives are engaged in *maternelle* classrooms. As recent statistics from The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) show, many immigrants and descendants of immigrants experience educational inequality and feelings of discrimination in the classroom in France. (Brinbaum and Primon, 2014) Therefore, a better understanding of how *maternelle* level education varies across the country regarding engagement with diverse communities, particularly minority and immigrant communities, is certainly important to explore.

Additionally, research to understand whether demographics of children in *maternelle* classrooms are similar to the surrounding communities in which they live is also important. Because *maternelle* care is voluntary, it is important to understand whether there are any specific communities who are less likely to send their children to *maternelles*. If this is the case, further research could explore potential reasons for any gaps. Additionally, it is important to understand what the process of enrollment is like, whether there are waitlists in different regions, and how long the process generally takes.

Finally, France stresses the importance of access to diversified care for children; the country emphasizes that parents should be able to choose the care and early learning that best fits their needs and standards. (Sabatinelli, 2007) Thus, it is important to explore the parents of *maternelle* age children's agency over the care their children receive, how *maternelles* engage children's families, if at all, and whether this varies across the country.

Therefore, to gain this basic, grassroots level of understanding of curricula, engagement of minority and immigrant communities, general demographics of children in *maternelles*, and family engagement in *maternelles* across the country, I have carried out qualitative research by



spending two months in different regions of France. This research uses grounded theory and was conducted by interviewing parents of children in *maternelles*, teachers, and individuals associated with child care focused organizations.

My research is guided by the following four research questions:

- 1) What are the qualities or attributes of a high quality *maternelle* in different areas of France? How do they align with French early childhood development quality standards, particularly with regard to emotional and ethical development?
- 2) To what extent are immigrant and minority populations engaged within *maternelles* across France?
- 3) Do *maternelles* engage with family members? If so, how?
- 4) What is the demographic make-up of children in *maternelles* across France?

### 3. Contribution to the Literature

This study fills necessary gaps in early childhood education research in France by examining how the quality and attributes of *maternelles* vary in France on an intimate level from region to region. As opposed to aggregate data often collected by the state, this information is specific to each parent and teacher interviewed. Additionally, this study interviews parents as opposed to simply surveying them (as French evaluations traditionally do) and interviews teachers from the lens of a researcher and not a program evaluator, potentially allowing for more flexibility and freedom in expression than past research (OECD, 2016). Further, this study explores family engagement and involvement within French *maternelles*, something that is not only minimally researched by the state, but that the literature shows to be important to advancing opportunities for marginalized children. This study also fills in gaps regarding research specific

to racial and ethnic minority children's experiences in French education, as the French government does not collect any data on these specific identities, and few studies on the topic exist. (OECD, 2016)

#### 4. Perspective of the Researcher

It is important here to note my relevant social location and identities. I am a United States citizen and have lived in the United States my entire life. It is thus important to acknowledge that, while I of course did as much research as possible to inform myself before conducting this study, I did approach each interview and observation with the eyes, ears, and mind of an American. My conceptions of child care are primarily framed by my experiences with child care advocacy in the United States. The standards for child care and early childhood education are set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, for example, and are thus my primary experience with child care and early childhood education quality recommendations. The culture in the United States also differs from other cultures in that talk about racial, among other, identities is considered normal and is thus part of the lens through which I view research. Because I have been primed with American ideas, it was thus necessary for me to seek out literature from other cultures to inform my research—particularly my interview protocol.

I am a White, native-English speaker, middle class, college-educated non-immigrant woman. I therefore have not experienced firsthand the circumstances of a racial minority or immigrant in a country and hold a perhaps more privileged social location than people who have. I also hold the privilege of being middle-class and being college-educated and am thus less likely to fully understand those who have not had access to the basic resources and education that I have.

I should also note that I am conversational in French and that French is my second language.

Finally, I am an advocate for gender equity and thus view much of my work through that lens. I also identify as politically liberal in the context of United States politics. For the purpose of this study, I attempted to be aware my ideological and political preconceptions and to present my findings with as much nuance as possible, holding this in mind.

Throughout my research, it is clear that my social location allowed me easier access to parents and teachers in many cases, as it is likely that teachers were more comfortable with me entering their classrooms and parents were more comfortable with me approaching them as a petite White woman than if I held another social location. It is also likely that parents and teachers were more comfortable with divulging more information to me if we held similar identities (White, seemingly middle-class, French speaking, etc.). However, if I held different social locations from the parents and teachers with whom I interacted, it seemed as though they were less comfortable with speaking with me and divulging their full experiences to me.

## 5. Anticipations

### Differences in Adherence to *Maternelle* Curricula

Based on my perspective and review of literature, I expected that *maternelle* curricula across France would vary according to each region's culture and economy. I anticipated this particularly because of the country's model of decentralized oversight and funding. (As noted above, communes contribute some funds to *maternelles*.) Thus, in richer communes, I expected higher quality *maternelles* that more closely fit within the national curriculum. Within all *maternelles*, I expected considerable focus within classrooms on developing the child's

imagination, creativity, and emotional and ethical development, as the overall national curriculum from 2015 suggests these are priorities for the French pre-primary education system (Ministry of Education, 2017).

### **Differences in *Maternelle* Quality**

I also expected that upper-class, White, native children would have access to better schools due to the variation in funding from commune to commune, as France has a history of racial and ethnic housing segregation (Huttman, Blauw, & Saltman, 1991). I also expected that minority racial, ethnic, and migrant populations would not find *maternelles* as accessible as other populations, as France has a history of racism and discrimination on the basis of ethnicity (Schneider, 1982; Keaton 2006). I also anticipated a less welcoming environment for these populations because race and difference are not often discussed in Europe (“Ethnic-based Statistics”, 2016).

### **Differences in Family Engagement**

I expected that some *maternelles* would provide family supports and creative ways to encourage and support families to be involved according to priorities outlined in the 2015 national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017).

### **Demographic Make-Up of *Maternelles***

I anticipated that *maternelles* would be predominately majority children who were not immigrants or descendants of immigrants. I also expected that most children would be White. If any children had a more difficult time accessing *maternelle* (i.e. if there were not enough resources for the whole population to enter *maternelle*) care than others, I expected it would be children of low-socioeconomic status and/or of a racial, ethnic, or migrant minority. I also

expected that because *maternelle* is voluntary, perhaps less immigrant or descendent of immigrant families would be familiar with the practice of enrollment, and thus be less likely to enroll children in *maternelles*.

## 6. Results

This study finds that teacher-student ratios are important attributes in a high quality *maternelle* for the teachers interviewed in each region of France, and many teachers express the need for less children per classroom. Because France does not impose a teacher-student ratio standard, this study recommends policy development regarding these ratios.

This study highlights two minority experiences, those of a disabled student and a parent of immigrant children, in particular that warrant further research regarding minority children's experiences in France. I also find that the majority of parents and teachers comment that all children are treated the same, with no differences in support or engagement, in *maternelles* across France.

For the most part, parents were engaged in *maternelles* sampled in this study via volunteering or parent-initiated actions. However, a few schools did have more supportive parental engagement, particularly for immigrant and non-French speaking parents, that suggest further research may be necessary regarding the benefits or costs of parent outreach and population-specific support programs in France.

Finally, this study finds that, as the literature suggests, the demographics of children in *maternelles* in each region reflected the surrounding community. Parents had trouble finding places for their children in only a few schools in the sample, and all of these were in large, densely populated cities in France. This suggests that perhaps either higher allocations of funding

or intentionally sending children to *maternelles* in other neighborhoods in densely-populated cities may be necessary to ensure equal access to *maternelle* education in France.

## 7. Inspiration for the Work

I should note that this work is deeply personal for me. I approach this research as someone who is concerned about gender equity and understands that there are many complexities surrounding the need and/or desire to work and the need to provide quality care for one's children. In many places across the globe, the task of caring for a family's children generally falls on the mother. This is especially difficult for low-income mothers in the United States who have to work to provide for their families and have difficulty providing their children with safe, affordable, quality care during the most important years for their development.

I also simply love children. I have worked as a tutor in elementary school classrooms, as a nanny, and as a Teacher Assistant in a day care in Western Massachusetts. Children hold infinite possibilities within them, and with the right mentorship and care, they provide hope for progress in each generation. I believe children hold the solutions to problems such as interpersonal violence and sexual assault, simply because we can teach them so much about inclusiveness, bodily autonomy, and consent from an incredibly early age. Child care also provides the opportunity to identify and provide resources for childhood trauma. All of this fuels my passion for child care as an economic and social issue.

Because of this, I spent time doing research and writing about child care in my home state with Women AdvaNCe, a non-profit focused on women's interests in North Carolina. I later spent time as a Child Care Policy intern at the National Women's Law Center. As I explored state and national policy, I learned more about other models of care around the world—

models that inspire child care and early childhood education policy advocates for change in the United States. During my time with Child Care policy advocates at the National Women's Law Center, I often heard France and Sweden heralded as countries with the best child care and early childhood education policies.

While the numbers of children receiving care in these countries was extremely high and government funding for child care and early childhood education was much higher than in the United States, I began to wonder about the faults and strengths of this policy on a human level. I wanted to know whether it truly served all French citizens equally, about the satisfaction and involvement of parents, how the curriculum as a whole was implemented across the country. I wanted to explore facilities from the independent, outside perspective of a United States citizen and to more deeply understand parents' and teachers' perspectives of the policy. At its core, I wanted to understand who French child care policy serves and how—and what aspects of this policy designed for people in an entirely separate country of an entirely other culture could be applicable to United States policy.

