

# Evaluation of learning

At the Preschool and Elementary Levels

FRAMEWORK

Québec



# EVALUATION OF LEARNING AT THE PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY LEVELS

## Framework

Direction générale de la formation des jeunes

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## INTRODUCTION

The current education reform involves a policy shift to promote educational success for the greatest possible number of students. One of the major elements of this reform is without a doubt the renewal of the curriculum, which includes the Québec Education Program and evaluation of learning.

The educational policy statement *Québec Schools on Course* maintains that evaluation is a central component of the curriculum. Given the close link with learning, evaluation practices have to be adapted to the characteristics of the new Québec Education Program.

### Evaluation of learning in the Québec Education Program

*"The Québec Education Program is characterized essentially by its competency-based approach and its focus on the learning process. Knowledges are organized in terms of competencies to make learning meaningful and open-ended for students. The conceptual framework adopted by the Québec Education Program defines learning as an active, ongoing process of construction of knowledge."* (p. 4)

Learning is viewed as an active construction of the learner's knowledge that builds on his or her cognitive and affective resources and is influenced by his or her cultural environment and social interaction. It is therefore a process that is cognitive, affective and social in nature.

This concept of learning affects evaluation in several ways. To begin with, it calls for the creation of learning and evaluation situations that reflect the students' environment, that involve interaction among classmates, that enable students to construct their thoughts on the basis of what they already know and that give them some control over the way in which learning and evaluation activities are conducted. This concept also recognizes the place and role of knowledge in the development of competencies, because there are no competencies without a knowledge base.

The Québec Education Program defines a competency as *"a set of behaviours based on the effective mobilization and use of a range of resources."* (p. 4) This definition points clearly to important characteristics that must be taken into account during learning and evaluation activities.

A competency is **an appropriate performance in a given situation**. In this context, knowledge must serve as a tool for both action and thought development. The evaluation of students' competency therefore involves verifying their ability to use a variety of resources appropriately in a given circumstance.

A competency is **complex** because it reflects the ability to combine a set of acquired resources in an effective manner for a specific purpose. For example, writers mobilize a wide variety of resources to produce a piece of written work. They must be effective in using all the resources

needed to write coherently and in accordance with the requirements of the language. Writing a poem and writing a letter call for different approaches. Evaluating a competency involves placing students in situations that require the mobilization of a variety of pertinent resources. It is also important to evaluate competencies in a contextualized manner, since the resources to be mobilized depend on the context in which they will be used.

A competency is **cumulative** because it must be developed over time and because it can always be improved. For example, one can develop the ability to speak a second language over an entire lifetime. Since a competency is cumulative, students should be given enough time to learn and to develop the competency. This is especially a challenge for subject specialists who see students once a week at most and rarely for more than 60 minutes. Moreover, we cannot say categorically that someone either has or has not acquired a competency, since it is possible to identify different levels of competency.

A competency is **comprehensive and integrated** in the sense that it involves using a variety of resources that are not limited to knowledge acquired in school. These may also include resources related to a student's personality, interests, experiential learning, etc. Because the resources that students use in a given situation do not result solely from formal learning, evaluation should take into account the whole range of resources the students actually use.

In short, teaching, learning and evaluation are not considered in sequence as distinct points in the pedagogical process, but rather in dynamic interaction. To the extent that evaluation allows students to consider their own processes metacognitively and teachers to make use of their observations to foster students' progress, evaluation promotes learning.

In this context, the educational community is currently raising a number of questions regarding guidelines and methods in evaluation. Which evaluation practices are in line with the competency-based approach of the Québec Education Program? What aspects of prior practices should be retained? What should be evaluated and how? When? How will parents be informed of their children's progress?

This document proposes some answers to these questions and addresses other concerns regarding evaluation at the pre-school and elementary levels. This framework for the evaluation of learning is intended mainly for teachers and those responsible for implementing the Québec Education Program, especially school administrators. This framework presents a concept of the evaluation of learning that is consistent with the requirements of the Québec Education Program and the Policy on the Evaluation of Learning.

## CHAPTER I

# THE NATURE AND PURPOSES OF EVALUATION

Evaluation of learning is defined as a process that leads to a judgment on the knowledge acquired by a student and the competencies developed. This judgment serves as a basis for decisions and actions and must be founded on a sufficient amount of pertinent information.

In accordance with the stated views of the reform regarding evaluation of learning, the values that guide evaluation are justice, equality and equity, as well as coherence, rigour and openness.

Competencies are evaluated on the basis of meaningful situations, that is, situations that give students a chance to learn while appealing to their interests and motivating them. To the extent that they are conducive to student self-evaluation and provide teachers with information to make their teaching more effective, evaluation promotes the development of competencies.

At the preschool and elementary levels, evaluation serves two purposes: **support for learning** and **recognition of competencies**. Both functions are presented separately, but the corresponding processes are not necessarily independent and sequential. The very act of regularly gathering information to help students learn also allows teachers to determine the degree to which students have developed competencies.

### 1.1 Evaluation as Support for Learning

Evaluation serves to support learning whenever the goal of evaluation is to support the student in acquiring knowledge and developing competencies. To fulfill this function, evaluation must be integrated into the teaching and learning process and be used to monitor both student learning and teaching practices.

#### Regulation of learning by the teacher

Teachers can carry out three types of monitoring during the learning process: interactive, retrospective and proactive.

Regulation, whether it is interactive, retrospective or proactive, can pertain to different learning focuses such as the processes used, the final result or previously acquired knowledge. It can also cover other aspects of the learning process like student motivation or involvement. Whatever its focus, it should promote individual student progress.

**Interactive regulation** takes place during learning activities and involves providing students with immediate feedback. This type of informal communication between teacher and student cannot be entirely planned, since it occurs in response to needs that emerge during learning activities.

*Examples of interactive regulation:*

a) During a particular learning sequence in an English Language Arts class, the teacher chooses to target one particular characteristic of reading progress: using an appropriate strategy to get at meaning when encountering a difficult passage. The teacher reviews the variety of strategies outlined in the Québec Education Program and now wants to verify which ones the students appear to call upon regularly. She makes a point of noting how selected students are progressing. With some students, there is evident progress, and she notes this. With others, there is an attempt to apply a strategy, but support is needed and she arranges a reciprocal reading exchange with a peer. Two other students need more immediate intervention, and this is offered with a "Try this." In all cases, the teacher's observations and the nature of the intervention are recorded as soon as possible.

b) A preschool activity involves the competency To affirm his/her personality. Given a list of available learning station activities, the teacher asks the children to each choose one that interests them and that they find enjoyable. Afterward, the children will meet with their parents to discuss their preferences and interests. After choosing their learning station activity, the children share their interests and preferences. The teacher also asks them questions: What do you want to do? What materials will you select? Will you be working alone or with others? During this discussion, the teacher notes whether the children have found appropriate ways of meeting their needs, which is the evaluation criterion that has been selected for this situation.

c) For a learning and evaluation activity involving the competency Interagir en français en se familiarisant avec le monde

francophone, the subject specialist moves around the classroom while the students are busy with a group activity. The teacher responds immediately to needs demonstrated by students. Students are encouraged to ask for help by using expressions on display for them, such as "Comment dit-on ... en français?" "Nous avons besoin d'aide." "Est-ce que c'est correct?" "Nous ne comprenons pas." etc. The kind of support provided by the French teacher throughout the learning and evaluation activity stresses the importance of interactive regulation for the students to successfully complete an activity, task or project.

**Retrospective regulation** involves reviewing tasks that were not successfully completed during the first step in the learning process. It allows teachers to track growth in specific abilities of individual students over time and to adapt pedagogical practices in order to deal with the problems identified.

*Examples of retrospective regulation:*

a) A teacher compares the last two stories that a student has written. The teacher notes that in both cases the plot is well constructed, but the student has painted a clumsy portrait of the main character. The teacher decides to help the student modify the description of the hero of the second story by encouraging him to make use of the descriptions in the stories he is reading. Later, the teacher prompts the student to read the new version to the other students in the class so that they can appreciate the quality of the description of the character.

b) After exploring a subject, a class decides to further pursue the question How do you make plants grow? A team of four students decides to sprout seeds under



*various conditions. As usual, they must record the whole procedure in their lab notebooks. After checking the lab notebooks, the teacher notices how much trouble one of the students is having in organizing her notebook. The teacher then helps the student find a way to improve how she records the steps taken. She will compare notes with a teammate from time to time. At the beginning of every period, the student will summarize the work completed in an earlier period for the team. Once the task is completed, the student may compare the description of steps taken with the previous description so that she can identify her progress and pinpoint what was helpful. This makes it possible to take the following two evaluation criteria into account: "correct transmission of scientific and technological information" for the competency To communicate in the languages used in science and technology, and "analysis of the steps in the procedure" for the cross-curricular competency To adopt effective work methods.*

For a subject specialist, feedback is often verbal and intended for the entire class or a small group of students. Personalized feedback may also be given to students with specific difficulties.

