

Classroom Organization



Mélany Cannavino's class, 2021

Three orientations are being used to pursue the two main objectives of the mandate for the Preschool Cycle Program, which are the global development and universal and targeted prevention. These three orientations are: play, observation of the child's progress and classroom organization.

The classroom must be physically adapted to the needs of 4- to 6-year-old children and be both safe and easily accessible. It should be organized in such a way as to foster the children's participation and encourage them to explore different types of play (e.g. games that involve motor skills, manipulation of objects; symbolic play; construction games; board games)."¹ This document refers to essential elements that reflect the importance of careful classroom organization in preschool education.

¹ Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Preschool Cycle Program* (Québec: 2021), 10.

The classroom, the gym, the schoolyard and the outdoor environment as well as the equipment and technological devices used by the children are at the service of their learning.

Keep in mind

- › The environment should be spacious enough to accommodate large gatherings.
- › The environment should provide a variety of play areas that can accommodate the children's interests, allowing them to move around easily and play actively.
- › The space should be arranged according to the type of play (active play, games that require concentration, etc.) and materials (blocks, puzzles, etc.).
- › Children should have easy access to the materials available to them, as well as permission to use, select, handle and operate them.
- › The environment should include indoor and outdoor spaces and adequate equipment so the children can move vigorously.
- › The physical space should be arranged so that the teacher can see the whole group and ensure the safety of the children.

A quality environment should include spaces for:

- › gatherings
- › symbolic play
- › construction games
- › rule-based games
- › board games and manipulatives
- › science, math and play using water and sand
- › art and creative expression
- › music and mouvement
- › technological devices
- › display of children's productions
- › display of reference materials
- › reading and writing

Essential elements in classroom organization

The classroom should be organized in order to allow the children:

- › to be active and engaged
- › to take initiative
- › to observe, explore and manipulate
- › to use their memory
- › to develop their motor skills
- › to reflect on a project, imagine it and create it
- › to have access to picture books

The classroom arrangement must also:

- › take into account all areas of the children's development
- › take into consideration the different pace, interests, needs 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 characteristics and needs of children as defined in the Preschool Cycle Program (1, 19, 28, 34, 41 and 49), which may apply to 4- to 6-year-olds

About the organization of the materials

- › It is important to offer a variety of materials throughout the school year.
- › The materials to which the children have access must be clean, intact, safe and in sufficient quantity.
- › A rotation of materials can avoid overloading the classroom.
- › 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 bin of miniature animals and use it in the building blocks corner).

GATHERINGS

In general, the space provided for gatherings usually has:

- › an interactive white board (IWB)
- › the calendar for the month
- › pictograms for the day's schedule
- › the featured song
- › posters of rules of conduct with the expected behaviours
- › pictures or texts related to the current theme
- › children's productions, etc.
- › a comfortable area rug or mat of an appropriate size

Keep in mind

- › Children should be allowed to choose where they want to place themselves.
- › The space should allow the children to be comfortable and allow them to see what is displayed on the wall or what the teacher is showing.
- › To avoid information overload, posters should match the needs at the time.
- › To be effective, the elements displayed must be clear, adapted and distinct.
- › There should be sufficient space that can be easily rearranged or is large enough for children to move, dance, etc.
- › The space should be flexible enough to allow for small group and entire group play.
- › Furnishings and equipment must be at the children's height and be easily accessible to them.



Shannon Aubé's classroom, 2021

SYMBOLIC PLAY

In general, the space provided for symbolic play usually has:

- › the house area
- › materials that offer opportunities to act out different roles and imaginary situations (e.g. castle, dollhouse, zoo, farm, costumes, etc.)
- › building blocks, etc.



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Keep in mind

- › Symbolic play can take place in different play areas of the classroom.
- › These play areas should support symbolic play by offering a variety of materials and props.
- › At the beginning of the school year, this corner requires few elements (e.g. a blanket, a few articles of clothing, an easy-to-dress doll, empty food boxes from home, some plastic foods). The important thing is that the children can play there and create their own world.
- › Cultural diversity should be reflected in the play materials offered to the children.
- › Additional items should be made available throughout the school year, according to the level of play and the interests of the children.
- › Children should have access to pencils, paper, a notebook, magazines, flyers, picture books, etc.
- › The space can 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 about the human body, a tape measure, growth charts on the wall, etc.), a restaurant (bills, cash register, menus, placemats, pizza boxes, cookbooks, etc.), a hair salon, a daycare, a snack bar, an ice cream shop, etc.
- › 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 part of a rotation.