## ***Background and Conceptual Framework***

### **1. Early Childhood Education**

Research suggests early childhood education significantly benefits children's development (Jalongo et al., 2004; Burger, 2009; OECD, 2016; Miller, Cameron, Dalli, & Barbour, 2018). Further evidence shows that early childhood education and child care can be successful tools for reducing inequality among disadvantaged children (Dumas & Lefranc, 2010; Heckman, 2011; OECD, 2016; Miller et al., 2018).

The literature places an emphasis on not just the presence of early childhood education and care, but the quality of early childhood education and care to ensure positive and equitable outcomes for children (OECD, 2016; Heckman, 2011; Miller et al., 2018). In fact, low quality early childhood education and care has been shown to have negative effects on children. For example, a recent study in Quebec found poor child developmental and health results after the implementation of universal child care policies in Quebec (Kottelenberg & Lehrer, 2013). Analyses show this was likely because only 5% of the child care centers in this model provided high quality child care—and the rest did not. Therefore, the quality of early childhood education and care is an important consideration in assessing programs.

While research helps shape notions of excellence, defining universal high quality early childhood education and care standards poses challenges. As standards such as teacher-student ratios, methods of conflict resolution, and multiculturalism vary around the world, it is important to recognize quality as a “value- and cultural- based concept” (OECD, 2016, p. 5; Tobin 2005).

For this study, questions of quality will be considered within the framework of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, otherwise known as the OECD, of



which France is a member organization, and the French National curriculum itself. The OECD conducts regular early childhood education monitoring for member countries who are willing to participate, including France.

The OECD defines quality as “all the features of children’s environments and experiences that are assumed to benefit their well-being and development” (OECD, 2016, p. 7). Such features that factor into this, according to the OECD, are a school or child care provider’s curriculum, teacher qualifications and qualities, the physical facility itself, and numbers of children served. According to the OECD, “Quality in France is, as in most countries, implicitly defined through minimum standards, a curriculum, and a competency framework for staff” (OECD, 2016, p. 7).

## 2. French Early Childhood Education

Children from ages two to six years old can be enrolled in French pre-primary school, or *maternelle* (Ministry of Education 2017). The Ministry of Education sets *maternelle* curriculum and teacher requirements on a national level. All *maternelle* teachers must pass a *concours*, or a public service competition to become a teacher. To prepare for this exam, teachers attend higher education for teaching and education. The *maternelle* curriculum, recently updated in 2015, outlines five domains of early learning: “1) Mobilize language in all its dimensions, 2) Act, express yourself, understand through physical activity, 3) Act, express yourself, understand through artistic activities, 4) Build the first tools to structure your thinking, and 5) Explore the world” (Robine, 2015). This new curriculum signifies a further move toward a *maternelle* focused in child character development and societal preparation and away from a more academic

model. It is important to understand how schools are implementing this change, according to the OECD (2016), as such reform poses a challenge for France.

At the end of *maternelle*, students are expected to possess a number of skills. However, the curriculum does not present a strict timeline for when these skills should be achieved. Each *maternelle* simply receives national guidelines and are monitored by nationally regulated regional offices, located according to province. The curriculum stresses the importance of recognizing and adapting to the differences in each child and creating a place of community and care in *maternelle*. It also highlights early on in the curriculum the importance of family participation in school life, particularly in recognizing family “diversity” and engaging with it (Robine, 2015).

In 2014, almost all children ages three to six years and 11.8% of children ages 2 to 3 years attend *maternelle*. According to the Minister of Education (2017), children ages 2 to 3 can enroll in *maternelles* primarily in “disadvantaged social environments”, (p.1), *maternelle* is considered the “foundation” of the education system in France, as noted by the name of the curriculum, “*L’école maternelle: un cycle unique, fondamental pour la réussite de tous*”, or “Kindergarten: a single cycle, fundamental to the success of all” (Directorate of Education, 2004, p. 16; OECD, 2016). It is regarded as an equalizer, with the curriculum going so far as to state, “The kindergarten builds the conditions for equality, especially between girls and boys” (Robine, p. 5 2015).

France has no set national teacher-student ratios. However, on average, there is one teacher for every 25 students in *maternelle*. This may be lower if schools are located in priority education zones with a high concentration of low-income households, where schools receive

additional funding to hire more teachers (OECD, 2006). The national government hires and pays teachers, while municipalities hire and pay teaching assistants, or *Atsems*, provide funding for supplies, and provide and maintain school buildings (Directorate of Education, 2004).

### 3. “Fundamental for the Success of All”

Since studies have shown that high quality early childhood education can have particularly positive outcomes for “disadvantaged” children and the French government has affirmed a commitment to *maternelle* as a tool for equality, it is important to explore the state of equity in French pre-primary education. According to the literature, policies to ensure equality in *maternelles* seem focused on gender and income. While the national curriculum states that teachers should adapt their lessons to each child’s ability (OECD 2006). French *maternelles* have been less successful in ensuring students with disabilities are included. Further, the OECD mentioned that data on this topic were particularly difficult to find (OECD, 2006).

According to municipal leaders and funding, there is potential for inequality of resources from region to region given that municipalities share the responsibility of funding *maternelles*, and community demographics (incomes, population density, rate of immigration, etc.) vary widely from region to region. While there is some public data on regional inequality in France, it is not specific and does not provide any geographic or material understanding of how resources may vary across the nation (OECD, 2016).

As the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) notes, France does not collect data on race, ethnicity, or religion whatsoever; therefore, discussions of these are absent from evaluations of equity in French administration (“Ethnic-based Statistics”, 2016). However, a recent INSEE study showed that many immigrants and descendants of immigrants of

different origins (North Africa in particular) experienced inequality or felt discriminated against in the French education system, citing their country of origin and skin color as perceived reasons (Brinbaum & Primon, 2014). Further, studies have shown that in France, immigrant children have low academic performance and feelings of belonging (OECD, 2015). Further research should thus explore how inequality or feelings of discrimination may present themselves in *maternelle*, particularly because the French system sees this as a tool of equal opportunity.

Pre-primary education has been considered one of the best ways to help immigrant children integrate into society and learn their host country's language (OECD, 2015). French *maternelles* stress teaching French language and culture and promote an assimilationist integrative model of society. For example, one study showed that multilingualism was not common in French *maternelles*, and that some teachers would encourage parents to speak the French language at home with their children (Thomauske, 2011). The OECD has criticized French *maternelles* for lacking adequate attention to difference and multiculturalism (Directorate of Education, 2004). However, some studies suggest that there are benefits to France's model of assimilationist integration, particularly one study that compares this model to the Netherlands' multiculturalist integration model (Kaptein, 2016). Yet, while, immigrants in France who are fluent in French are more likely to participate in society, and less likely to be unemployed than Dutch speaking Dutch immigrants, immigrants in France were likely to have a lower level of education than immigrants in the Netherlands, lower rate of naturalization, and were less likely to marry within their own communities (Kaptein, 2016). Indeed, none of the ways in which France's assimilationist culture and government structure appears to have positive outcomes for immigrants outweighs the benefits of the Netherlands' multiculturalist culture and government structures. Further, there are few other studies regarding the positive and negative outcomes of

France's assimilationist model. Thus, literature is limited in fully understanding best integrative models for immigrants in France, particularly immigrant children in pre-primary education.

Policy recommendations to assist immigrant children at school include 1) preparing all teachers for diverse classrooms, 2) distributing immigrant children among a mix of schools—not just “disadvantaged” schools, 3) engaging with immigrant students' parents (OECD, 2015). Indeed, research shows that engaging with “high need” students' parents can improve families' experiences (Join-Lambert, 2016, p.). According to OECD surveys, moderately fewer principles in advantaged schools in France (1.5%) saw ethnic diversity in schools as a hindrance to learning than the OECD average (3.5%). But in disadvantaged schools, the percentage of principles in France who saw ethnic diversity in schools as a hindrance to learning was an outlier in the dataset—17% as compared to the OECD average of 7% (OECD, 2015). Further research should thus assess what actions may or may not be taken to ensure all students are provided with an equitable experience in *maternelle*.

Further, after accounting for socio-economic status, immigrant children in France are not more likely to attend pre-primary schools than immigrant children in OECD countries (OECD, 2015), even though France has the highest enrollment rate of children overall in pre-primary education of all OECD countries, well above the average (OECD, 2016). This raises questions of how accessible *maternelle* is for all French immigrant children.

#### 4. Race & Ethnicity in France

Literature also shows that racism and discrimination based on ethnicity and immigration status are significant issues in France. Racial and ethnic housing segregation in France,

particularly in urban areas, also shows associations with increased rates of poverty and inequity in education, mimicking patterns in other colonizer countries throughout the Western World (Huttman, Blauw, and Saltman, 1991; Schneider, 1982; Keaton, 2006). Yet, France is unique in that 1) the government has purposefully avoided constructing any form of race policy, and 2) little research exists, particularly within government records, to document the depth of such inequality (Bleich, 2001; “Ethnic-based Statistics”, 2016). Further, in most French cities, many immigrant communities are based in subsidized housing constructed on the margins of society, away from accessible transportation and employment (Huttman, Blauw, and Saltman, 1991). This policy decision is indicative of a society that in which systems are constructed unjustly for racial, ethnic, and immigrant minorities. Indeed, such circumstances cannot be overlooked when considering the context of racial and ethnic educational equity in France.