**Proactive regulation** is based on observations made during previous learning activities, and allows future learning situations to be modified. This type of intervention can be used in two ways. When students are experiencing difficulties, the teacher can adapt learning situations to suit their needs. When students are progressing rapidly, the teacher can devise learning situations that will enable them to consolidate their competencies in other contexts.

*Examples of proactive regulation:*

*a) A teacher notices that when reading assignments are too far removed from students' concerns, or too complex for them, some students do not understand or are not interested in them. For subsequent activities, the teacher decides instead to offer them reading assignments tied to their real interests, particularly something that is reasonably challenging.*

*b) A teacher notes that a student has provided an extremely accurate evaluation of the quality of his own work. The teacher comments on this and asks him to help other students.*

To summarize, although there are three types of regulation during the learning process, **interactive regulation** is nevertheless the most important, because students can receive immediate feedback. The teacher can therefore respond to the students' questions and reactions by providing appropriate information.

### **Regulation of learning by the student (self-regulation)**

Teachers seek to develop the students' autonomy and the central role they play in their own learning. They help students gradually develop the ability to make adjustments to their own learning process. Students must be aware of both their own learning approach and their own progress, and when they encounter a problem, they must be able to rely on various strategies to rectify the situation. In this case, students are engaging in a metacognitive activity that helps them construct their knowledge.

The exchange of ideas within the classroom can help students self-regulate. Ideas can be shared in different forums (e.g. a discussion involving a student and the rest of the class, two students working together, or a teacher-student exchange). As much as possible, students should be placed in situations that force them to give or receive information, so that the class becomes a real learning community. In this way, the students develop the habit of discussing their ideas with their classmates. They share their doubts and questions, explain their procedures, present their achievements and describe the problems they encountered during the learning situations. While certain subject specialists may not have much time to spend with students, it is in their interest to take advantage of this kind of activity to gather information on which their judgments will be based.

Exchange of ideas provides students with an interactive way of learning how to make their own adjustments. The teacher can help the group work efficiently by reviewing the relevant aspects of the situation and by getting students to become aware of important points and develop their social skills. If an exchange of ideas is to be instructive, the teacher must ensure that students engage in intelligent discussion.

Self-evaluation has proved to be a good way of motivating students to become aware of how they carry out a task effectively. When students evaluate themselves, they can, among other things, comment on their work method, explain the problems they encountered and reflect on the strategies they have used. The teacher must create a framework conducive to self-evaluation: he or she must provide students with the possibility of making choices and encourage them to assume responsibility and take risks.

Students must be presented with many different opportunities for self-evaluation and must be provided with feedback on the accuracy of their evaluations.

### **Monitoring of pedagogical practices**

During learning situations, evaluation not only guides students through the learning process, but also helps teachers make adjustments to their pedagogical practices. These practices, and especially planning, may have to be adjusted. Are the learning context and the description of the task in question appropriate? Do all students understand what is expected of them? Do they have the knowledge and skills needed to carry out the task? Are they motivated to participate in the proposed activities? Do they have enough time to complete the activities? Have they integrated new learning? By examining these questions, teachers can adjust their practices and thereby help their students make progress.

## **1.2 Evaluation for the Recognition of Competencies**

Evaluation for the recognition of competencies occurs when evaluation is used to determine the degree to which a competency has been developed, which is generally the case at the end of each cycle.

To report on students' competency development, teachers consider all the relevant information to prepare an end-of-cycle progress report. This information is interpreted in light of the end-of-cycle outcomes specified in the Québec Education Program and the competency levels (see 4.3).

The cycle team thus provides teachers in the next cycle with information that will help them design appropriate remedial or enrichment activities for students.

An official document for the recognition of competencies is also included in the report card (see Chapter V).

## CHAPTER II

# THE ACT OF EVALUATING

As stated in the first chapter, evaluation of learning is a professional act that involves the teacher making judgments about the competencies that students have developed and the knowledge they have acquired, with a view to taking decisions and action. Evaluation of learning is a complex process that comprises various stages: planning, information gathering and interpretation, judgment, and decision.

Although the stages in the evaluation process are presented in sequential order, this does not mean that evaluation is a rigid and linear process. It is possible to complete some of these stages, return to one of them to finalize it and continue the process to the end.

As well, not all stages of the process are meant to be rigorously applied to all learning and evaluation situations. In the case of a spontaneous and informal evaluation, for example, there is little room for planning, and judgment may take place at the same time as the information gathering and interpretation.

### 2.1 Planning

All of a school's personnel need to collaborate in planning how to help students develop subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies, while taking broad areas of learning into consideration. An overall plan is prepared by the cycle team or preschool teachers. Then, on the basis of this initial planning, individual teachers can plan the specific learning and

evaluation situations for which they are responsible.

#### **Planning carried out by the cycle team or preschool teachers**

At the beginning of the school year, the cycle team or the preschool teachers should schedule general planning meetings for teaching and evaluation. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure collaboration between homeroom teachers, subject specialists, nonteaching professionals and school administrators. At the elementary level, in addition to fostering a common vision and common goals, this joint planning guarantees coherence among the various teaching and evaluation activities aimed at developing the subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies.

While members of the cycle team plan the teaching (choosing broad areas of learning, and subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies likely to be required in various situations or projects, etc.), they must also plan the evaluation of learning. Making choices among the subject-specific competencies does not mean putting some competencies aside: all subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies must be taught and evaluated. The choice has to do with which competencies will be evaluated in each learning unit.

Whether evaluation by the teacher, teacher-student coevaluation, self-evaluation or peer evaluation is involved,

the planning meeting is the time to discuss how information will be gathered. It is also an opportunity to discuss which evaluation instruments the team should develop. Finally, this meeting can also be used to decide how parents will be informed about their children's progress. Should students keep a portfolio? What information will it provide during the learning process? What type of information should be communicated? What will the end-of-cycle progress report look like?

It should be noted that it is very difficult for subject specialists to be included on all the cycle teams of the school(s) where they work. However, a school's subject specialists might get together to decide which cycle team to join. They could then become the spokesperson for the other subject specialists on that cycle team. Other organizational models would also allow subject specialists to participate on the cycle team. What is important is to aim for a realistic method of sharing evaluation responsibilities among all the cycle team teachers.

Essentially, throughout the two years that students spend in a cycle, the goal should be on getting them to progress toward the achievement of the end-of-cycle outcomes determined for each competency. The same applies to preschool education in terms of the outcomes specified in the Québec Education Program.

Evaluation instruments should be chosen to take into account students' active participation in evaluation. Evaluation should be planned without making a distinction between the time devoted to learning and the time devoted to evaluation, since evaluation is embedded in the learning situations themselves and also allows the development of competencies.

### **Readjusting the planning**

The overall planning of evaluation should be adaptable to situations experienced in the classroom so that evaluation activities can be used as learning opportunities. The planning should provide an overview of the evaluation within the cycle as a whole, without, however, being constraining. Frequent meetings of preschool teachers or the cycle team are essential so they can periodically review and adjust the planning to ensure the most effective follow-up of student learning.

By focusing on themes, issues and projects that allow the pursuit of educational aims associated with the broad areas of learning, the cycle team can agree on how to make use of tools to keep significant records of student learning. This will allow the cycle team to note the development of competencies in various contexts and will facilitate discussion by the team when the time comes to assess a student's progress.

### **Consultation with the school team**

It is strongly recommended that members of the cycle team work together. The school team, consisting of preschool teachers, cycle teams, nonteaching professionals (e.g. remedial specialists, psychologists) and school administrators, is responsible for the overall planning of learning and evaluation. The planning should make it possible to cover all the elements of the Québec Education Program (broad areas of learning, and cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies) in a logical progression.

Each cycle team must make use of all the cross-curricular competencies by exposing students to learning situations favourable to the development of these competencies, and by regularly observing students' progress.

It is therefore necessary, when planning activities for a given cycle, to consider the planning of other cycles so that there is continuity in the development of competencies throughout elementary school.

Lastly, members of the school team must work together to decide how to manage and share resources in information and communications technologies. Members of the school team must also select or design a report card, taking into account the school board's model, if available.

