

ORGANIZATION OF THE PRESCHOOL EDUCATION CLASSROOM



"The quality of the educational environment depends on the quality of interpersonal relationships, on the support provided to children in their learning and on class organization." (Preschool Education Program for 4-Year-Olds, 6)

"Classroom organization involves three dimensions: the physical environment, behaviour management and scheduled daily activities." (Preschool Education Program for 4-Year-Olds, 7)

This document refers solely to the physical environment, that is, the space in the classroom and the materials made available to the children.

There may be space in the classroom for:

- gatherings
- symbolic play
- construction play
- water and sand play
- games and manipulatives
- art and creative expression (painting, crafts, music, etc.)
- technology
- display of children's work and children's literature
- ...

Children must be able to use, manipulate and explore the materials available to them.

Some essentials for the physical environment

The teacher must organize the class in order to:

- give the children the opportunity to be active and engaged
- give the children opportunities to observe, explore, manipulate, use their memory; develop motor skills; to look at books; reflect on a project, imagine it and create it
- take into account all areas of child development
- take into consideration the different rhythms and learning styles of the children
- build on the children's prior experiences and learning
- promote interactions among the children and between each child and the adult take into account the child's journey, as defined in the *Preschool Education Program for 4-Year-Olds*, the contexts for learning defined in the *Preschool Education Program (5-Year-Olds)*, and the elements that some children need more, according to the *Preschool Education Program for 4-Year-Olds*, and which may also apply to 5-year-olds as some of them start school.

About the organization of the materials

- It is important to offer a variety of materials, but be careful, more is not always better.
- The available materials must be clean, intact and safe.
- They must be easily accessible to the children.
- Some flexibility in the use of the materials will enable the children to broaden their play (e.g. a child may choose to get the miniature animal bin and use it in the block corner).

GATHERINGS (CIRCLE TIME)

This space usually has:

- an interactive white board (IWB)
- the calendar of the month
- a pictogram of the day's schedule
- the featured song
- illustrated rules of conduct
- posters, pictures or texts related to the current theme
- ...



Nathalie Férier's class, authorized for MELS, 2013-2014.

Keep in mind...

- The space should allow the children to be comfortable when they are seated and allow them to see what is displayed on the wall or what the teacher is showing.
- To avoid information overload, the posters should match the needs at the time.
- To be effective, the displayed elements must be clear, adapted and distinct.
- There must be sufficient space, or the space must be easy to rearrange, to allow children to move, dance, etc.

Ask yourself...

- Does the space allow for different groupings?
- Should the children have an assigned place?
- Can the children see what is displayed or shown at all times?
- Are the items used by the children at the right height or accessible?



Catherine Vachon's class, authorized for MELS, 2013-2014.

SYMBOLIC PLAY (DRAMATIC PLAY)

This space usually has:

- the house corner
- materials that offer opportunities to act out different roles and imaginary situations (e.g. castle, doctor's office, restaurant, farm)
- ...



Suzanne Bédard-Lefebvre's class, authorized for MELS, 2013-2014.

Keep in mind...

- At the beginning of the year, this corner requires few elements (e.g. a blanket, a few clothing items, an easy-to-dress doll, some plastic food [fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy products]).
- Items can be added throughout the year according to the level of play of the children and the themes of interest to them.
- It is important to include pencils, paper, a notebook, magazines, flyers, books, etc.
- The space can temporarily take different forms. It can become a grocery store, a veterinary or medical clinic (veterinarian or doctor's kit, animal pictures, stuffed animals, animal books and magazines for the waiting room, flashlight, books on the human body, bandages, etc.), a restaurant (bills, cash register, menus, placemats, pizza boxes, cookbooks, etc.), a hairdresser, a daycare, a snack bar, an ice cream shop, and so on.
- Dramatic play spaces that offer opportunities to act out different roles and imaginary situations do not have to be continually present in the classroom; they can be rotated.

Ask yourself...

- How much time is given to observing children's play to analyze what they do and then adapt or add to the environment to help them progress? For example, when children take on roles ("I am the mom", "you are the dad"), we can add accessories (e.g. tie, necklace, purse).
- Does the physical layout allow children to play in small groups to facilitate interactions?
- Do children have access to this space on a daily basis?
- How does the organization of this space allow children to use written texts (e.g., presence of children's books, restaurant menus, and grocery store circulars)?
- How do you gradually bring writing into this space?

CONSTRUCTION PLAY (BLOCK CORNER)

This space usually has:

- a variety of blocks (wood, cardboard, foam, etc.)
- a variety of plastic materials (tools, blocks, cars, etc.)
- ...



Catherine Vachon's class, authorized for MELS, 2013-2014.

Keep in mind...