## 5. Monitoring Pre-Primary Education in France

Research shows that monitoring and evaluations of early childhood education contribute to quality improvements (Litjens, 2013). The French government monitors service quality, staff quality, and child development in *maternelles* on a national level via regional offices. To achieve this, researchers and inspectors utilize inspections, surveys, observations, checklists, and other tools. Notably, child development is monitored using narrative assessments, such as portfolios, and observations (OECD, 2016). However, the OECD has criticized France for lacking a child perspective on service and staff quality assessments (OECD, 2016). Additionally, parent perspectives are monitored using surveys, and mostly on a local level, to gather parental perspectives about quality.

The OECD did note that a potential area of improvement for France in the wake of reforms like the most recent curriculum change was monitoring of adjustment to changes in policies. As France's *maternelle* curriculum has evolved over time from an academic to child development focus, these changes may materialize differently in different parts of the country, with some regions still maintaining a more academic focus and others transitioning more quickly to a child development focus (perhaps due to resource allocation or location). Further, the French government generally chooses not to publish outcomes from service quality evaluations (which includes curriculum implementation) and staff quality evaluations (OECD, 2016).

As noted earlier, France does not collect information on race and ethnicity, leaving this information absent from monitoring data. Such information could benefit the country in assessing the differences in *maternelle* quality and experiences for people of racial and ethnic minorities.

## 6. Contribution to the Literature

In the following section, I will illustrate how my work will contribute to the literature by explaining the gaps in literature addressed by each research question and my methodology.

**RQ 1)** What are the qualities or attributes of a high quality *maternelle* in different areas of France? How do they align with French early childhood development quality standards, particularly with regard to emotional and ethical development?

Since the French government stresses *maternelle* as the foundation of the education system and “fundamental for the success of all” (Directorate of Education, 2004, p. 16), it is important to understand the extent *maternelle* quality may vary across schools. Particularly, it is

important to engage with teachers' understandings of the definition of quality in *maternelle* and how they implement this, especially with regard to the recent change in curriculum and teachers' flexibility in its implementation. It is also important to explore how the evolution from a more academic focused model to child development model has been implemented. Using qualitative methods to interview teachers and parents, my first research question will address this gap in the literature.

**RQ 2)** To what extent are immigrant and minority populations engaged within *maternelles* across France?

Given that the French model tends to emphasize sameness and minimize difference, there is little literature regarding how minority populations are engaged within *maternelles*. To fully assess *maternelles* as a foundation for the education of all children in France, I will use this study to explore how teachers and parents believe children of different identities and backgrounds are treated in the classroom. This is an especially significant area of research considering the literature around the importance of pre-primary education for immigrant populations and immigrants' and descendants of immigrants' reported interactions with the French education system.

**RQ 3)** Do *maternelles* engage with family members? If so, how?

This study will explore family engagement within *maternelles*, as the French curriculum directly states the importance of family members to *maternelles* and studies have shown that engagement with family members can have particularly positive effects for immigrant and high-need populations. There is a significant gap in the literature, particularly within French



government evaluations, regarding this question. Through interviews and focus groups with teachers and parents, this research allows for deep inquiry to address this gap.

**RQ 4) What is the demographic make-up of children in *maternelles* across France?**

It is very difficult to understand some aspects of the demographic make-up of *maternelles* across France and whether these are accessible to people of all population, as there is little to no data regarding race, ethnicity, religion, or whether children are descendants of immigrants in school systems. This is an especially significant question considering the above data that many immigrant children experience discrimination or inequality in the French education system. Thus, this study addresses this gap in the literature.

**Comparing Methodologies**

The methodology employed in this study also addresses gaps in the literature. While the French government tends to employ surveys on a local level to assess parents' opinions of *maternelle* quality, this study will use qualitative methods to explore parents' input into all of the above research questions on a more intimate and comprehensive level. Additionally, while the French government does interview teachers when assessing quality, this study will provide the perspective of interviews with an outside researcher not interested in assessing their performance, but interested in assessing policy as a whole. While other studies have attempted to provide similar outside perspectives, these have often employed observations and checklists to do so. This study will attempt to gather a more robust understanding of teacher's experiences and opinions by giving teachers an opportunity to comment anonymously and perhaps with more freedom. I will also interview parents of children in *maternelles* for this study, unlike other

evaluations, giving parents more flexibility to fully comment on their own and their children's experiences in *maternelle*.

## ***Methods***

### *Data Collection Method*

#### **1. Strategy of Inquiry**

This study uses grounded theory to deduce information about the French early childhood education system. I collected data for this study by interviewing and conducting focus groups of teachers and parents of children in *maternelles* almost entirely in French. During my in-person teacher interviews, I collected observation data and took photographs to supplement my findings.

#### **2. Target population and Sample**

The target population for this study was 1) teachers in *maternelles* across France and 2) parents of children ages two to six who attend *maternelles* across France. Overall, I spoke with 22 teachers and 18 parents over the time period of 5/31/17 to 11/21/17.

I spoke with the 22 teachers from 17 different *maternelles* via 15 individual interviews and 2 focus groups. Of the individual interviews, I conducted ten in person and five over the phone. Of all the teachers I interviewed individually, all but one were both administrators and teachers. Of the two focus groups, one included one *maternelle* director/teacher<sup>1</sup> and three teachers with no administrative duties, and the other included one director/teacher and two teachers with no administrative duties.

I spoke with the 18 parents via three focus groups (each with two parents in the interview) and 12 individual interviews. While the focus of this paper is public *maternelles*, three

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<sup>1</sup> Directors of *maternelles* in France are almost always also teachers.

of these parents' children attended private *maternelles* and the rest attended public *maternelles*. The three parents whose children attended private *maternelles* were all located in Paris.

*Table 1. Interviews and Focus Groups*

<b>Region</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>
<b>Paris</b>	7	7	0	4	4	0
<b>Calvados</b>	2	0	1	6	3	1
<b>Gironde</b>	2	2	0	3	3	0
<b>Bouches-du-Rhône</b>	3	1	1	7	3	1
<b>Côte-d'Or</b>	0	0	0	2	2	0
<b>Pas-de-Calais</b>	4	2	1	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	18	12	3	23	16	2

I did not directly ask teachers and administrators about their racial or ethnic identities because it is not customary to do so in France. This is, unfortunately, a limitation of my data, and the racial descriptions within this paper must be noted with my social location as a White, middle-class woman who has lived in the United States for her entire life.

The sample of teachers was overwhelmingly European, native French, White and female. There were seven male teachers/directors and two teachers whom I have identified as teachers of visible racial minorities represented in my data. One male director in the Bouches-du-Rhône region self-identified as a person of North African descent. One woman in the Gironde region did not directly state her racial or ethnic identity. Most male teachers whom I interviewed held director positions.

The sample of parents included four men and eleven women. Half (nine) were native European with White skin, and half were non-native European people of visible racial minorities (e.g. Black, Brown), as identified by me or directly stated during the interview. Five parents stated that they were immigrants or had lived in another country for a long period of time.

To more specifically describe my sample of parents, within the Paris Department, I spoke with two Black men, one Asian woman, one Greek immigrant woman, two Black women, one Black Muslim woman, and one White, native French man. In the Calvados Department, I spoke with a White couple composed of one man and one woman. In Gironde, I spoke with one White unemployed woman who had just returned from more than five years as an expatriate in England and one Black man. I spoke with two White women and one woman of a visible racial minority who did not identify her race in Bouches-du-Rhône. Finally, in Pas-de-Calais, I spoke with three White women and one Black Muslim immigrant woman from Sudan who spoke little French.

### 3. Sampling Procedures

To preserve the confidentiality of my interviewees, I did not include participants' names nor did I include their particular locale, instead naming the department, or region, in which their child attended *maternelle*. I used purposive sampling to choose where to conduct interviews and visit *maternelles* in France. I started by clustering France's provinces to make six main geographic regions of France. I then purposefully ensured that the two cities with the highest immigrant populations in France were the cities chosen from their cluster regions, and thus included as part of the sample. I did this to ensure that my study appropriately examined access to early childhood education for immigrant and racially diverse populations. For the four remaining clusters, I randomly sampled provinces within the purposefully chosen clusters, then randomly choose cities containing accessible train stations (for budget purposes) within these provinces to visit as my base for ten days each. During the ten days, I interviewed teachers and parents within the main town and the surrounding villages and suburbs if accessible by train, bus,

or foot. The cities and municipalities visited for my study were within the following French Departments: Pas-de-Calais, Côte-d'Or, Gironde, Bouches-du-Rhône, Calvados, and Paris.

This sampling method ensured that towns from different regions all across France were represented in my sample. It is important to note, however, that because the cities I chose were close to train stations for budgetary reasons and ease of transportation, even if the provinces in which towns were located were rural, I still examined fairly urban towns within these regions.

Within these towns, the schools were sampled randomly on the whole, by assigning numbers to schools and using a random number generator to decide who to call. The exception to this is one city which was too large to assign a number to each school in a database and sample. Therefore, for this city I chose to randomly sample schools from all the schools in a middle class to upper middle class neighborhood and a poorer neighborhood to get a robust representation of socioeconomic status in my sample.

Parents were sampled using convenience sampling. I interviewed any parents of children in *maternelles* interested in participating in the study. I coordinated interviews through the school by talking to parents before and after school. I also recruited parents from public child friendly places (i.e. parks) and asked friends and acquaintances in France about people who may be interested in being interviewed for my study.