### **Planning carried out by the teacher**

On the basis of the planning carried out by the cycle team or by preschool teachers, each teacher develops a plan of activities. Teachers define the learning and evaluation situations they will use, in addition to those selected during initial planning. A homeroom teacher might decide to use a logbook with students in reading and to include excerpts in the portfolio in order to measure the students' progress with respect to this competency. A teacher might also develop a self-evaluation instrument for problem-solving in mathematics (see example in Appendix II). In preschool education, teachers can plan specific times in their schedule for observing each child.

Whenever possible, it is important to plan complex situations, as these are what help students develop competencies and enable teachers to evaluate them. Thorough knowledge of the Québec Education

Program allows teachers to better plan such situations.

Note that competency levels, which are presented in Chapter IV, may guide teachers in their planning and allow them to adjust requirements pertaining to each competency during a cycle.

There are several ways to go about this process. Teachers may develop the learning and evaluation situations themselves and then share them with their colleagues, or they may develop others with them. Teachers may also select situations from the materials already available and adapt them to students' needs, or work from the learning and evaluation situations developed by school boards or the Ministère de l'Éducation. Provincial examinations at the end of elementary school may also provide teachers with examples of learning and evaluation situations (see Appendix I). Naturally, in complex situations, teachers cannot foresee everything that will occur; the project, research or inquiry can easily evolve differently from what was initially planned. As well, because it is difficult to determine in advance all the resources that might be used along the way, the evaluation focuses may have to be updated. Teachers should therefore be able to adapt their strategies rapidly in order to make the most of any situation likely to promote learning.

Teachers should also plan and design specific learning activities necessary for the development of student competencies. These specific exercises should only be used insofar as they correspond to a concrete need. For example, to solve a mathematics problem, students should be able to multiply numbers. Evaluation of the concept of multiplication is not an end in itself, but is an integral part of the

development of competencies. Complex learning situations and activities that involve the acquisition and evaluation of essential knowledges are therefore interrelated.

## **2.2 Information Gathering and Interpretation**

To evaluate student learning, teachers must gather and interpret a sufficient amount of useful information to make a judgment, both during and at the end of preschool or of an elementary school cycle.

### **Information gathering**

Because evaluation is integrated into the teaching and learning process, information gathering occurs primarily during regular classroom activities. The teacher must therefore be available to carry out the evaluation activities. How the students are grouped together, the physical arrangement of the classroom and the classroom atmosphere are all factors that can influence the time and energy that a teacher has to gather information, and the quality of the information gathered.

Gathering information often results in a change in teaching or learning activities. On the one hand, the information provided to students helps them improve their methods or their work. On the other hand, teachers may use the information to modify certain elements of their teaching, for example, the way the teams are formed, the time allotted for a task or the degree of difficulty of a task, so as to better adapt the activity to the students' needs and situational constraints.

On the basis of the evaluation targets established during the planning, the teacher chooses appropriate methods of gathering information. Observing, asking the students questions and analyzing the students' work are the principal means used. Information can be gathered informally or more formally, using specific tools, but a balance should be maintained between the two approaches.

### ***a) Spontaneous and informal evaluation***

Often, during regular classroom activities, the teacher simply needs to observe the students and ask them specific questions to obtain the information required to provide them with the appropriate support and guidance. This form of spontaneous and noninstrument-based evaluation is beneficial because it gives students immediate feedback, making them aware of an ineffective work method, helping them to improve a process or allowing them to correct an error. It also gives the teacher a chance to make on-the-spot adjustments to the teaching activity or strategy (e.g. clarifying instructions that have been given, providing additional explanations to a small group or to the whole class).

### ***b) Formal and instrument-based evaluation***

While spontaneous and informal evaluation is important, evaluating the development of competencies requires the use of specific instruments. Teachers should plan time for using instruments (e.g. observation checklists or individual conferences) to gather information. By including these evaluation periods in their schedule, they can ensure that they will have

sufficient time to devote to each student. Moreover, since it is essential to foster students' sense of responsibility for their learning, the use of coevaluation and self-evaluation instruments is quite appropriate.

For students who are experiencing difficulty, it is sometimes necessary to formalize the information-gathering process by using an instrument adapted to their particular situation in order to isolate certain errors or identify an erroneous process. Although evaluation practices should not be cumbersome, using a variety of instruments (observation checklists, self-evaluation, peer evaluation) helps with information gathering in different learning and evaluation situations (such instruments are described in Chapter IV).

### **Interpretation**

The information gathered must be analyzed and compared with a point of reference in order to understand its meaning. An analysis of the information leads the teacher to compare the results achieved or processes used by the student with what is expected in the Québec Education Program. Teachers may also use the competency levels developed by the Ministère de l'Éducation, which are based on the outcomes and evaluation criteria related to each competency in the Program (see 4.3).

#### ***a) Interpretation of results during the cycle***

Interpretation with the goal of assessing the progress achieved often takes place just before report cards are to be handed out; however, it can also be carried out at other times when teachers consider they have gathered sufficient information. It is

up to each teacher or the cycle team to decide when interpretation will take place, according to the learning situations and the students' rate of learning. For, while analyzing just one result or just one observation may prove extremely useful for making immediate adjustments, relying on a single piece of information is not adequate for a judgment or a decision. Information must be gathered frequently in order to follow a student's progress and identify strengths and weaknesses.

For each competency to be evaluated, the teacher analyzes the examples of the student's work available and the information recorded. The teacher compares the results obtained at different times in order to form a judgment on the progress made. This analysis involves interpretation based on the evaluation criteria associated with the competencies.

It is important to involve the students by having them analyze their work. Like the teacher, they compare the processes used and results obtained at different times, identify their progress, achievements and difficulties encountered and compare their interpretation to the teacher's. For young children, particularly at the preschool level, support and guidance are required to help them analyze their work. They can be asked to concentrate on a limited number of competencies, in the presence of the teacher. Older children who are not used to examining their work may also benefit from the teacher's help.

These analysis periods are extremely valuable: they not only offer teachers an opportunity to take a step back from their work so as to better adjust their pedagogical practices, but they also help students become aware of their progress.



*Example:*

*In the daily writing workshop sessions, the teacher encourages a wide variety of writing activities that address the writing competency in English Language Arts: To write self-expressive, narrative and information-based texts. The teacher gives the students opportunities to write purposefully—a birthday greeting, an invitation to a class party, a funny comic strip. Nathalie writes all the time, but always the same thing, almost the same words: "Today I got up, I got dressed. . . . I went to school. . . . I got off the bus." By now, Nathalie has over ten such pieces in her portfolio! Upon reflection, the teacher notes the repetitive pattern and hypothesizes that perhaps Nathalie needs to spend more time, with some guided assistance, planning her writing, giving it a specific purpose. Perhaps Nathalie also needs to talk first to bring out the details that go with her writing in order to make it interesting. The teacher decides to follow through on this surmise and makes a point of spending time with Nathalie prior to writing. This way, Nathalie will no doubt uncover what she wants to write about and how to make her writing of interest to others. The teacher's reflection on Nathalie's work and her interpretation of what accounts for the repetitive pattern serve to nudge this young student along.*

**b) Interpretation of results at the end of preschool and at the end of a cycle**

At the end of preschool and at the end of a cycle, results are interpreted in order to assess the degree to which the student has developed the competencies. Observations are compared with what a student is expected to achieve at the end of preschool or end of a given cycle in the

Québec Education Program. The analysis is based on information gathered in complex situations, taking into account the end-of-cycle outcomes, the achievement context and the evaluation criteria related to the competency.

As for cross-curricular competencies, the Québec Education Program describes their development throughout the various cycles. These statements serve as the foundation for the competency levels. Information related to the development of a cross-curricular competency can be interpreted by situating the student's progress with respect to the major stages in the process of competency development, as described in the competency levels.

## 2.3 Judgment

After having gathered and interpreted information using various points of reference (evaluation criteria, the student's results at different points during the cycle, outcomes for the end of preschool and the end of a cycle), the teacher now has to make a judgment, that is, arrive at a conclusion by considering certain factors such as the time and resources the student had available.

A judgment regarding the development of cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies may only be made to the extent that the student has had numerous opportunities to develop them in a variety of contexts. The teacher should make sure to have gathered enough relevant information that permits meaningful observations.

Judgment plays a dominant role in evaluation. It must reflect, as accurately as possible, the student's progress. During the cycle, the judgment is temporary, because

the student is still developing and has the possibility of improving. At the end of the cycle, the team of teachers could work together to arrive at a judgment on the degree to which a student has acquired competencies. Homeroom teachers and subject specialists may collaborate on cross-curricular competencies and arrive at a judgment regarding competencies in their respective subjects.