- The corner must have enough open space so that the children can make long structures or roads.
- At the beginning of the year, the children stack blocks, demolish what they build and make long, simple roads. During the course of the year, their creations become more elaborate.
- There should be wooden blocks, cardboard blocks, and foam blocks throughout the year.
- At various times, easy-to-manipulate building sets should be added (e.g. Lego, Mobilo, Duplo, Magic Brix).
- The children must be able to incorporate small cars, trucks, a garage, planes, a train, a fire truck, animals, characters, etc. into their creations.
- We can also include paper, pencils, magazines, books, and laminated pictures of structures (e.g. buildings, skyscrapers, bridges, landscapes with roads, airplanes, railways and train stations).

Ask yourself...

- Are the children allowed to incorporate other small objects to complete their creation?
- Should there be limits on the structures that children make (height, length, etc.)?
- What criteria should be used to choose the number of children who can play in this corner at the same time?
- Why do children need to take out all of the blocks before they start playing? What can we do to respect this need, without the corner becoming overly cluttered?
- How do we guide the children to put away the blocks they used?



Catherine Vachon's class, authorized for MELS, 2013-2014.

WATER AND SAND PLAY

Depending on the season or theme, this space usually has:

- a water basin and objects, such as funnels of different sizes, measuring cups with a pouring spout, plastic containers, medicine droppers, a baster, plastic toys (ducks, boats, fishing rods)



Annie-Claude Larocque's class,
authorized for MELS, 2014-2015.

- a sandbox and objects, such as plastic containers and molds of different shapes, small cars, wooden spoons, shovels, buckets and sifters

- ...



Élisabeth Poulin's class,
authorized for MELS, 2013-2014.

Keep in mind...

- Playing with water can be done in a plastic tub next to the sink or in the sink itself if there is no room. The water tub must be emptied daily.
- For sand play, sand that does not cause dust must be used.
- Sand can be replaced by dry lentils of different colors.
- Other types of sand, called moon sand or kinetic sand, which molds and does not dry out, can also be used. Place it in a resealable plastic container that is not too large. You can add small items, such as textured molds, modelling clay accessories, plastic eggs. However, this material does not replace the sandbox.

Ask yourself...

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the water tub and sandbox?
- Why is it important for children to play with water and sand?
- What constraints exist in the school environment that could prevent such a corner from being installed or maintained? What solutions can we find?

GAMES AND MANIPULATIVES

This space usually has:

- modelling clay and tools
- clay with different degrees of malleability
- a variety of small objects and manipulatives (e.g. buttons, milk bag fasteners, paper clips, beads, tokens, cotton balls, cubes)
- materials for stringing or lacing (beads of various sizes, strings, laces, etc.)
- small plastic animals (farm or forest animals, insects, etc.)
- sets to sort (small bears of different sizes and colors, aquatic animals, dinosaurs, vehicles, etc.)
- stacking sets
- sets for screwing, unscrewing, hammering
- balls of different textures to manipulate
- foam, wood, or cardboard puzzles of 6, 8, 16, 25 or 35 different sized pieces
- logic games such as tangrams;
- observation equipment (e.g. colored lenses, translucent shapes, magnets, magnifying glasses)
- magnetic games where the children use a magnetic stick to move a ball
- ...



Annie-Claude Larocque's class,
authorized for MELS, 2014-2015.

Keep in mind...

- You need soft, malleable modelling clay that does not stain.
- The equipment should be in bins that are accessible to the children and facilitate clean-up.
- The children do not have to have access to all the manipulatives all the time; it is preferable to rotate the objects. Teachers should observe how the children play with the materials and give them challenges sometimes (e.g. "I have grouped these objects together, what do they have in common?").
- We must respect the children's abilities. For example, stringing small beads can be difficult for some children and this may discourage them from exploring and manipulating. As a result, the children may find it not worthwhile to play with this material.

Ask yourself...

- What materials can be provided to enable children to continue exploring?
- How do the children use the available materials?
- What are the factors that can inhibit the desire to manipulate or explore?
- What can be observed when a child plays with small objects (e.g., keys)?
- How can board games and manipulatives give the children an opportunity to interact with each other between children?
- What place do books have in the board games and manipulatives corner?

ART AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION CORNER (painting, crafts, music, etc.)

This space usually has:

- equipment for creative movement (e.g. rhythm ribbons, hula hoops)
- tempera paint, brushes, various types of paper, scissors, glue, finger paint, pastels, glitter, sponges, etc.
- musical instruments (homemade or not)
- picture books related to the arts
- recycled materials
- ...



Josée Blanchard's class, CS des Premières-Seigneuries

Keep in mind...

- It is important to have good quality art materials that the children can use with the least possible constraints. It is preferable to have small quantities of quality materials than an abundance of poor quality materials that break easily or don't work effectively.
- Teachers must show the children that art materials and equipment must be taken care of because they provide artists with the opportunity to create.
- The materials and equipment must be easily accessible to the children.
- The children should have access to the art corner regularly.

Ask yourself...

- Are the children familiar with the art corner routine?
- Why is it important for the children to be able to paint regularly?
- Why is it good for the children to stand while painting?
- How does the art and creative expression corner allow the children to talk and interact among themselves?
- What should the children be shown so that they can create artistic works (e.g. the possibility of using a model, a specific method of painting)?