#### 4. Obstacles and limitations

##### **Language**

The sample is limited by my language abilities, as I only speak French and English. I was unable to communicate with parents who only or mostly spoke Arabic or Spanish, and thus the sample likely underrepresents immigrants or descendants of immigrants.

### **Political Restrictions**

It is important to note the limitations of my methods of data collection. I would first like to note that some of my initial observation plans changed after getting to France. Though I had done research and spoken to French lawyers about legalities surrounding research in French classrooms, French teachers, particularly in one city, were quite averse to any observation of classroom activities without a note from *l'Academie*, or their regional Board of Education. After making contact with the Board of Education, I was unable to get a clear response of what I needed to do for weeks. Eventually, I was told that without mailing a handwritten letter to the Board of Education in each district and receiving one in return, the observation I initially planned to combine with teacher and parent interviews would be quite difficult, so I cut observation down to just observing the general layout and resources in each school. This eventually turned out to be better for teachers and time management and allowed me to better focus my observations and goals for the study. However, because I was waiting on a response from the Board of Education, my in person contact with teachers in that region for this study was quite limited.

### **Limited Time**

I was only able to spend ten days in each location. I was harassed and followed as a traveler on my own and made the decision to stay indoors when conditions were unsafe. I was thus unable to finish my data collection or make as many contacts as I would have liked. More

time would of course lend itself to me not appearing as a visitor and given me the opportunity to collection more information and have a more robust sample.

## 5. Data Collection

After randomly sampling schools for interviews and observations in each region, I called each school during business hours and requested interviews with teachers and/or directors at the school. At some schools, I was only able to interview the director. Other schools did not have any teachers with time or interest in being involved in my study. During my visits to schools, I also asked the directors for a tour. On this tour, I took photographs of the school from which to make notes for my observation protocol.

As noted above, because my first attempts at coordinating parent interviews in advance were not effective, I mostly interviewed parents by approaching them when they seemed to have a free moment in the park or during another leisurely activity. These interviews only took about ten minutes and were the most effective way to ensure parent follow-through and efficiency of resources. I did also make contacts with parents through my Airbnb hosts and asked friends about any parents of children in *maternelles* who might be willing to talk to me; however, parents are busy, and the follow-through was extremely low.

My Teacher Interview Protocol, School Observation Guide, and Parent Interview Protocol are included in Appendix A.

## *Data Analysis Methods*

### 1. Translation



I conducted my analysis in English. Because the vast majority of my interviews were in French, I hired native French speaking students to translate and transcribe the interviews for efficiency.

## 2. Coding

I assigned each question from my interview protocol to the research question it sought to answer. I then coded interview responses by hand according to themes that appeared most often in my interviews, according to interview question. I kept a record of the number of interview and focus group responses that included each theme in response to each question. I then grouped these according to the research question to which each interview question was assigned. The tables including my protocol and assigned research questions are in Appendix B. These records are displayed in Chapter 4: Analysis.

## 3. Analysis

In my analysis, I searched for similarities and differences of responses in France as a whole, across regions, and within regions. I grouped responses according to teacher/director responses and parent responses to best understand these populations' different perspectives. For this analysis, I used quotes from interviews paired with the tables displaying common interview themes to understand both individual interviewee experiences as well as the most common experiences of the sample as a whole.

## *Results*

**Research Question 1.** What are the qualities or attributes of a high quality *maternelle* in different areas of France? How do they align with French early childhood development quality standards, particularly with regard to emotional and ethical development?

For parents within this sample, a high-quality *maternelle* is one that focuses on their children's well-being and teaches them to live in community with others. For teachers, a high-quality *maternelle* also focuses on the child's well-being and care; it is defined as having low teacher-student ratios, meeting children's individual needs, providing games in the classroom, and positively measuring children's success and development. With the exception of the quality standard of a low teacher-student ratio, these align well with the national curriculum's focus on developing the spirit and individuality of each child. Teachers also highlighted practices of encouraging children to express themselves orally and through the arts, which align with the national *maternelle* curriculum as well (Ministry of Education 2017).

### **1.1 Parents**

Parents highlighted a number of characteristics they consider critical elements of a high quality *maternelle*. These characteristics are outlined in Table 1. As displayed in this table, most of the concerns parents brought up focused on their children's well-being—whether the children were well taken care of at school, if the *maternelle* provided them with activities, and if the children learned to live in community with others. While education and language skills are certainly priorities highlighted in the table below, these are out-numbered by a list of more wellness and social oriented priorities. To better illustrate these points, the following are quotes

that are generally representative of the wide variety of parents' responses to the question, "Please describe your ideal *maternelle*."

- Pas-de-Calais (White woman): "[An ideal *maternelle* is] where the children can correct themselves, where they can be free during the activities."
- Gironde (Black man): "They are well received, they eat there, they have a siesta there, they have a lot of games, it's not necessarily focused on the education, the staff plays with the children, they don't overwhelm them, they sing, they eat, they rest and in the evening we come and pick them up..."
- Bouches-du-Rhône (White woman): "I think there is no ideal kindergarten. The kindergarten of my children is good because there are not many children per class...It's near my home. And this allows parents to work..."
- Calvados (Two-parent interview, White woman and man):  
Parent 1: "It must prepare the child for school, it should not too hard at the beginning. It is hard for the children to leave their family so it must help them into doing that."  
Parent 2: "It's the same, the preschool must help my child to improve, and prepare him for the future."
- Paris (White man): "It's important that the children eat well, that they are well supervised, and also that they do manual activities and a nap!"

While there were only two parents who highlighted diversity as priorities of an ideal *maternelle*, both were parents of students who would in some way be considered a minority, either because of their race or ability status, and both were parents who lived in big cities with high immigrant populations. For example, one parent, a White, unemployed woman in the Department of Gironde, stated, "I think it's [an ideal *maternelle*] a place which is inclusive, that

everyone can, regardless of their physical ability or intellectual ability, whether if their fully potty trained or not.” Another parent, a Black man in the department of Paris, stated that the ideal *maternelle* would be, “[p]ublic after all so that everybody is mixed with everybody and it allows all the children to have the same education. But this is not always the case because it depends where you will: in rich neighborhood the school are usually richer, even if it is not always the case.”

Additionally, while many parents were concerned with their children’s well-being, parents were also concerned with a recent change in the early childhood education schedule, as evidenced in Table 1. Currently, *maternelles* are in session four and one-half days out of the week, as opposed to the traditional four days per week schedule. Many parents stated some dissatisfaction with this new added class day, noting either that their children were tired from the added school day or that this was a day during which they would like to spend more time with their children.

*Table 2. Maternelle Quality Priorities (According to Parents)*

<b>Maternelle Quality Priorities</b>	<b>Number of Parents Who Highlighted This Priority</b>
<b>Activities</b>	8
<b>Children well cared for</b>	5
<b>Living in community</b>	5
<b>Relationships with friends</b>	4
<b>Education</b>	4
<b>4 days/week schedule</b>	4
<b>Happy</b>	3
<b>Eat well</b>	3
<b>Low teacher-student ratio</b>	3
<b>Nap</b>	3
<b>Less shy</b>	2
<b>Children evolve/grow</b>	2
<b>Language skills</b>	2

<b>Maternelle Quality Priorities</b>	<b>Number of Parents Who Highlighted This Priority</b>
<b>Students learn to obey rules<sup>2</sup></b>	2
<b>Technology</b>	2
<b>Well-regulated building temperature</b>	2
<b>Diversity</b>	2

## 1.2 Teachers

Teachers' thoughts regarding a high quality *maternelle* are organized into Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 details more general *maternelle* components, while Table 3 contains priorities and practices related to emotional and social development. Like parents, teachers also seem concerned with children's well-being—focusing on teacher-student ratios, ensuring they adapt to children's individual needs, games in the classroom, and positively measuring children's success and development. This suggests that France is in fact moving from a more academic approach to *maternelle* to a more comprehensive approach to development. One teacher, a White woman director in a suburban school close to a major city in Calvados, summarized this quite well:

The program has recently changed. Before this change, the program required that at the end of the *maternelle* the pupils had to know some basis of reading and writing, for example how to hold a pen. But this program has been slimmed. More time is let to the children to grow at their own pace. This change was necessary because the children of today are not the same as the children of yesterday. They changed a lot, for example nowadays, as they are surrounded by screens, they are not able to stay focused. Also I think there has been a change in the parental education at home. So the school needed to adapt to those changes. Moreover, the school helps parents to become parents. Some of them are totally submerged so we give them advice, we try to show them the path. The mistress [teacher] has a different view of the children, as they see them in community, a view that can be very useful to the parents. So we discuss a lot with the parents, which is not the case of all schools. It's more difficult in the city center, or when the parents are disadvantaged or when the parents don't speak French for instance. Also the curricula are now more focused of the progress and success of the children, while they were more repressive before, with sanctions. For example, in elementary schools, the grades have been suppressed. It's good I think, it's necessary to give time to the children to learn and progress. This is especially true when the children are young, since there is a huge difference between the children born at the beginning of the year and the end of the year.

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<sup>2</sup> Both in the same large city in Bouches-du-Rhône

When you are 4 years old, 10 months are very important in terms of knowledge and skills. So the logic has changed: today we care more about the children's full development. But of course there are still educational requirements, because the *maternelle* is not a nursery.