When making a judgment, decisions are pedagogical in nature, even at the end of a cycle. For example, a decision to provide a student with specific support measures should be based on an in-depth analysis of the information available. This is not a matter of simply adding up the results to determine the degree to which a competency has been developed. Moreover, the diversity of the information gathered (examples of student work, observations, interview summaries, self-evaluations) cannot be considered by using a mathematical formula, however sophisticated that formula may be.

Judgment is a professional act that cannot be completely objective. However, teachers must take the necessary steps to make an informed judgment. They must determine the targets, use appropriate tools, collect and record a sufficient amount of information, and interpret it in light of relevant reference points. In some cases, the information used to make a judgment could include results of external evaluations such as end-of-cycle evaluations conducted by school boards or provincial examinations (see Appendix I).

Collaboration between preschool teachers or between members of the cycle team also allows teachers to compare information, discuss its interpretation and make

enlightened judgments based on a common understanding of the Québec Education Program.

## 2.4 Decision

When a judgment is rendered, the teacher must make a decision. During a cycle, decisions focus on the pedagogical process and thus on immediate action to be taken. For example, the teacher has judged that although some students are making progress, they are experiencing some difficulty with the Geography, History and Citizenship Education competency *To interpret change in a society and its territory*. The teacher decides to have these students work together, so he can help them in this regard.

At the end of a cycle, decisions concern the recognition of competencies and are recorded in the end-of-cycle progress report that follows students to the next cycle, according to the rules determined by the school or the school board.

It is easy to see that pedagogical or administrative decisions relating to the evaluation of learning are important. Teachers must therefore keep information on which such decisions are based, using the record keeping tool of their choice (see 4.2).

A decision always leads to the communication of information that fulfills one of the purposes of evaluation (i.e. support for learning or the recognition of competencies). This information is intended for the student, parents or any other person concerned.

## CHAPTER III

# CLASSROOM EVALUATION PRACTICES

This chapter presents guidelines to ensure that classroom evaluation practices are consistent with the Québec Education Program and the Policy on the Evaluation of Learning. It covers evaluation focuses, evaluation conditions, learning and evaluation situations, tasks and evaluation criteria.

### 3.1 Evaluation Focuses

Since the main purpose of evaluation is to assist students in their learning, anything that helps them to adopt better ways of learning and allows teachers to adjust their pedagogical practices may be evaluated. In a complex situation, many different evaluation focuses are possible with regard to the students: the knowledge they have before beginning a new learning sequence, the process or strategy they use, the results, their motivation, etc.

Student productions, in particular, may be either durable or short-lived. For example, for a plastic arts creation, the product is durable and may be evaluated later on. However, the performance of a piece of music must be evaluated immediately (unless it is recorded).

When a student's procedure is evaluated, there is no final product as such. For example, the teacher should observe the student performing a task to evaluate recognition and identification strategies, or reading comprehension strategies. The teacher can also observe the student's actions, questions and decisions to better understand how the student learns, even if

this information was not specified as an evaluation focus.

### Competencies

The problems and questions that interest students are often complex. How can the ocean be cleaned up after an oil spill? What is the point of war? Why do we have to go to school? Does God exist? Finding solutions and answers to such questions and problems requires the application of a range of subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies that will not all be evaluated simultaneously. Choices need to be made to gather enough relevant information on the targeted competencies and to be able to manage the situation effectively.

Cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies are presented in the Québec Education Program as targets to be attained. As such, they are the focus of learning prescribed in each of the elementary cycles.

Cross-curricular competencies are generally developed through learning and evaluation situations used to acquire subject-specific competencies. However, since cross-curricular competencies represent specific learning, observable behaviours related to their development need to be defined so that their level of development can be assessed.

Teachers use various methods to evaluate the development of cross-curricular competencies, including observation,

questions, conferences, and analysis of the final outcome. Evaluation methods are chosen according to the type of competency and are adapted to the age of the students. For example, in preschool education and Cycle One, observation and oral questioning are the best means of evaluating the competency of exercising critical judgment, whereas in Cycle Three, the teacher can ask the students to give a written explanation.

Unlike the subject-specific competencies, there are no end-of-cycle outcomes in the Québec Education Program for cross-curricular competencies. Evaluation therefore consists solely in monitoring student progress.

### Knowledge

For each subject-specific competency, the knowledge to be developed and evaluated should be identified. The **Essential Knowledges** section of the Québec Education Program should be consulted to determine the strategies, concepts and techniques on which the evaluation should focus.

For example, for the Science and Technology competency *To propose explanations for or solutions to scientific or technological problems*, the teacher will evaluate exploration strategies in particular (e.g. diagramming the problem, formulating questions) in order to help students use them properly. For the Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction competency *To appreciate the living Catholic tradition*, evaluation could focus on strategies that will help students grasp the essentials of a story and tell it (explore, analyze, narrate, etc.). In the process, the teacher can also evaluate certain

strategies related to exploring, sharing and listening for the competency *To use language to communicate and learn* in English Language Arts.

### 3.2 Learning and Evaluation Situations

Learning and evaluation situations for the development of competencies take into account contexts ranging from the daily experiences of students to broad civic or scientific topics. Such situations are conducive to peer interaction, allowing students to construct new knowledge based on prior learning and to control the sequence of actions to a certain extent.

When teachers are required to pronounce on the progress made during a cycle, or on the degree to which students have developed certain competencies at the end of a cycle, they should base their judgment on tasks that have allowed the students to demonstrate their overall competencies in meaningful and complex situations that require students to use essential knowledges in a variety of contexts. The tasks to be performed correspond to activities that the students must engage in at school or in everyday life. Learning and evaluation situations can extend over several periods, days, or even weeks. Often, they involve making some type of presentation to an audience of classmates, students from other classes, or parents. Giving students opportunities to demonstrate how they have developed their competencies in this way increases their motivation.

The starting point for an evaluation situation is a question, a goal to be attained or a problem to be solved. Students' concerns and interests are taken into account, helping them to better understand

the world in which they live. Students should be motivated and inspired to participate. The choice of a starting point is an important step in developing a learning and evaluation situation, because it sets the tone. In effect, this initial situation is used to define the educational aim as it relates to the corresponding broad areas of learning.

To determine the initial situation, teachers can adapt topics proposed by students, or come up with their own topics. At all times, this situation must generate relevant, achievable tasks and must bring several competencies into play. In short, it should give rise to a complex learning situation.

The situation must be a rich learning opportunity so as to promote the acquisition of knowledge and the development

of competencies by taking into consideration students' prior learning. To determine the number of competencies to be evaluated, they should consider several factors such as the characteristics of the situation, the degree to which students are able to pursue their inquiry and the time available. However, teachers should strive for balance in taking into account cross-curricular competencies, subject-specific competencies, related knowledge, and other resources used by students.

The table on the following page reviews certain characteristics of a learning and evaluation situation.

<b>Characteristics of Learning and Evaluation Situations</b>	
<b>Realistic</b>	<p>Requires that students solve problems related to everyday life, civic life or the world of science</p> <p>Involves a production that is intended for a public and whose use is specified for the student</p> <p>Promotes the use of a variety of materials to perform the task</p> <p>Takes into account the time and resources available</p>
<b>Meaningful and stimulating</b>	<p>Offers stimulating challenges, adapted to students' needs and interests</p> <p>Fosters cooperation</p> <p>Promotes reflection on the processes used</p> <p>Requires that students construct a response</p> <p>Takes into account student diversity (learning rates and styles, etc.)</p>
<b>Flexible and adaptable</b>	<p>Allows for observation of the process and the outcome</p> <p>Allows for adult support</p> <p>Shifts according to students' reactions and results</p> <p>Allows students to explore a problem further</p> <p>Allows for the possibility of adjusting to time constraints</p>
<b>Coherent</b>	<p>Is consistent with the Québec Education Program (cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies, broad areas of learning)</p> <p>Makes it possible to evaluate competencies according to the criteria and outcomes of the Québec Education Program</p>
<b>Rigorous</b>	<p>Requires students to produce quality work</p> <p>Clearly presents expectations and instructions to students</p> <p>Informs students of evaluation criteria and encourages them to take these criteria into account (self-evaluation)</p>

### 3.3 Evaluation Conditions

An evaluation situation often involves cooperation among students. When students work as a group to solve a problem that is meaningful to them, their interest is sustained and they are motivated to apply efficient strategies to perform a task or attain a goal. Collaboration, meaning a pooling of individual knowledge and competencies, is a determining factor in the learning process. However, the teacher evaluates the individual performance of each student.