TECHNOLOGY

This space usually has:

- an IWB
- one or more digital tablets
- equipment for robotics (WeDo hardware)
- ...

Keep in mind...

- The Service national du RÉCIT à l'éducation préscolaire is a resource that meets different needs with regard to the use of technological tools on a daily basis. The website can be found at <http://recitpresco.qc.ca> . Many of these resources have been translated into English and can be found in the Technology section of the Kinder Resource Garden website at <https://krgarden.ca/>.

Ask yourself...

- How do the children use the technology tools?
- How are these tools a resource for the teacher?
- What is the place of technology in the classroom?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of using technology?
- How does the use of these tools allow the children to talk and interact among themselves?



DISPLAY OF CHILDREN'S PRODUCTIONS AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

This space usually has:

- photos of children in action
- statements made by children
- children's reflections
- children's creations
- ...

Keep in mind...

- When a child takes time to create something, it is important to display the creation with care.
- Children are proud to show their creations to their parents.
- The corridor is a great public place to regularly display new productions. Don't forget to invite colleagues and students from other classes to visit.
- Displays show what the children can do and what is being done in the classroom.
- The art work and exhibits are ideally placed at the children's eye level.

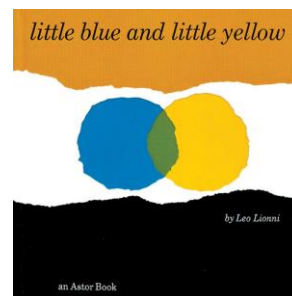
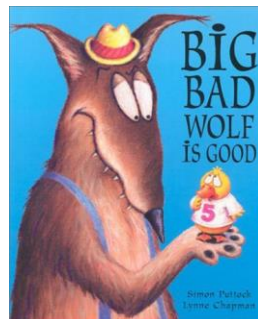
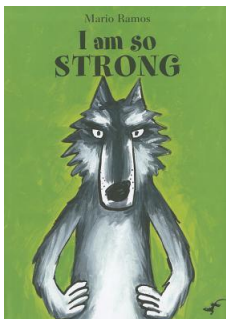


Ninon Denommée's class, CS Marguerite-Bourgeoys

Children's Literature

The children must have access to a variety of books in all play areas. Do not hesitate to choose board books.

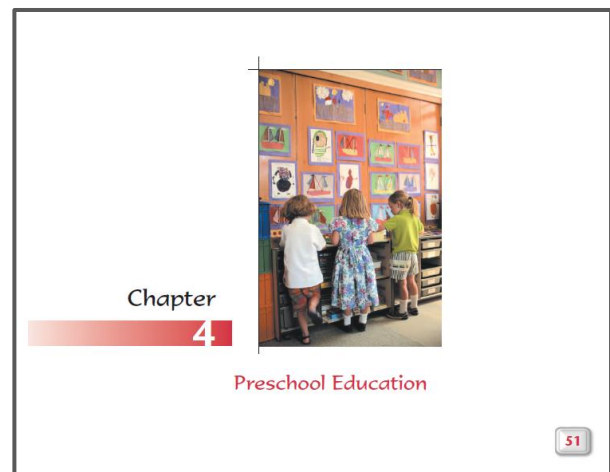
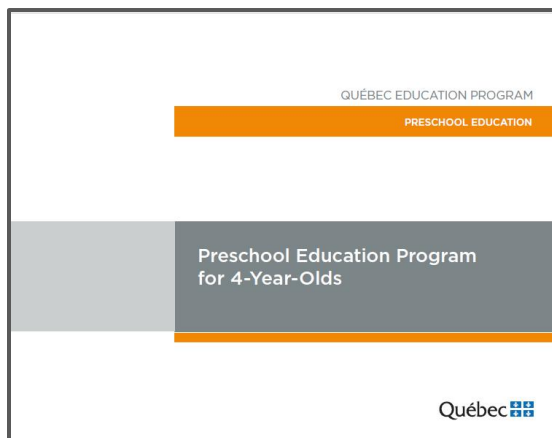
A great resource for selecting books by grade level or theme is the [Quebec Reading Connection](#).



Didactic materials

Teachers could use the following questions to help them select materials.

- ✚ How does the material address all the areas of global development in the different learning situations drawn from the world of play and the development activities?
- ✚ How does the material relate to the children's everyday lives and their human, physical and cultural environment?
- ✚ How does it contribute to the development of one or more domains? How does it cover all the components?
- ✚ How does it promote the interaction among domains?
- ✚ How does the learning material relate to the child's world of play, life experiences and relationships with other children, and how can it lead to new learning situations?
- ✚ How are the suggested pathways and tools related to the child's journey and the needs of certain children in preschool for 4-year-olds, as well as to the evaluation criteria and end-of-cycle expectations for preschool for 5-year-olds?



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