As shown in Table 2, teacher-student ratios was the characteristic of a high-quality *maternelle* teachers highlighted most often, even though there are no regulations regarding teacher-student ratios in France. Many teachers stated that there were too many students in their classrooms, and that an ideal *maternelle* would contain fewer students per teacher. While this was a less pronounced concern in the parent analysis, three parents did mention low teacher-student ratios as important components of a high quality *maternelle* as well.

While at least one teacher in every region expressed concern about teacher-student ratios, in Calvados, a more rural region, a teacher in only one of the four schools brought this up, perhaps suggesting that teacher-student ratios are smaller or pose less of a problem in villages or more rural regions. Additionally, a White, male director at a village school in Calvados was one of few teachers to make any mentions of the curriculum being quite “full”, suggesting that perhaps in smaller villages the curriculum is a bit more overwhelming than in other regions or that perhaps in smaller villages the definition of a high quality *maternelle* curriculum would differ from other regions. However, because so few villages were represented in this sample, more research is necessary to draw any conclusions from this outlier.

*Table 3. Maternelle Quality Priorities (According to Teachers)*

<b>Maternelle Quality Priorities</b>	<b>Number of Teachers/Directors Who Highlighted This Priority</b>
<b>Low teacher-student ratio</b>	9
<b>Adapt to individual child</b>	8
<b>Games/play</b>	8
<b>Charting progress over time (positive success)</b>	6
<b>Less school hours per week</b>	5
<b>More technology in school</b>	5

<b>Learning to live together</b>	4
<b>4 school days/per week (versus the current 4.5)</b>	3
<b>Focus on child development</b>	3
<b>Manipulations</b>	3
<b>More space</b>	2
<b>Time for children to move</b>	2
<b>Notebook charting progress for parents</b>	2

As outlined in Table 3, most teachers highlighted language, art, and theater as media through which high quality *maternelles* encourage children's emotional, social, and ethical development. In almost every interview, teachers emphasized the importance of language in early childhood education in France. Encouraging expression through various media appeared to be synonymous with encouraging emotional, social, and ethical development for most teachers. As one White, male teacher and director in a village in Calvados stated, "We encourage them to express by themselves their needs. The preschool is a lot about oral, and learning through play. So for instance after we read a story, we ask children to summarize it in their own words." Another teacher, a man of North African descent, in Bouches-du-Rhône spoke on the importance of theater in the *maternelle* classroom, "We have workshops like the live show, express emotions, we do dance, mime, which allow children to be spectators, actors. This year they made a show on the theme of the circus for example, an imaginary circus, with imaginary animals, clowns. So they learn to communicate through live performance, but that's part of the kindergarten program."

In three of the four schools where teachers were interviewed in Bouches-du-Rhône, when asked about techniques for social and emotional development in the classroom, teachers brought up that the *Prodas*, a program for social and emotional development from Quebec, had been in use at one point at the school, but was no longer. These schools were likely part of a pilot program to study the impact of the *Prodas* in select schools in this region. Beyond their initial

response, these teachers gave no responses regarding techniques for social and emotional development in the classroom. This leaves implications regarding the ethics of discontinuing such programs with no clear resources or action steps for teachers to continue similar projects or implement similar techniques in the future.

*Table 4. Emotional, Social, and Ethical Development Practices (Highlighted by Teachers)*

<i>Maternelle</i> Emotional, Social, & Ethical Development Practices	Number of Teachers/Directors Who Highlighted This Practice
<b>Helping children find words for feelings/express themselves orally</b>	7
<b>Encouraging students to express opinions</b>	6
<b>Arts &amp; theater</b>	5
<b>Work in teams</b>	4
<b>Being available to listen</b>	3
<b>Literature</b>	3
<b>Exposure to differences</b>	3
<b>Adapt to children's differences</b>	2

**Research Question 2.** To what extent are immigrant and minority populations engaged within *maternelles* across France?

On average, both parents and teachers in this study tended to view immigrant and minority engagement as no different as engaging other children, unless there was a tangible difference like a language barrier that would require extra care. Even then, most teachers stated that there were no extra supports for non-French speaking children and that they can learn by playing with others. Additionally, overall, most teachers are not trained to recognize and deal with the signs of childhood trauma in the classroom, which children of immigrant and minority populations are more likely to face (OECD 2015). Some teachers do, however, mention organizing students with difficulties in school into small groups based on learning ability and language skill to facilitate learning, and stories of parents whose children experienced different treatment in school based on their identity are included below.



## 2.1 Parents

One limitation of this study that particularly impacts my ability to fully explore this question is my ability to speak only English and French. As noted in Chapter Three, I was unsuccessful in interviewing many immigrants, as French was their second language; indeed, only one person who spoke little French is included in this study. This study is thus unrepresentative of the experiences of immigrant parents, as the language barrier prevented me from gaining access to these interviews. Therefore, I cannot speak to the experiences of immigrant parents, and this is a limitation of the data. I can, however, summarize the findings of the parents included within the sample, most of whom spoke French well and were of European descent. I must stress here again that these findings should not be generalized to minority populations.

In general, parents either 1) tended to believe that teachers engaged all students well, regardless of identity or background or 2) were not completely sure of the details regarding their children's engagement at school. One parent, a Black man, from the Gironde region stated,

Children are not pressured. Every child learns at its pace. Every child is different and learns in his own way. Sometimes, children don't want to play too much, so teachers leave the child alone, in peace. The teachers exchange with parents regularly, so we know everything, it's very well. It is not because a child can read and another can't that the child has to learn how to read. Everybody learns at his own pace.

Each parent mentioned something different regarding their child's engagement in the classroom, including that teachers engaged children through good relationships, end of the year parties, encouraging children to speak up in class, and group work. This range of responses makes sense, as 1) teachers have complete flexibility in their classroom demeanor, as long as

they fulfill national curriculum goals and 2) all parents and children hold different identities, background, and ways of living in this world.

Only two responses highlighted the experiences of immigrant and minority populations in France. The first was the experience of a Muslim immigrant mother from Sudan living in Pas-de-Calais. Her first language was Arabic, so we could not communicate very well. However, we were able to have the following exchange,

“At the beginning, did the teachers help the children if they do not speak French so well?”

“One of the teachers asked me to speak more French in the house.”

She did not share if her child’s teacher attempted to support them in any other ways in the classroom or home; I am not sure if that was because of the communication barrier or because there were no other ways in which her daughter’s teacher had attempted to reach out. Further research is certainly required to better understand immigrant students’ experiences in early childhood education settings in France.

The second example experience of a child within a minority population was highlighted when a White divorced, unemployed teacher with four children in Gironde shared her experience as the parent of a child with chronic medical concerns. Her daughter’s experience supports the OECD literature (Referenced in Chapter 2) that suggests a gap in the French early childhood education system in meeting disabled children’s needs. She shared:

In France, no, they don’t want people to be different...So, [my daughter] she’s got like a range of conditions—like you could call it disabilities, although she’s not disabled, but... And that—they’re scared of her, you know? At school. They don’t really... They want her to go to school just mornings, and not afternoons, and she can do it! She’s more brave, and she can, she can do more than this one [my other child] who’s perfectly normal so that’s completely—they just see the sheet of paper with all the conditions and go, “Oh, you know, she can’t come to our school, it’s too difficult.” Yeah, this kind of

thing. So if you're not like everybody else, if you're a bit different, that's the problem here. That's the problem here. They don't like differences. They like everyone to be the same. Yeah, because they don't know how to deal with disabled children! Even just conditions like—her main problem is a breathing condition—they don't know what to do!

Her concerns not only bolster the OECD literature's suggested gap, but highlights a need for further French government research—and perhaps policy reform—regarding *maternelle* policies for students with disabilities and chronic medical conditions.

## 2.2 Teachers

Most teachers did not differentiate student engagement by population. Rather, as demonstrated in Table 4, it was most teachers' goal to encourage each student to speak and ensure that all students were interested in class. As one teacher in Paris, a White woman, stated, “We use the Montessori methods: each pupil, once he completed the activity, shows it to the mistress who validates it. The mistress is always available for them; she is here to encourage and support them in the activities.” I asked her a follow-up question, “How do the teachers encourage immigrant children to participate?” She responded, “It is the same thing for everybody, we do not differentiate children of foreign origin.” Certainly teaching methods varied from interview to interview given the flexibility allowed in the French national curriculum; however, the focus on adapting to each individual students' needs and encouraging all students equally was generally present throughout most interviews.

Additionally, teachers generally expected children for whom French is not their native language to learn by playing and speaking with other children. Indeed, many teachers even noted the importance of *maternelle* for learning the French language and noted that children can

become fluent with months or a year. As one teacher, a White woman in the Paris Department, said, “But in *maternelle* the children learn very fast, within a few months they are able to say basic things and understand the mistress. It is said that children are like sponges because they have a great ability to learn.”