As in any learning situation, students have access to a range of resources: books, people, and information and technologies. The teacher specifies what resources may be used, and makes sure that restricted access to particular resources does not give any group of students an unfair advantage.

It takes time to develop a competency, and not all students progress at the same rate. In some learning and evaluation situations, the students do not yet possess the knowledge or competencies they need to perform the required tasks alone. In this case, the teacher provides an appropriate and progressive level of support. At the beginning, the teacher can ask the students questions and do the task with them. Gradually, the students will participate more, until they are able to function in a self-initiated manner. For other students, a question or a suggestion will be enough to engage them. When it is time to make a judgment concerning the development of a competency, the teacher should take into account the direct support the student has received.

### 3.4 Tasks

The teacher develops or selects tasks as part of the learning and evaluation situation. The task specifies what students must do to develop competencies and acquire subject-specific learning. These tasks are linked to the subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies described in the Québec Education Program. Tasks should not be selected arbitrarily or at random. They are valid only if they are designed to contribute to learning or evaluation.

The degree of complexity of tasks must be adapted to the students. In other words, tasks should be sufficiently easy for the students to handle using their current knowledge, and sufficiently difficult to oblige them to apply various approaches and learn something new. The degree of complexity varies with the number of constraints involved and the operations students must carry out, as well as the scope of the work to be completed. The document *Competency Levels by Cycle—Elementary School* provides information teachers will find useful in developing tasks that present students with a realistic challenge.

Activities relating to specific elements of a competency and those focusing on competencies as a whole should not be separated. Activities for systematically acquiring essential knowledges in class have a place among all of the learning and evaluation situations proposed to students. Within competency development activities, teachers plan for the acquisition and evaluation of the essential knowledges prescribed by the Québec Education Program. These specific exercises will only be used insofar as they are relevant in allowing students to perform complex tasks requiring them to use their

competencies. Essential knowledges are therefore evaluated using a micro-approach, because this facilitates the regulation of learning (by the students themselves or by the teacher, to verify what the whole group has learned, for example, or to pinpoint difficulties encountered by a particular student). Such evaluation requires the kind of learning and evaluation tasks that isolate the elements of a competency. However, these tasks are used in conjunction with tasks focusing on competencies as a whole.

The teacher describes each task and what is required to complete it, as well as the appropriate resources. The teacher provides clear, written instructions, taking care not to limit the students' initiative, since they must retain a degree of control over the sequence of actions required to complete the task. Where possible, the teacher should leave the students free to make choices concerning the subject, the approach used, the way in which the final results are presented, the physical resources used, and so on. The teacher should also specify the sequence and duration of tasks.

### **3.5 Evaluation Criteria**

Once the task is defined, the teacher determines the evaluation criteria. These criteria will allow the teacher to evaluate

either the effectiveness of the process or procedure used, or the quality of the student's work. Given the students' freedom to act and the actual process applied by each, any final product may vary widely from one student to another, or from one group to another. There is therefore no single right answer. Criteria should therefore be developed allowing for evaluation of the process.

Evaluation criteria for subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies are chosen on the basis of those indicated in the Québec Education Program. They are adapted to the characteristics of the situation, the time of year, students' prior learning, and the subject-specific competencies and content targeted by the task. An example of an adaptation of evaluation criteria to the characteristics of the situation is presented in Chapter IV. In keeping with the objective of openness, the criteria must be made known to the students, which will contribute to their sense of effectiveness and their motivation. The teacher must ensure that they fully understand what is expected of them.

In short, the choice of evaluation criteria is critical, because the interpretation of results and the judgment are based on them. The criteria are used to develop the evaluation tools presented in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER IV

# EVALUATION TOOLS AND MEANS

Evaluation tools are used to gather the information needed to make a judgment concerning the development of competencies and acquisition of knowledge. The quality of the judgment depends greatly on the quality of the evaluation tools used. Some tools are more appropriate than others for giving students the high-quality feedback that will help them progress.

In this chapter, three types of tools are presented: information gathering tools, record keeping tools and interpretation tools.

### 4.1 Tools Used to Gather Information

Information gathering is an important part of the act of evaluating. Appropriate and effective means must therefore be chosen. How teachers decide to gather information depends on their pedagogical aim, the competencies to be evaluated, the evaluation criteria selected and the tasks to be completed.

Appendix II provides several examples of tools that can be used to gather information. The following pages present some examples of evaluation tools to encourage teachers to gradually introduce a greater range of tools for the evaluation of learning.

### Observation checklist

The observation checklist is a tool used to record the specific features of an action, a sample of student work or a process, using a list of observable elements and a fixed way of recording the observations made. The checklist may be used by teachers, by a group of students jointly evaluating their performance, or by a student engaging in self-evaluation.

The observation checklist is made up of a set of criteria and a progress scale. The progress scale is that part of the checklist which gives an indication of the quality or number of behaviours observed, using a number of stages.

A descriptive observation checklist is by far the type that gives students the most information for deciding on the actions required to perform a task. In this type of checklist, each stage describes what has been observed, a more precise and useful approach than vaguely formulated stages (e.g. poor, average, excellent). Since it provides support for the user, the observation checklist helps to make the observation more objective.

The criteria presented for each competency in the Québec Education Program provide the basic elements for preparing an observation checklist. Since these are rather generic, they should be stated as specific to the task presented.

In Cycle Two of the Science and Technology program, for example, one of the criteria for the first competency is *use of an approach geared to the nature of the problem or set of problems*. If the situation the students are given concerns the buoyancy of materials, specific criteria could be formulated such as *use of various solids and liquids or the collection of the relevant data*. The same approach is taken with the rest of the criteria in the Québec Education Program.

Observation checklists may be used analytically, that is, by gathering information related to each criterion separately, so that teachers can let students know which aspects they need to improve and tailor their support to those particular aspects. Checklists can also be used for general (or holistic) purposes, when information needs to be gathered to support a judgment relating to a whole competency. This type of information is used to pinpoint the students' development in terms of competency levels (see 4.3).

### Verification list

The verification list is a set of statements describing a series of actions, qualities or characteristics relating to the evaluation focus. The statements are factual elements and are presented in a well-defined order. The verification list allows the presence or absence of a particular element to be noted with a minimum of interpretation, but gives no indication of the quality or frequency of the characteristics observed. It is easier to prepare, however, than a descriptive observation checklist. The verification list is often used to help students remember the steps in a process

or procedure. The teacher can use it to observe students in action or students can complete them on their own by means of self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation is one way to allow students to participate in the evaluation process and to reflect on their actions, processes, strategies and achievements. Whatever tools are selected (checklists, conferences, portfolios, etc.), they must relate to the targeted competency and the teacher's pedagogical aim and they must serve as support for learning.

### Conferences

A conference is a dialogue between the student and the teacher, structured by a series of questions that the student must answer. It is more formal than a simple questioning of the student by the teacher, since it is generally designed to permit the teacher to understand the student's thinking about a specific aspect of a competency.

To conduct a successful conference, the teacher must create a relaxed atmosphere, since the student must feel comfortable if the interview is to be beneficial. During the conference, the student should do most of the talking. The more the student talks, the easier it will be for the teacher to understand how the student thinks and what the student really knows.

Individual conferences take time, but they are a powerful tool to help students progress. While students are talking, they become aware of how they do things. The conference makes it possible to individualize evaluation, since it can focus on the aspects most likely to promote a student's competency development.

The teacher can also conduct group conferences. The teacher asks the whole class questions, and the students have an opportunity to hear about other ways of doing things. Another possibility is to form teams and to ask each team to answer one question. Each student suggests a possible answer to the team. In both cases, the students must be able to listen to the answers given by others, but must also have an opportunity to make their individual contribution. Another approach consists in pairing up the students in the class with students in a higher cycle, and having the latter conduct conferences with their younger peers. Of course, the students should be prepared beforehand to ask questions and write down their observations.

#### **4.2 Tools Used to Record Information**

Since the application of a given competency is strongly dependent on the context in which it is used, it is important to evaluate competencies in several different contexts and to keep significant records of students' work.

To be able to interpret the information gathered, teachers record information on a regular basis. There are different ways of doing this. Teachers can choose the methods best suited to the group involved and to their own style. A combination of different methods and tools is often most effective, but information must be recorded so it can be consulted on other occasions, either alone or with colleagues, as well as used to justify the judgments made.

