

Chapter 4

Preschool Education

Introduction

For many children in Québec, preschool education marks the start of learning to interact in a group, and for all children it is the beginning of school. They arrive in kindergarten at various stages of development, which are the result of both their personal and family history and their sociocultural background.

Kindergarten is a special place, where children continue their development, increasing their learnings, acquiring new learning strategies and forming relationships with other children and adults. This social experience allows them to discover themselves as individuals, to become aware of their potential, to structure their personality and gradually to increase their autonomy. Kindergarten is also a place of intellectual stimulation, where children discover the pleasure of learning and lay the foundation for future learning. The richness and variety of their experience allows them to increase their understanding of the world, to construct their knowledges and to become acquainted with the various subject areas of elementary school.

Preschool education has a threefold mandate: to serve as a rite of passage that gives children a liking for school; to foster children's overall development by motivating them to exploit their full potential; and to lay the social and cognitive groundwork that will prepare children for their future schooling and enable them to continue to learn throughout their lives.

The program enables 4- and 5-year-olds to develop psychomotor, emotional, social, language, cognitive and methodological competencies related to self-knowledge, life in society and communication. With the support of the teacher, children take part in learning situations drawn from their world of play and their life experiences and begin to play the role of students, active and capable of thinking.

The program also allows children to begin developing certain intellectual, methodological, personal and social, and communication-related competencies that are cross-curricular, and to explore topics that are of interest to them in the broad areas of learning.

CHILDREN AND PLAY

Through their play and spontaneous activities, children express themselves, experiment, construct their learnings, structure their thoughts and develop their worldview. They learn to be themselves, to interact with others and to solve problems. They develop their imagination and creativity. Spontaneous activity and play are their way of mastering reality; this justifies giving play a central place in preschool education and organizing the space and time accordingly.

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Activities related to children's concerns and interests are by nature cross-curricular. They are rooted in children's

everyday lives and their human, physical and cultural environment. They give children the opportunity to discover various means of expression and creation and to become aware of the different languages that support and construct learning. In addition, they foster the development of knowledges, behaviours and attitudes that help children do things methodically and exercise elementary forms of critical judgment of people and things.

CLASS ORGANIZATION

The preschool class is organized to encourage children's active participation. The classroom, the gym and the school yard are places where children may observe, explore, manipulate things, reflect, imagine, exercise memory, plan projects, test their abilities and develop their motor skills. Learning centres stimulate their curiosity and allow them to explore various areas of learning: languages, the arts, mathematics, the social sciences, and science and technology.

PEDAGOGICAL EVALUATION

In preschool education, evaluation involves the individual children, their peers, teachers and parents. Observation is the favoured means of evaluation: it fosters and respects the learning process and focuses on the children's attitudes, behaviours, processes, strategies and productions. Observation makes it possible to follow the children's progress in the development of their competencies.