However, as shown in Table 4, some teachers did mention efforts to specifically engage students with learning difficulties and allophone students, students of immigrant descent, and/or first-generation immigrant students. One teacher, a White woman in a large city in the Bouches-du-Rhône region, highlighted a variety of measures teachers carried out in and outside the classroom to engage their immigrant/allophone students:

Our primary goal in kindergarten is that children learn to speak French as best as possible. So our priority is teaching French to all children. But here we have children whose mother tongue is not French, who do not speak French at home. So the teachers organize specific workshops for these students. In this school we also give free French lessons for parents who do not speak French with teachers who come from an association called EPFF, Training Space Training France, that does training for adults. So this teacher gives courses to about 18 parents who do not speak French well and who have trouble reading and writing it. And that's very important because it's so that after the parents can help the children in their schooling. In the classroom, there are also actions that are put in place. For example, this year we had a training course on listening pedagogy, which is a training that encourages children to speak by giving them several speaking sessions one after the other. And even if a child has the right answer, we still give the floor to other children to allow everyone to express themselves. We also try to work so that the children understand the meaning of the school: after each activity, we return to what has been done so that the children realize what they have learned. The goal is to return to the activity so that the children understand the meaning of the activity, the real meaning of the activity. We also do a lot of outings: in museums, in the city, in parks, on the farm. We have a lot of cultural projects. These are concrete activities so that they can learn more easily.

Another teacher, a White man, in a village near a large city in the Gironde region spoke about small group time for children with trouble keeping up in class. When asked about methods to engage children who had trouble speaking French, the teacher responded, “So for the children who have difficulties during the teachings? There is always an allocated time in class devoted to

them. We are taking them in small group of 4 or 5 children. While the others are doing something else, and we, the teachers, we are taking the students and we are coming back to what was not good.”

There is, therefore, a wide variation in approaches to engaging students with learning difficulties, allophone students, students of immigrant descent, and/or first-generation immigrant students in French *maternelles*. More research is required to understand better understand this variation, which approaches are more beneficial and why these approaches vary so greatly from school to school (culture, resources, etc.).

*Table 5. Teacher Practices Used to Engage All Students*

<b>Practices Highlighted to Engage All Students in <i>Maternelle</i></b>	<b>Number of Teachers/Directors Who Highlighted This Practice</b>
<b>Motivating /interesting activities/games</b>	5
<b>Encourage children to speak</b>	4
<b>Encourage children to participate</b>	3
<b>Meaningful activities/ understanding activity purposes</b>	2
<b>Playing with others</b>	2
<b>Class workshops for children with difficulties in class (e.g. allophones, students w/ disabilities)</b>	2
<b>Try to help students understand they are equal</b>	2
<b>Adapt to each child</b>	1
<b>Mingle all ages</b>	1
<b>One on one teacher time with all students</b>	1
<b><i>Specific mentions of ways to engage allophone students, students of immigrant descent, and/or immigrant students</i></b>	
<b>Children who don't speak French expected to learn French in <i>maternelle</i> by mingling with others</b>	4
<b>Parent Outreach</b>	1
<b>Specific workshops</b>	1
<b>Mention of some language trainings for <i>maternelle</i> teachers</b>	1

As mentioned in Chapter Two, trauma is more likely to impact immigrant children than other children and can have a negative impact on children's learning. Thus, I asked *maternelle* teachers and directors whether they had received any training to recognize the signs of or attend to childhood trauma in their students. As shown in Table 5, on the whole, teachers and directors said *maternelle* teachers received little to no training on childhood trauma. When asked about whether teachers at his school received any training on early childhood trauma, one teacher, a man at a school in a small town in the Côte-d'Or Department, responded, "Not at all. When we are facing a problem, we are not really trained. Not enough in any event. So when we have a problem, we call the school psychologist. We, teachers, are not enough trained." (I conducted a phone interview with this teacher and am thus unaware of his race.) Another teacher, a White woman from the Bouches-du-Rhône Department, commented,

"Not a lot. The teacher needs to listen. In kindergarten, the dialogue between parents and teachers is very important. The child must be confident. After, we are so used to being with children that we can detect certain things, certain disorders. We also have a nurse, who makes medical visits, for the eyes, ears, from kindergarten. And we also have a psychological observation about children. Some families confide in us too. But we do not have specific training."

Many teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of ongoing training and the breadth of subjects covered.

However, as shown in Table 5, most teachers did mention that trauma is generally considered a concern for the school psychologist or the doctor. Every school in this sample contained a school psychologist who dealt with educational and/or behavioral difficulties that impacted children's learning at school. Many teachers did note that if they could not handle a trauma related situation, they would generally refer the child to the school psychologist.

Table 6. Presence of Teacher Trauma Training in Maternelles

Presence of Teacher Trauma Training	Number of Teachers/Directors
No trauma training for teachers	8
Very little trauma training for teachers	4
Some trauma training for teachers	2
Trauma considered a concern for school psychologist/doctor	11

**Research Question 3.** Do *maternelles* engage with family members? If so, how?

Overall, I found that teachers in *maternelles* tend to engage with family members, with only two accounts of resistance. On average, both parents and teachers viewed family engagement as an act initiated by parents to assist in school life in some way, as opposed to a support extended by a teacher to help the parents. However, there were exceptions to this, particularly in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrant children.

### 3.1 Parents

To better understand parent engagement in *maternelles*, I have broken up parent responses into 1) their understanding of their child's *maternelle*/curriculum (shown in Table 6) and 2) methods of parent participation in the classroom (shown in Table 7). As displayed in Table 6, many parents did not have a comprehensive understanding of what their children were learning in school. One White woman in the Pas-de-Calais Department said, "Oh... There is no curriculum. You know I am not really aware of the curriculum." Another parent, a White woman in the Gironde Department, remarked, "I do not know it specifically. But when I look at my son's notebooks I am satisfied with his work, what he does in class." When parents commented on specific skills they believed their children were learning in the classroom, each parent mentioned something different; however, most answers were quite vague and remarked that to some degree

children were either learning to play with others or live in community or learning numbers or the alphabet. Only one parent, a Greek woman immigrant in the Paris Department, noted that the curriculum was “very well-explained.”

*Table 7. Parent Understanding of Maternelle Curriculum*

<b>Parent Comments on <i>Maternelle</i> Curriculum</b>	<b>Number of Parents Who Expressed This Sentiment</b>
<b>Play/live in community</b>	3
<b>Name/numbers/alphabet</b>	3
<b>Don’t know/no curriculum</b>	2
<b>“Basics”</b>	1
<b>Very well-explained</b>	1

From parents’ perspectives, parent engagement in *maternelles* appears to be mostly understood as parent volunteering and observing class time as shown in Table 7. Indeed, almost every aspect of parent involvement mentioned in Table 7 (accompanying children on outings, observing classes, being part of the parent association, etc.) rely more on the parent’s initiative to engage. Most parents appeared to consider this to be relatively normal, save one parent, a White unemployed former teacher and parent of a disabled child, in the Gironde region:

You don’t feel too involved in... like, you’ve got those, you know, they give you those “report cards”? Uh, like, every ... for older kids. For little kids, they have evaluations, evaluations. You know? Your kids have to be ready to draw the men the way they want (laughs), you know? But apart from those things, you don’t really know what your kid is doing in school, you know?

One parent, a Black Muslim woman in the Paris Department, however, did mention that she felt engaged in her child’s classroom, stating, “Yes, the mistress talks with us each morning.” On the whole, however, it appears that most parents in this sample equated volunteering or observing class time with engaging with their children’s school lives.



*Table 8. Parent Involvement in the Classroom (According to Parents)*

<b>Methods of Participation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Accompany on outings/trips</b>	4
<b>Observe class</b>	2
<b>Parent association</b>	1
<b>Life notebook</b>	1
<b>Talk to teacher early morning</b>	1
<b>Help out w/ Wed activities</b>	1
<b>Participate in school bazaars or open houses</b>	1

### **3.2 Teachers**

Like parents, overall, teachers seemed to understand parent engagement in school in terms of volunteering and spending time in the classroom, as Table 8 shows. Indeed, teachers most commonly cited volunteering for activities, chaperoning for class outings, and participating in the parent association as methods of parent engagement in the classroom. This suggests that perhaps only parents who have a more flexible work schedule or make enough money so that only one parent has to work are able to fully engage in their children's school lives. One White woman teacher in the Calvados Department echoed this sentiment, saying, "Here yes the parents are very interested and involved in the school. That's because the neighborhood is privileged, most of the parents are well-off. But in schools located in less fortunate neighborhoods parents tend to be less involved." One teacher, a man of North-African descent, in the Bouches-du-Rhône region also mentioned it was easier to have good relationships with parents in more village-like settings.

However, teachers did seem to mention some social- and support- oriented engagement as well, including school social events, school informational meetings, and parent cafés, where teachers would provide parents with tea or coffee for a time of interaction with school staff and other parents. These were simply less common than methods of participation that relied on the

parents' initiative to engage. Schools with more supportive and social approaches to parent engagement also tended to have specific approaches for involvement of immigrant and/or allophone parents. One teacher, a White woman, in a school in a large city in the Gironde Department explained:

There is a women's association, PROMOFEMME, which exists in the neighborhood, an association in which women come to give free French lessons to mothers, because it is important for mothers to learn French. So they teach them French and they also read the notes of the school. For example, a note that signals that there will be a party in the school, or a schedule change. And at the beginning of the school year, in September, we have a little meeting. We have many Turkish-speaking moms because they are Turkish or Bulgarian, and they register for the first time their children of 5-6 years old at school, so there is a big effort for these children to accept all the rules. So in this association, led by teachers, and a translator, there are often meetings about the school, and parents can ask any questions they want, and the translator translates. We are lucky to have this association. In France, there are many associations like this that work thanks to subsidies from the French government, from the European community...