#### **Tools used by the teacher to record information**

##### ***a) Teacher's logbook***

The logbook is a tool used by teachers to record information on a daily basis. It can be used to note observations concerning certain students, as well as the context in which the observations were made. Observations on the atmosphere in the classroom or the way students react to certain activities can also be recorded in it. Teachers can also include remarks on their own teaching. The logbook can combine all these forms of observation.

The logbook is useful only if it is kept continuously. This is essential if it is to be used to monitor the progress of each student or to improve teaching practices. The logbook has been used in preschool for many years now, and teachers in other levels of education could benefit from it too.

##### ***b) Anecdotal records***

Anecdotal records include a brief description, as objective as possible, of precise facts observed by the teacher. Recording the facts allows the teacher to provide a relatively objective analysis of the situation. This tool is often used with students experiencing particular difficulties. A series of facts provides more reliable data for making a judgment than an isolated observation. Anecdotal records may be included in the teacher's logbook, although some teachers prefer to keep both records and a logbook.

**A tool used by the student to record information: the logbook**

The student's logbook is a tool whose general scope is defined by teachers, according to the way they intend to use it. It is mainly used by students to record questions, difficulties, achievements, opinions, summaries of knowledge, etc.

Teachers regularly enter comments in each student's logbook. Once students get into the habit of exchanging written comments with their teacher in their logbook, many of them begin to enjoy expressing their thoughts in writing. For some students, this exchange can become an extremely meaningful experience that has a positive effect on their writing.

The student's logbook will be useful if the following conditions are fulfilled:

- Students are given clear instructions.
- Each student and the teacher uses the logbook continuously.
- The teacher gives regular feedback (answers to questions, reactions, comments).

**A tool used by the teacher and the student to record information: the portfolio**

The portfolio is an organized collection of a student's work to demonstrate the development of competencies. The portfolio is more than just a collection of work, however, since it also contains thoughts and comments. Students can hand in the collection, analyze their work, record their observations, recognize possible improvements, set goals and challenges, etc. By

getting students to examine their accomplishments critically, the portfolio promotes the development of metacognitive abilities.

The work included in the portfolio is selected by the student, or jointly by the student and the teacher, or by the teacher alone. The portfolio allows students to reflect and examine their strategies, strengths and needs. More than just a collection of documents, this type of portfolio records each student's thoughts, ideas, accomplishments and progress in relation to the development of competencies.

Students work on their portfolios on a daily basis. They regularly add documents, enter comments and reorganize the contents. Any of these activities may trigger discussions with the teacher or with other students. From time to time, the teacher adds a particular piece of work to the portfolio of certain students or asks the class to include a piece of work, explaining why the documents must be added to the portfolio.

Ideally, the students should be required to examine their portfolio and reorganize its contents regularly. The teacher could, for example, give them time at the end of the day to add documents and write down information. The task takes only a few minutes, and can also be performed during free time. The students can add comments to their completed work, add extra pieces of work, update self-evaluation forms, and so on. The students review their portfolio one last time before it is presented. In this way, students become increasingly autonomous and responsible. Guided by an adult, they take initiatives, set goals for themselves and choose activities.

Properly used, the portfolio allows students to develop more responsibility for their own

learning. While encouraging students to analyze the contents on an ongoing basis, it requires students to evaluate themselves and make choices. Students become more conscious of the processes they are using.

By examining students' portfolios, teachers can evaluate students' progress and recognize their strengths and weaknesses. This enables teachers to talk regularly with the students about the competencies they are developing, their interests, and their attitude toward activities. These discussions can take place during regular classroom activities, but because these discussions are of limited duration, students and teachers do not have time to analyze the portfolios in depth. This means teachers must schedule time to meet each student individually. These meetings are essential, because, with the help of the teacher, students can assess the level they have reached. The official nature of the individual meetings, and the need to

prepare for them, forces students to analyze the content of their portfolio in more detail and to assemble their thoughts. The portfolio takes on an importance it would not otherwise have. The meetings also give the students an opportunity to share with their teacher thoughts and questions they might have kept to themselves.

As part of preparing for promotion to the next cycle, students could be asked to choose, with the teacher's help, the essential pieces documenting their level of competency. Teachers of the next cycle may also be consulted for their opinion on which documents will be most useful to the students in continuing to develop their competencies. This ensures continuity in the progression of learning.

The following table shows the relationship between various aspects of evaluation and the characteristics of the portfolio.

## Evaluation and the Portfolio

PURPOSE	Evaluation	The Portfolio
<b>Support for Learning</b>	Is integrated into the dynamics of student learning	Involves students in their learning (as a tool for reflection)
	Must encourage students to play an active role in their evaluation activities and thus increase their accountability	<p>Allows students to increase their ability to self-evaluate</p> <p>Teaches students to make choices</p> <p>Encourages students to better understand themselves and focus on their strengths</p> <p>Allows students to reflect on their procedures, strategies and accomplishments so that they can improve and correct them and ultimately succeed</p>
	Must be carried out in a way that respects diversity and difference and must seek ways to ensure the educational success of all students	<p>Promotes feedback during the learning process, particularly during individual conferences</p> <p>Encourages students to reflect on their strengths, needs, errors, interests, challenges, objectives, etc.</p>
	Involves the collaboration of all stakeholders, while taking into account their respective legal responsibilities	Encourages interactive processes among students, teachers and parents
	Constitutes a process that involves making a judgment about the development of competencies and the acquisition of knowledge	<p>Shows student progress because it tracks performance over time</p> <p>Is used to assess competencies developed by students</p>

Adapted from: *Utilisation du portfolio au primaire, 1<sup>er</sup> cycle*, sous-comité régional de la Montérégie, June 2001.

### **4.3 Tools Used to Interpret Information in Elementary School: Competency Levels**

Competency levels describe the major stages in the development of competencies, thereby helping teachers to interpret information and situate the student's level of development of a competency as an integral concept, in order to orient learning or draw up a progress report.

Serving as guidelines to recognize certain stages in the development of competencies, the competency levels fall within the general field of interpretation by criteria and provide teachers with a common frame of reference to help them interpret their observations and form opinions about the development of competencies. However, the competency levels do not replace the Québec Education Program. They detail, for each competency, different levels of development along a continuum. Each level must be understood and interpreted in light of the descriptions provided in the Program.

The sets of competency levels present an overall picture rather than a list of characteristics to be verified separately. Teachers are encouraged to step back and identify which of these pictures best corresponds overall to the various information collected on the competency of a student during a given period of time. The competency levels are references to be used when interpreting different observations and when forming opinions on the level of competency development by the student; they should not be considered observation or correction grids.

For subject-specific competencies, there are two to four levels per cycle. The last level for each cycle corresponds to the end-of-cycle outcomes specified in the Québec Education Program.

For the cross-curricular competencies, there is no reference to the end-of-cycle outcomes in the Program. These levels describe only the developmental trajectory of the competency. This decision does not lessen the importance of the cross-curricular competencies; it simply confirms their distinctive nature. The cross-curricular competencies are composed of four levels for the whole of elementary school.

Except for the levels that represent the end-of-cycle outcomes for each cycle, the competency levels are not linked to definite points in the school calendar.

#### **Function of the competency levels and their uses**

##### ***a) Support for learning***

During the course of a cycle, the competency levels enable teachers to gain an overview of the students' learning in order to situate the development of their competencies. In this way, they serve as an instrument for regulating learning. When a teacher has observed and gathered a sufficient amount of relevant information to determine which level best corresponds to the development of a student's competency, the levels can be used to detect difficulties a student is having in developing competencies and to decide if the teaching approach needs to be adjusted.

This use of the competency levels can also help teachers complete the report cards that are sent to parents during the cycle. For example, after determining the student's level of competency, the teacher indicates (depending on the form of report card adopted by the school) whether the student is progressing well or with difficulty.

***b) Recognition of competencies***

At the end of the cycle, information collected during the course of the cycle is analyzed to situate the student's level of development for each of the competencies at the appropriate level. Therefore, the competency levels serve to help teachers recognize the competencies.

The general formulation of the levels requires persons authorized to work with the student throughout a cycle to exercise their professional judgment, based on pertinent observations, in the end-of-cycle progress report. If certain aspects of a competency have been marginally acquired, the judgment may call for finer distinctions to indicate this. For example, it could be stated that a student's competency is below a certain level, without necessarily corresponding to the preceding level, or higher than a certain level, without necessarily attaining the subsequent level.

This opinion must then be entered in the end-of-cycle progress report. For subject-

specific competencies, taking into account the end-of-cycle outcomes specified in the Québec Education Program and the form of report card adopted by the school, teachers indicate, for example, whether a student has surpassed the expected level, attained the level, partially attained the level, or has not attained the level.

