

## Questions about Preschool Education

### What is the difference between kindergarten and daycare?

That's a question that all kindergarten teachers have had to answer at one point or another. Although often phrased differently, this question targets the specific nature of kindergarten, its mandate, the learning done by children and the role of the teacher.

It may be a fellow teacher or a family member remarking, "Everyone knows that kindergarten teachers do nothing but play all day." Or a parent of a child in your class who says to you in September, "My child has been going to nursery school since he was 6 months old, he's played enough. I hope he's going to start learning!" Or, it may be a mother who states, "My daughter knows how to count to 100, and she knows her alphabet, colours and shapes. I'm worried she'll be bored this year." Who hasn't heard remarks such as "at daycare, my son does much more than in kindergarten where all he does is play."

Indeed, the differences between kindergarten and daycare deserve serious consideration.

This consideration is even more important when we learn what is happening elsewhere in Canada. In some areas, certain school boards are replacing kindergarten teachers with daycare educators to reduce costs. Imagine if that happened here! How could we justify the specific nature of kindergarten in Québec?

Discussing differences means thinking about one's teaching practices, and not judging the role of daycare educators. Like teachers, they have their own specific mandate.

Thinking about our practices means stopping and asking ourselves: "What distinguishes kindergarten from daycare?" The Preschool Education program development committee has had to reflect on this as well. We studied what is specific to kindergarten teachers. Our conclusion is that it is our teaching approach that sets us apart.

We define teacher intervention as a professional act that must be carried out. The same applies to daycare workers. However, teachers have an obligation to intervene: intervene to improve instructional planning; intervene to better observe and evaluate children in order to promote learning; intervene to be more effective.

I would also add that we observe children through different lenses. Our interpretation of the data gathered and our subsequent actions determine what and whether children will learn. Children will learn only if intervention takes place.

For example, Annie, Arianne, and Alexander are sitting at a table stringing beads. When asked "What are they doing?", I expect a kindergarten teacher to provide a completely different answer from "They are stringing pearls." They are doing more than that: they are acquiring skills that involve several components of their development: cognitive, motor, socio-affective and language. Teachers must be able to identify these components and make the connection between them and the program competencies. From these observations, teachers will decide to intervene in ways that enable children to learn, enriching the situation and taking into account that challenges should be

adapted to each child's learning pace. Intervening is a professional act that requires reflection.

Given that preschool education is the gateway to Québec's education system, it is through us that parents will come to understand the idea of learning as process, what competencies look like in our classroom, how evaluation is an aid to learning, etc. It is therefore our job to explain fully and to make parents (and others) understand our specific role as preschool education teachers.

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