Similarly, another teacher, a White woman from a large city in the Bouches-du-Rhône Department, described a series of supports to ensure immigrant and allophone parents' participation in *maternelle* life:

For parents who do not speak French well, they have trouble getting involved in school life, so we help them a lot. When there is information to pass to these parents, specialized people will help them understand this information. For other parents, we have an association called "the appointment of parents", which takes place once a period on Wednesday morning, and we invite parents who wish to come for a tea and talk about their difficulties or their success at school or in the education of their children. So if they have a problem with their children, or if they have questions, we help them solve that. They can also talk to each other about the education of children, they can give each other advice. They can also accompany the students out. And mistresses also offer parents who wish to come one morning in the classroom, to observe a morning class to better understand the learning of their children in school. There are also information meetings with the mistresses, and more convivial moments where the parents are invited, for example if we organize an exhibition of the drawings of their children, the parents come to school and meet up with their children. Every year we also organize "the meal of the world", it is an evening where each parent brings a dish to eat from his country/region and we all eat together in the school yard. It's a very convivial moment. In this school there are 295 children, so there are many families.

Because both these schools were in cities with higher proportions of immigrants than other parts of France, it could be true that perhaps the flexibility in the French curriculum has allowed the necessary adjustments for parent satisfaction and student success. However, it is likely that more research is required to understand the benefits of these different approaches and the scope of French supports for parents of children in *maternelles*.

Notably, when asked about parent participation in the classroom, two teachers in the Paris Department did mention that sometimes teachers discourage parent engagement in *maternelles*. As one teacher, woman, mentioned, “The parents want to be involved in the school’s life, but this is something that the teachers don’t really like. Sometimes the teachers are scared of the scrutiny of the parents.” Another teacher, also a woman, said,

It depends on the teachers, who don’t really like when the parents are at the school. So the parents are only asked to accompany on school trips. Also from time to time they come to help the teacher for some activities, such as making pancakes or manufacturing masks for the carnival. They are invited to all events of the school, like the school fête, the choir concert. And of course everyday the parents go in the school, even in the classrooms, when they bring their children. This is not the case everywhere, for example in my grandson’s *maternelle* the parents are not allowed to go into the classrooms.

(Interviews with both of these teachers were conducted over the phone, and I thus do not have any race information for them.) This suggests that parent *maternelle* involvement could vary in some larger cities across France, as such statements were only made by teachers in city schools. Further research is thus important to understand why some parents are unable to be involved in their children’s *maternelles* and what, if any, harm or benefits may arise from this.

*Table 9. Parent Involvement in the Classroom (According to Teachers)*

Methods of Participation	Frequency
Parent association	6
Accompany/chaperone on outings	6
Volunteer for activities	5

Methods of Participation	Frequency
School social events for both parents and children	4
Informational meetings between parents and administrators and/or teachers	4
Bringing children to school	3
Parent-teacher interaction for parental support	3
Parent cafés	3
Read Stories in Class	2
Attending child performances	1

**Research Question 4.** What is the demographic make-up of children in *maternelles* across France?

Overall, I found that the parents and teachers in this study stated that demographics of children within *maternelles* tended to reflect the communities in which they lived. However, within regions, demographics represented within *maternelles* could vary widely from neighborhood to neighborhood, implying segregated neighborhoods, particularly with regard to race and immigrant status.

#### 4.1 Parents

To most fully understand the demographics of children attending French *maternelles*, it is important to first consider the accessibility of the process of enrollment. Overall, parents expressed no complaints about enrollment process. However, it is important to note that these were all parents whose children were enrolled in *maternelle* at the time of the interview. All parents mentioned that the processes for enrollment were similar; parents had to go to their city hall and fill out paperwork and would eventually receive a letter designating which school their child would attend. One parent in the Pas-de-Calais region did mention that her child needed to

be toilet-trained before attending school, but did not express any dissatisfaction with this, as the parent of the child with the breathing condition from the Gironde region did above (section 2.1).

Additionally, some parents in the Paris Department mentioned that it could be a slower process for their children to gain a space in *maternelle*, particularly if they had a higher socioeconomic status. As one parent, a Black man, who decided to choose a private *maternelle* for his child noted, “[T]he priority in public school is for people who have no money, so there are lots of criteria: what is your job, where do you live, what is your apartment like...” Another parent, a White man, noted that he decided to take his child out of public school because there were too many strikes, remarking, “We first put him the public but in two weeks there has been 4 strikes so we immediately changed the school.” Thus, some children of higher socioeconomic status may not make up an equivalent proportion of children in public school, as their parents may have a lower tolerance for strikes, slower moving enrollment processes, and waitlists that prioritize lower income children.

However, as shown in Table 9, most parents considered their children’s *maternelles* to be socioeconomically and/or racially diverse. If parents did not consider their child’s class to be fairly diverse, they still generally believed it reflected the demographic make-up of their neighborhood. Parents’ considerations of diversity ranged widely, with one Black woman parent in the Paris Department noting, “Diversity can mean a lot of things. There is a diversity, but I think it is mostly White families so it’s quite homogeneous. This is good in a way because all the children have the same cultural background, but I’m in favor of more diversity.” Yet, another parent, a White woman from the Pas-de-Calais Department, commented that she had not thought much about diversity in her child’s classroom before, responding, “I have not had the time to

consider the question, but yes, there are children coming from all socio-professional backgrounds.”

*Table 10. Parent Reflections on Diversity in the Classroom*

<b>Reflection</b>	<b>Number of Parents Who Highlighted This Reflection</b>
<b>Felt classroom was diverse and reflected the community</b>	9
<b>Language</b>	3
<b>Race</b>	3
<b>Socioeconomic status</b>	1
<b>Ability status</b>	1
<b>No specific facet of diversity mentioned</b>	1
<b>Did not feel the classroom was diverse, but felt that the classroom reflected the community</b>	3
<b>Did not feel that the classroom was diverse or that it reflected the community</b>	1
<b>Positive feelings toward diversity mentioned (unprompted)</b>	4
<b>Negative feelings toward diversity mentioned (unprompted)</b>	1

## 4.2 Teachers

Most teachers stated that it was easy for parents to find a place for their children in their schools, with the exception of teachers in three schools. Each of these schools were in a large city, two in the Paris Department and one in Gironde. Both of these cities have large populations and high immigrant and ethnic minority populations as compared to other parts of the country. When asked if it was an easy for children to find a place in her *maternelle*, one teacher in Paris responded,

Not always, especially here in [this neighborhood] because there are lots of families who are French. So there is a social worker who helps them. But in general it's going well, since the people at the City Hall are very nice. But it is true that it can be quite difficult and slow to get all the necessary papers. The diversity is quite important in this school, there are not only low-income families, but there are a lot of African families.

A teacher at the Gironde school also noted that the Town Hall was doing all it could to accommodate all students' enrollment requests:

Right now, in this neighborhood, there are a lot of requests. And in some kindergarten we will not be able to accommodate everyone, so we will have to find solutions. There are a lot of buildings that have been built, so new families came to live in the neighborhood. Afterwards, normally, all children must have a place in a school, even if they are assigned to a school a little further away from home.

While social workers and city officials may be successful in finding temporary solutions for schools in highly populated neighborhood, more research to find long term policy solutions to ensure all students throughout France are secured a place in *maternelles* in their neighborhoods.

As shown in Table 11 below, teachers were able to give a more accurate description of classroom demographics, particularly relating to immigrant and allophone students. It is not common to speak about racial and ethnic diversity in France, as the French nationality is considered to be paramount over other such distinguishing factors. When asked how many children were immigrants or of immigrant descent in his school, one teacher in the Gironde Department responded,

This is not a good question, because here all children are of French nationality. After there are several origins, Polish, Spanish, gypsies, Maghrebs, Senegalese, but they are all born in Marseille so they are all French. So it's a bad question. Afterall, in France, there is the right of the soil, so when a child is born in France, it has necessarily the French nationality. After it is true that there is not a lot of French "pure strain" we will say.

Thus, teachers and directors may have identified immigrant children or descendants of immigrants inconsistently. Additionally, teachers and directors responded in relatively inconsistent units, even when I asked them to estimate percentages, and interviewees from some schools were willing to give more information on this matter than others, as is shown in the variation in responses in Table 11.

As Table 11 shows below, school populations in the more rural Pas-de-Calais and Calvados regions tended to contain less allophones and immigrant students overall than other schools. As one teacher in the Calvados region commented, “It’s a mix of various social classes, the diversity is great in this school. But there are very few immigrant pupils as we are in a country school, they are more numerous when in urban schools, situated in big cities.” Beyond this distinction, proportions of immigrant and allophone children in classrooms varied widely from neighborhood to neighborhood, which is consistent with literature referenced above regarding housing segregation in France. Because children are assigned to their *maternelle* based on their home address, this opens up the question of whether children in low-income and high-immigrant neighborhoods experience equitable access to education. This will be explored further in the next chapter.