Although competency levels cannot be used directly in reports to parents, they can help when communicating information to parents during parent-teacher conferences. With the help of explanations and by illustrating aspects of the student's competency based on examples observed from activities, the teacher can help the student and the parents appreciate progress made in the competencies.

The competency levels also serve as a communication tool for teachers within the same school or in different schools. Using the levels, teachers can determine how students are progressing in their learning and more clearly share information that can support the progress of students within a given cycle or from one cycle to another. For example, teachers will all have the same information on what is expected of a student at Level 3 in reading. Progress reports based on the competency levels allow teachers receiving the students to continue the work started in the previous cycle. The competency levels contribute to continuity between cycles and to a better adjustment of pedagogical practices to the needs of students.



## CHAPTER V

# COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS

In order to ensure ongoing collaboration between the school and parents, it is essential to inform parents regularly about their child's progress and the degree to which the child has developed specific competencies. Teachers must give parents regular updates, noting the child's particular strengths and the difficulties encountered. Information must also be communicated to students to help them in their learning process and increase their motivation and sense of accountability.

Communication can be official and take the form of a report card. Other types of communication may be used as well.

### 5.1 Report Cards and Progress Reports

As opposed to other forms of communication described later in this chapter, the report card is an official document prescribed by the Basic School Regulation. Report cards generally contain information in summarized form and an overview of the student's progress in developing competencies. In this sense, the report card does not replicate the Québec Education Program. It should contain the essential information needed by parents to collaborate in their child's success. This is why it is useful to supplement the report card with other forms of communication.

In preschool education, the last report card includes a progress report indicating where the student stands in relation to the outcomes specified in the Québec Education Program.

In elementary school, the last report card of a cycle includes a progress report on the student's learning and indicates the degree to which subject-specific competencies have been developed in relation to the end-of-cycle outcomes specified in the Québec Education Program. It also provides information on the development of cross-curricular competencies. In addition to informing parents, students and school administrators, the progress report also provides the teachers in the next cycle with the information they will need to offer support measures for students who need help to continue learning. The report therefore serves as evaluation for the support of learning and for the recognition of competencies.

#### Distribution of reports

Reports cards must be issued to parents as frequently as required by the Basic School Regulation. However, in order to take into account the learning pace of students and to provide them and their parents with useful, meaningful information, the school team may recommend to the school principal that reports be distributed at certain key points in the learning process, depending on the students' progress. As a result, the report cards for various classes in the same school may be issued at different times, with the exception of the end-of-cycle progress report.

### Report card development process

Section 96.15 of the *Education Act* stipulates that the principal is responsible for approving, on the proposal of the teachers, the standards and procedures for the evaluation of learning. Since the report card is part of procedures, members of the school team are responsible for it. However, a ministerial statement in June 2001 indicated that school boards are each to establish a framework for the development of a report card and make it available to schools in their territory so that a certain degree of uniformity can be ensured. The schools may use the report card as is, or adapt it to suit their needs, while complying with the Act.

Developing a report card is part of the overall evaluation process. This is an ideal opportunity to become familiar with the Québec Education Program and its theoretical foundations. Because the report card must reflect what is learned in the classroom and must be related to evaluation practices, this communication tool should be carefully considered before it is developed. Time should be set aside to discuss and think about the new orientations, based on current practices.

Following are some suggestions to help in developing a report card.

1. The report card must be complete, but concise. It should contain all the information called for in the Basic School Regulation (identification of student and school, etc.).
2. The report card must be clear and understandable to parents, teachers from other schools, and other personnel in the education system. For this reason, it may be appropriate in certain cases to simplify the formulation of

competencies in the Québec Education Program so that parents can readily understand what is being evaluated. Thus, although all subjects must appear on the report card (as prescribed by the Basic School Regulation), schools could decide not to include every competency in a subject. This approach does presume, however, that teachers have evaluated all the competencies.

3. It would be good to provide space for comments from parents, students, teachers and school administrators, as required.
4. Hard-to-read type faces (e.g. very small type) should not be used on the report card. Moreover, colour type and symbols or over-size paper formats are not recommended, because this would make the report card hard to reproduce and file.
5. It should be possible to develop a report card format that can be delivered electronically.
6. The legend used for report cards issued during a cycle should reflect the judgment made regarding the development of competencies.

*Examples:*

*The student is developing competencies:*

- 1- *very satisfactorily*
- 2- *satisfactorily*
- 3- *with a few difficulties*
- 4- *with great difficulty*

*or*

*The student is progressing:*

- A- *very easily*
- B- *easily*
- C- *with difficulty*
- D- *with great difficulty*

7. The legend used for the end-of-cycle progress report (last report card of the cycle) should reflect the judgment made regarding the degree to which end-of-cycle outcomes have been attained.

*Example:*

*The student:*

- 1- *exceeds end-of-cycle outcomes*
- 2- *has attained end-of-cycle outcomes*
- 3- *has partially attained end-of-cycle outcomes*
- 4- *has not attained end-of-cycle outcomes*

According to the orientations of the education reform, a descriptive report card is preferable at the elementary level because it allows for qualitative judgment. However, in keeping with a school's environment, grades can be used at the end of the cycle. Whether students' results are expressed as grades or ratings, or are compared to the group, their competencies must be judged by comparing their performance **to what is expected in the Québec Education Program**. Thus, whether a student's results fall above or below the group average does not indicate whether he or she has acquired the targeted competency.

Since parents are the main recipients of report cards, they should be able to express their opinion on the report card they receive. Moreover, whatever report

card model is used, it should be considered a work in progress. As understanding of the new Québec Education Program grows over the years, report cards should be modified to reflect improvements. For this reason, the report card should be revised after being used for a while. It will then be possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the report cards and suggest potential improvements. It is important to revise the model in light of teachers' experience as well as parents' comments.

## 5.2 Other Forms of Communication

Because evaluation is an integral part of the learning process, students must regularly receive information that allows them to be aware of how they are doing so that they can make any necessary adjustments. Parents need to be informed frequently so that they can help in preventing and correcting any learning difficulties that may occur. Even when students are making good progress, regular and frequent information reinforces student motivation and allows parents to better monitor their child's progress.

In the educational policy statement *Québec Schools on Course*, it is suggested that schools should have the option of selecting other ways of communicating with parents, in addition to the report card. Similarly, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, in *Évaluer les apprentissages au primaire : un équilibre à trouver*, maintained that report cards cannot replace regular student work on which teachers write their comments, parent/teacher conferences, or any other form of communication between the school and students' families. Frequent communication between the school and family

ensures that information contained in the report cards will not be a surprise to parents.

Certain forms of communication were presented in Chapter IV, because some of them are also tools used to record information.

Students' **logbooks**, for example, can be sent to parents on a regular basis. A parent can read his or her child's logbook to better understand the child's progress. This means of communication provides dynamic interaction between the teacher, the student and the parents.

The **school agenda** may also be used for communicating with the family, provided that it has been designed for this purpose. The best record keeping tool for informing parents of student progress is without a doubt the **portfolio**. When shown to parents, it serves as a powerful communication tool, particularly when students

are the ones to show it to their parents. Portfolios allow parents to learn about their children's achievements and to use them as a basis for discussion.

Moreover, even when portfolios are not used, other evaluation tools, as well as student achievements that include comments from the teacher, may occasionally be sent to parents. These include student work annotated by the teacher, self-evaluation checklists, logbooks, etc., which can help parents to recognize their child's strengths and difficulties.

Report cards can be supplemented by using more familiar tools to report on student learning. The reason for resorting to less official means of communication is mainly because they are a way to provide feedback in the classroom. Their use allows the teacher and parents to support students' learning in an ongoing and concerted manner.

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## GLOSSARY

*The definitions that follow are not exhaustive; they give the meaning of the terms used in this document.*

### **Communication**

Transmission to students and parents of information regarding the development of competencies.

### **Competency**

A demonstration of learning behaviours based on the mobilization and effective use of a set of resources in a given situation. A competency is the application of prior and new knowledge and resources to problem-solve in real-life situations. It is progressive, durable and transferable.

### **Criterion**

One aspect of an actual manifestation of a competency, used as a reference point in making a judgment.

### **End-of-cycle progress report**

Assessment of the development of competencies provided in the last report card of the cycle and intended for students and parents. The progress report is also used to establish support or enrichment measures for the subsequent cycle for students who need them.

### **Evaluation strategy**

Set of measures and resources planned for use in an evaluation process.

### **Evaluation task**

Activities to be performed by a student during an evaluation situation.

### **Information gathering**

Stage in the evaluation process that involves the rigorous gathering of a sufficient amount of relevant information, to support the decisions to be made or actions to be taken.