CONSTRUCTION GAMES

In general, the space provided for construction games usually has:

- › a variety of blocks (wood, cardboard, foam, etc.)
- › a variety of accessories of different categories (tools, blocks, cars, characters, animals, etc.)
- › materials related to the children's interests
- › an area rug or mat to keep children comfortable and absorb sound.



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Keep in mind

- › The corner must have enough open spaces so that the children can make long structures or roads.
- › There should be wooden blocks, cardboard blocks and foam blocks throughout the school year.
- › The space should be large enough for several children to build structures and add accessories.
- › At various times, easy-to-manipulate building sets should be added.
- › Children should be able to incorporate small cars, trucks, a garage, airplanes, a train, a fire truck, road signs, etc. into their constructions.
- › This space can also include paper, pencils, magazines books and laminated pictures of structures (e.g. buildings, skyscrapers, landscape with roads, railways, airplanes and train stations).
- › Children should be able to bring in the items they need to complete their construction from other corners.
- › They should be allowed to keep their construction after playtime to continue working on it at another time.
- › The block and construction corner should be located away from traffic areas.
- › Access to open shelves and labelling makes it easy for children to put things away.

RULE-BASED GAMES

In general, the space provided for rule-based games usually has:

- › cooperative games
- › board games
- › card games
- › association games
- › memory games

Keep in mind

- › Children in preschool often decide to set their own rules for play.
- › The children should be allowed to decide who they want to play with. They can play rule-based games in small groups or alone.
- › These games help children learn to respect rules, wait their turn and control their emotions. These games promote self-esteem.
- › These games develop attention span, listening skills, memory, logical thinking and fine motor skills.
- › Additions should be made throughout the school year depending on the level of play and the interests of the children.



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BOARD GAMES AND MANIPULATIVES

In general, the space provided board games and manipulatives usually has:

- › soft, malleable modelling clay that does not stain and clay modelling tools
- › clays of different degrees of malleability
- › a variety of small objects and manipulatives (buttons, milk bag fasteners, paper clips, beads, tokens, cotton balls, cubes, etc.)
- › materials needed 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 colours, sea creatures, dinosaurs, vehicles, etc.)
- › stacking sets
- › sets for screwing, unscrewing and hammering
- › balls of different textures to manipulate
- › foam, wooden or cardboard puzzles of various sizes and with various numbers of pieces
- › logic games such as tangrams
- › observation equipment (coloured lenses, translucent shapes, magnets, magnifying glasses, etc.)
- › magnetic games
- › interlocking toys (small bricks, etc.)

Keep in mind

- › Manipulative components help develop fine motor skills.
- › Tools for observation, sorting and manipulation can be used to introduce children to mathematical and scientific concepts and knowledge.
- › Materials may also be found in different play areas.
- › Materials must be kept on open shelves accessible to children.
- › Materials must be stored in bins that are accessible to children.
- › Soft, malleable modelling clay that does not stain is required.
- › Additions to and a rotation of the materials should be made throughout the school year depending on the level of play and the interests of the children.



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SCIENCE, MATHEMATICS, AND PLAY USING WATER AND SAND²

In general, the space provided for play using water and sand usually has:

- › natural objects, living things and scientific activities
- › sufficient and varied objects that children can count, measure, compare in size and shape (blocks, materials with numbers on them, etc.)
- › a water basin and other objects, such as funnels of different sizes, measuring cups with a pouring spout, plastic containers, medicine droppers, a squeeze bulb and plastic toys (ducks, boats, fishing rods, etc.)
- › a sandbox and other objects, such as plastic containers and moulds of different shapes, small cars, wooden spoons, shovels, buckets and sifters
- › a small broom, a dustpan and some cloths

Keep in mind

- › The sandbox or water basin should be located away from traffic areas, preferably next to the sink.
- › The area for play using water and sand provides an opportunity to explore scientific concepts.
- › Children should have access to water and sand indoors and outdoors.
- › The water basin must be emptied daily.
- › It is essential to use quality sand that does not cause dust or sand that moulds easily (“moon” sand, “kinetic” sand) and does not dry out.
- › Appropriate storage materials must be provided for the children's use.



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² It is important to note that science and mathematics are not limited to sand and water play, but can be experienced in any corner of the classroom.

ART AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Painting and Crafts

In general, the space provided for painting and crafts usually has:

- › tempera paint, brushes, various types of paper, scissors, glue, finger paint, oil pastels, glitter, sponges, etc.
- › picture books related to the arts
- › recycled materials

Keep in mind

- › It is important to have good quality art materials that the children can use with the fewest possible constraints.
- › Painting and crafts materials must be easily accessible and always available.
- › A wide variety of materials (different types of scissors, brushes, paper, etc.) becomes a source of inspiration and creativity.
- › Allowing room for the children's creative mind encourages original and personalized productions.