*Table 11. Percentages of Immigrant V. Non-Immigrant Students in Maternelles According to Teachers/Directors*

Region	Teacher/Director Response
<b>Pas-de-Calais</b>	
School 1	10% immigrant/allophone
<b>Côte-d’Or</b>	
School 1	70% immigrant, 10% not French speaking
School 2	6-7% immigrant
<b>Gironde</b>	
School 1	20% allophones
School 2	“We are not in a neighborhood where there isn’t a lot of social mix.”
School 3	1.3%-2.5% immigrants
<b>Bouches-du-Rhône</b>	
School 1	45% non-francophone, 11% speak poor French
School 2	15% speak no French when they arrive
School 3	Few families who speak no French, 50% of children of foreign origin
School 4	“All children ‘are French’ a lot of ‘double culture’; not a lot of ‘pure strain.’”
<b>Calvados</b>	
School 1	Few immigrant children
School 2	Mix of social classes, few immigrants
School 3	Some immigrants, but not a lot (self-identified “privileged” school)
<b>Paris</b>	



<b>Region</b>	<b>Teacher/Director Response</b>
<b>School 1</b>	80% children of foreign origin
<b>School 2</b>	15% immigrant children; “Quite a lot don’t speak French but that’s normal.”
<b>School 3</b>	1-2% immigrant children, 4.8% (10) non-francophone children
<b>School 4</b>	7.3% Non-francophone, but tend to be bilingual

## ***Conclusions and Recommendations***

For parents and teachers, high-quality *maternelles* were defined as *maternelles* centered on children's well-being and care. Consistent with the national curriculum, teachers described using the arts and oral language as best practices to encourage children to express their feelings. Most teachers highlighted low teacher-student ratios as a priority for high-quality *maternelles*; such sentiments are consistent with literature regarding teacher-student ratios in pre-primary education. As there are currently no such standards for *maternelles* in France, I recommend that *maternelle* teacher-student ratio standards be developed in conjunction with teachers from regions across France, particularly in diverse neighborhoods. Many parents highlighted a four-day school week, instead of the recently changed four-and-a-half-day school week, as important for a high-quality *maternelle*. I thus recommend further comprehensive, qualitative research—perhaps an open comment period—regarding parents' views on the change, with a consideration to change back to a four-day school week.

Most parents and teachers viewed immigrant and minority engagement as no different from engaging with any other students. However, two specific experiences reflected in this study, that of an immigrant mother and that of the mother of a child with a physical disability, suggest otherwise. The literature regarding racial, ethnic, and immigrant equity in France also suggests that minority populations' experiences in school would likely vary from other students. As the data in this study does not include a robust sample of immigrants and is in fact limited by the languages I am able to speak (French and English, not Arabic), I recommend further research regarding ethnic and racial minority, immigrant, and disabled students' experiences within *maternelles*.

Parents and teachers both tend to define family engagement within French *maternelles* as parent-initiated actions to assist with the school and not as a support mechanism for parents. However, some teachers did outline particular family engagement programs and support mechanisms either directed toward immigrant communities or located in neighborhoods with high concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants. Because of this, I recommend that research be conducted regarding the outcomes of such *maternelle* supports, particularly in achieving equity for diverse populations.

Finally, I found that parents and teachers both tended to believe that the demographics of the children enrolled in their *maternelles* reflected their communities. However, because demographics could vary so widely from neighborhood to neighborhood within regions, further research is necessary to understand more robustly the implications this segregation may have on learning outcomes for children in *maternelles*. Additionally, because one teacher did note that a parent outreach program at her school was dedicated to helping enroll more immigrant students in her neighborhood, I recommend more research to understand which communities in which regions are less likely to enroll children in *maternelle* at an early age and why.

## **Appendix A.**

### *Teacher Protocol Questions*

#### **Introduction**

1. How many years have you worked in education? In *maternelles*? And, in this school?
2. What is a typical day like for you?

#### **Curriculum**

3. Tell me about the early learning curriculum used at this school.
4. How, if at all, is it meeting the needs of your students?
5. How would you define a high quality early learning curriculum?
  - a. To what extent does your definition of high quality align with the curriculum used here?

#### **Resources**

6. What resources/materials do teachers have access to for their classrooms?
  - b. Do you feel these resources are helpful?

#### **Teaching**

7. How, if at all, are you engaging all students? (e.g. immigrants and native populations)
8. How would you describe your teaching style?
  - a. What, if any, teaching techniques have you used to help children express emotions and be able to work in teams.
9. To what extent are teachers trained to recognize and deal with signs of childhood trauma?
10. Tell me about your planning process in the classroom? Is this something already prepared, or do you get to create your lessons?

#### **Parents**

11. To your knowledge, are parents having a difficult time securing a place for their children in this *maternelle*? If so, why do you think that is?
12. How, if at all, involved are your students' families? To what extent do you encourage their involvement in school?

#### **Final Remarks**

13. What is the percent breakdown of immigrant and non-immigrant in your classroom?
14. Is there anything that I missed that you would like to share?

### *Observation Guide*

#### **Assessing Resources**

Classroom arrangement, tools, textbooks, technology, posters (role models, etc), paintings, toys, anything to assist in teaching

Describe the classroom itself.

How many children are in one room?

What resource is it?	Quantity? Location? Condition? Size? Other notable descriptions?

### Exploring Curricula<sup>3</sup>

What teaching tools and resources are available in each classroom to achieve the following five goals for *maternelle* curricula set by the French government? (Directorate for Education, OECD 2004, 25)

- 1) Developing oral language and an introduction to writing
- 2) Learning how to work together
- 3) Acting and expressing emotions and thoughts with one's body
- 4) Discovering the world
- 5) Imagining, feeling, and creating

### Assessing Engagement of Minority and Immigrant Populations

- 1) What types of books and posters are there in the classroom?
- 2) What types of dolls and toys do you see in the classroom?
- 3) What, if any, other countries and cultures are displayed or taught about in the classroom?<sup>4</sup>
- 4) What else do you notice?

### *Parent Protocol Questions*

#### **Introduction**

1. How many years has your child attended this school?

#### ***Maternelle***

2. Can you describe your ideal *maternelle*?
  - a. What could your child's *maternelle* do to better meet your needs?

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<sup>3</sup> One of the main purposes of *maternelles* in France is to teach children about French culture and French practices. (Hurless 2004)

<sup>4</sup> I anticipated the focus to be France, as *maternelles* are where children learn about French culture and French practices. (Hurless 2004)

- b. Do the days and hours of operation meet your needs? If not, how would you change it?
- 3. How diverse, if at all, is your child's *maternelle*? Does this school mirror the community? If not, why?

### **Curriculum**

- 4. Tell me about the curriculum used at this school.
- 5. How, if at all, is it meeting the needs of your child?

### **Resources**

- 6. To what extent is this school equipped with the necessary resources to provide your child with a quality learning experience?

### **Teaching**

- 7. How, if at all, is your school engaging your child?

### **Access/Engagement/Impact**

- 8. What was the process like for securing a space in a *maternelle* for your child?
  - a. How, if at all, could this process be improved upon?
  - b. Did your family and/or friends share a similar experience? If so, please describe.
- 9. What, if any, impact has your child's time in a *maternelle* had on him or her, particularly with regard to his or her emotional and social development?
- 10. How, if at all, does your child's *maternelle* involve you in your child's classroom?

### **Final Remarks**

- 11. How long have you lived in this community?
- 12. Is there anything that I missed that you would like to share?

## Appendix B.

Protocol Questions (Parents)	Structure (Introduction, RQ, Conclusion)
1) How many years has your child attended this school?	Introduction
2) Can you describe your ideal <i>maternelle</i> ? a. What could your child's <i>maternelle</i> do to better meet your needs? b. Do the days and hours of operation meet your needs? If not, how would you change it?	RQ 3
3) How diverse, if at all, is your child's <i>maternelle</i> ? Does this school mirror the community? If not, why?	RQ 4
4) Tell me about the curriculum used at this school.	RQ 1
5) How, if at all, is it meeting the needs of your child?	RQ 1
6) To what extent is this school equipped with the necessary resources to provide your child with a quality learning experience?	RQ 1
7) How, if at all, is your school engaging your child?	RQ 2
8) What was the process like for securing a space in a <i>maternelle</i> for your child? c. How, if at all, could this process be improved upon? d. Did your family and/or friends share a similar experience? If so, please describe.	RQ 4
9) What, if any, impact has your child's time in a <i>maternelle</i> had on him or her, particularly with regard to his or her emotional and social development?	RQ 1
10) How, if at all, does your child's <i>maternelle</i> involve you in your child's classroom?	RQ 3
11) How long have you lived in this community?	Conclusion
12) Is there anything that I missed that you would like to share?	Conclusion

Protocol Questions (Teachers)	Structure (Introduction, RQ, Conclusion)
1) How many years have you worked in education? In <i>maternelles</i> ? And, in this school?	Intro
2) What is a typical day like for you?	Intro
3) Tell me about the early learning curriculum used at this school.	RQ 1
4) How, if at all, is it meeting the needs of your students?	RQ 1
5) How would you define a high quality early learning curriculum? a. To what extent does your definition of high quality align with the curriculum used here?	RQ 1
6) What resources/materials do teachers have access to for their classrooms? a. Do you feel these resources are helpful?	RQ 1
7) How, if at all, are you engaging all students? (e.g. immigrants and native populations)	RQ 2
8) How would you describe your teaching style? a. What, if any, teaching techniques have you used to help children express emotions and be able to work in teams.	RQ 1
9) To what extent are teachers trained to recognize and deal with signs of childhood trauma?	RQ 2
10) Tell me about your planning process in the classroom? Is this something already prepared, or do you get to create your lessons?	RQ 1
11) To your knowledge, are parents having a difficult time securing a place for their children in this <i>maternelle</i> ? If so, why do you think that is?	RQ 3
12) How, if at all, involved are your students' families? To what extent do you encourage their involvement in school?	RQ 3
13) What is the percent breakdown of immigrant and non-immigrant in your classroom?	RQ 4
14) Is there anything that I missed that you would like to share?	Conclusion



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