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MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

In general, the space provided for music and movement usually has:

- › equipment for creative movement (e.g. rhythm ribbons, hula hoops, etc.)
- › musical instruments
- › access to music and recording tools
- › listening devices, etc.

Keep in mind

- › Children enjoy listening to music alone or with other children. They can use headphones.
- › Allowing room for the children's creative mind encourages original and personalized productions.
- › Offering a variety of musical instruments and styles can lead to an openness to different cultures.



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TECHNOLOGICAL DEVICES

In general, the space provided for technological devices usually has:

- › an interactive white board (IWB)
- › one or more digital tablets
- › equipment for robotics, etc.

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 devices on a daily basis. The website can be found at <http://recitpresco.qc.ca/a-propos>. (in French only).
- › Children are often familiar with technological devices. They can be integrated into the classroom as tools for research, discovery and learning.
- › Access to robotics materials encourages problem solving.



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DISPLAY OF THE CHILDREN'S PRODUCTIONS

In general, the space provided for the display of the children's productions usually has:

- › photos of the children in action
- › statements made by the children
- › statements that support the content displayed (approach, intention, inspiration)
- › the children's productions

Keep in mind

- › Children are often proud of their work. Displaying it improves their self-esteem.
- › It is about carefully displaying their work in a chosen space.
- › Children are proud to show their creations to their parents.
- › The corridor is a "special" place to display their new productions. It reinforces the feeling of belonging to the group while brightening up the walls of the school.
- › The display shows what the children can do.



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DISPLAY OF REFERENCE MATERIALS

In general, the space provided for the display of reference materials usually has:

- › posters and pictograms that make children feel safe, help them find their way around, encourage their independence, etc.
- › labels attached to equipment, areas, bins, pockets, lockers, etc.
- › posters related to current themes, adapted to the children's interests

Keep in mind

- › The children should be able to easily locate the materials displayed (limited in number, at the children's eye level, etc.).
- › The materials displayed must be adapted to the needs of the children.
- › The children need to understand the meaning of the posters.

READING AND WRITING

In general, the space provided for reading usually has:

- › various children's books (varied content, shapes, sizes)
- › storage accessible to children (shelf, table, display)
- › a cozy corner for spending quality time (with an area rug, comfortable furniture, cushions, stuffed animals, etc.)
- › plastic letters, wooden letter blocks, etc.
- › ABC books and illustrated cards
- › paper and lead pencils, coloured pencils, markers


Keep in mind

- › Books as well as papers and pencils should be available to children throughout the day.
- › For children, books are opportunities and moments of happiness, sharing and enjoyment (images, stories, characters, etc.).
- › Books might also be found in different play areas.
- › The choice of picture books should be based on current topics and the children's interests, attention span and age.
- › There is a wide variety of quality children's books. Taking the time to discover them allows the children to make judicious choices that meet their needs.
- › Reading to children (with the whole class, in small groups or individually) is a favourable moment between the children and their teacher.



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ORGANIZATION OF MY CLASSROOM

 I continue to reflect on my classroom organization...

- › The space given to the children allows them to be active and to fully benefit from their play.
- › Materials must be accessible.
- › The materials meet the needs and interests of the children and their zone of proximal development.
- › The use of materials and the organization of the layout must be flexible.
- › The environment allows the children to:
 - express their curiosity
 - make their choices
 - explore, discover and learn
- › The safety aspect (space, furniture and equipment meeting safety standards, non-toxic and well-stored products, etc.).

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE DAY

 I continue to reflect on the organization of the day in my classroom...

Does my organization...

- › Allow students who come in (from the school bus, from the daycare, from home) to feel safe and welcome?
- › Give children the time they need to:
 - move about in the hallways?
 - eat?
 - get dressed and undressed, change their shoe?
 - prepare their bag?
 - recognize and understand daily classroom situations (routines, transitions, room changes, etc.) and feel secure in these situations?
 - express themselves (feelings, doubts, reflections, anecdotes, etc.)?
- › Allow children to enjoy two periods of free play per day (45 to 60 minutes continuously)?
- › Allow for outdoor play (schoolyard and park)?
- › Allow children to be active (explore, discover and experiment)?
- › Encourage spontaneous exchanges between children?
- › Allow me to have time to listen, observe, interact with and guide the children?

A safe, inclusive environment that is comfortable and responds to the curiosity and intelligence of the children and our pedagogical intentions