### **Interpretation**

Stage in the evaluation process that involves comparing information to a point of reference in order to understand its degree of acquisition.

### **Judgment**

Stage in the evaluation process that involves a decision regarding the degree to which competencies have been developed.

### **Observation checklist**

Instrument designed to direct the attention of the observer to record the observable elements of a process or product.



**Planning**

Stated intentions of the evaluation process to be applied in order to complete the actions undertaken to promote learning.

**Portfolio**

Collection of completed works selected by a student and/or the teacher to demonstrate the development of the student's competencies, as well as comments on his or her development.

**Regulation**

A process related to ongoing evaluation whereby the teacher or student makes changes to teaching practices and/or learning processes so that the student can continue to make learning progress.

**Report card**

Official document for parents and students that presents and records the judgments made concerning the competencies developed by a student during the course of learning or at the end of a cycle.

## APPENDIX I

### COMPULSORY PROVINCIAL EXAMINATIONS AT THE END OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Among the orientations pertaining to the evaluation of learning at the elementary level announced by the Ministère de l'Éducation in June 2001 are compulsory provincial examinations in basic subjects at the end of elementary school.

This measure does not invalidate the school boards' power under the *Education Act* to impose local examinations at the end of each elementary cycle. These examinations also do not affect any rules that school boards may implement concerning promotion from elementary to secondary school, unless they decide otherwise.

These examinations will specify tasks to evaluate the degree to which students have developed their competencies by the end of their elementary studies, and this in

terms of the outcomes specified in the Québec Education Program. These examinations are prepared by the Ministère and administered to all students in Québec under uniform conditions and according to an official calendar.

A sampling of the examinations will be corrected by the Ministère, making it possible to verify that students everywhere in Québec have acquired the knowledge and developed the competencies outlined in the Québec Education Program. These examinations may be corrected by the schools and the results used as part of the end-of-cycle progress reports given to parents.

These examinations will be administered starting in the 2004-2005 school year.

## APPENDIX II

### EXAMPLES OF TOOLS USED TO GATHER INFORMATION

Appendix II provides several examples of tools that can be used to gather information. These examples are proposed mainly for information purposes.

These examples have been adapted from various tools developed by the Ministère or the educational community. We would like to thank the following individuals who contributed to the development of these tools: Christiane Bourdages-Simpson, Western Québec School Board; Francine Giroux, Monique Marchand, Nathalie Michaud, Commission scolaire des Grandes-Seigneuries; Pierrette Jalbert, Société GRICS; Lorraine Desmarais, Commission scolaire des Patriotes; Christine Larose, Commission scolaire de Saint-Hyacinthe; the sous-comité régional de la Montérégie; teachers in pilot schools.

#### **This appendix includes:**

- a coevaluation checklist for two cross-curricular competencies (Cycle Two)
- an observation checklist for music (Cycle One)
- questions for self-evaluation at the preschool level
- a self-evaluation form for a cross-curricular competency (Cycle One)
- a verification list for mathematics (Cycle One)
- a conference outline for English Language Arts (Cycle Two or Three)

This example presents a **coevaluation checklist** for evaluating the two following cross-curricular competencies with Cycle Two students: *To use information* and *To solve problems*. When planning tasks and assigning them to students, the teacher can decide to evaluate either one of these competencies, or both of them. Moreover, for a particular competency, it is not necessary to evaluate each element of a competency at the same time. It is up to the teacher and the student to judge which elements seem most relevant. When information on several tasks can be recorded on a single checklist, it is easier to see a student's progress.

The use of such coevaluation tools encourages an exchange between the teacher and student. Where the two evaluations differ, the student will have to explain his or her evaluation.

## COEVALUATION CHECKLIST

## Legend

<b>Green:</b> Often	<b>Yellow:</b> Sometimes	<b>Red:</b> Rarely
---------------------	--------------------------	--------------------

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

Intellectual  
competencies

	Myself				The teacher			
<b>TO USE INFORMATION</b>								
a) I listen to my classmates and teacher to obtain information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) I ask questions to get information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) I consult books, magazines and Internet sites to get information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d) I select the right information to carry out a task.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e) I check to make sure the information obtained is true.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f) I classify the information gathered.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g) I use the information gathered to carry out a task.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>TO SOLVE PROBLEMS</b>								
a) I describe the problem encountered.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) I recognize similarities with problems I have already encountered.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) I find several solutions to the problems I encounter.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d) I identify the best solution to solve the problem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e) I apply the solution I found.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

This **observation checklist** focuses on a music competency. Three rating scales are suggested, depending on which aspect the teacher wants to observe: frequency of behaviour, quality of work, or degree of ease or difficulty. The teacher can use different rating scales with the same observation checklist when focusing on a student's work. This choice is made depending on what type of information the teacher deems most useful.

To facilitate teachers' use of the checklist, it is recommended that opinions be given only on the elements in boldface (is familiar with musical content, applies elements of vocal techniques, etc.). The other elements may simply be checked off to indicate that the student has exhibited this behaviour. Moreover, to make the information gathering easier, teachers can decide to evaluate one or two teams for a given task and evaluate other teams during another task.

### Observation Checklist - Music Cycle One Competency 2: To interpret musical pieces

Rating scale for the <b>frequency</b> of behaviour:				
1 Often	2 Sometimes	3 Rarely	4 Never	
Rating scale for the <b>quality</b> of work:				
! Excellent	+ Very satisfactory	= Satisfactory	? Needs improvement	
Rating scale for the <b>level of ease</b> :				
A Easy	B Somewhat difficult	C Difficult	D Very difficult	

  

THE STUDENT:	<b>Team: <i>The Musicians</i></b>			
	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4
<b>Is familiar with musical content</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> works on decoding the score				
<input type="checkbox"/> uses the score to play or sing				
<b>Applies elements of vocal techniques</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> articulates clearly				
<input type="checkbox"/> sings the appropriate sounds				
<input type="checkbox"/> breathes at the beginning of musical phrases				
<input type="checkbox"/> uses good posture				
<b>Applies elements of instrumental techniques (percussion instruments)</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> holds the sticks correctly				
<input type="checkbox"/> alternates the sticks				
<input type="checkbox"/> lets the sticks bounce				
<input type="checkbox"/> uses good posture				
<b>Applies elements of instrumental techniques (other percussion instruments)</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> holds the instrument correctly				
<input type="checkbox"/> uses an appropriate production mode				
<input type="checkbox"/> uses good posture				
<b>Conveys the expressive elements of the piece</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> takes into account indications of slight change				
<b>Applies rules for group ensemble work</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> remains attentive during the performance				
<input type="checkbox"/> reacts to sound and visual signals				
<b>Shares his/her experience</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> describes his/her interpretation experience				
<input type="checkbox"/> talks about aspects that are meaningful to him/her				
<b>Develops other aspects</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> takes pleasure in interpreting				

The following questions can help a preschooler do a **self-evaluation** with the teacher's help during or at the end of an activity (a game, project, etc.). The questions can be used with numerous learning situations and can be adapted to the teacher's pedagogical aim. They help preschoolers think about their actions so that they can become aware of what they have learned, their strengths, their weaknesses and the challenges they are facing.

The teacher uses a student's self-evaluation to record observations on a checklist or in a logbook, for example. This information will help the teacher to adjust teaching practices and to make a judgment on the development of competencies targeted in the Québec Education Program.

The questions should be used along with visual supports to initiate dialogue and to allow the child to illustrate his or her responses. Pictures can be shown to the child, or better yet, the child can be asked to draw them.



## **Questions for Self-Evaluation at the Preschool Level**

### **Planning**

How did you think you would do this activity? What did you want to do first? What materials did you need? Did you change your mind along the way? Why?

### **Collaboration**

Who helped you? How? Do you like getting help? Why? And how did you help a friend?

### **Process**

How did you do the activity? What did you do first? Second?

### **Presentation**

How did your presentation go? Did you find it easy or hard to do? Why? If you had to do another presentation, what would you do differently?

### **Preferences, interests**

Did you like doing the activity? What did you like the most? The least? Why?

### **New learnings**

What do you know now that you didn't know before the activity?

This **self-evaluation form** was prepared in accordance with the evaluation criteria for the cross-curricular competency *To cooperate with others*. The first part presents a short list of statements. The student places a checkmark beside the statements that correspond to what he or she has done. The second part is reserved for the thoughts that the student would like to share with his or her teammates. The teacher must read the statements to the students and help them write their comments.

This tool is used to gather information during a task that is meaningful to the student and that requires cooperation with others. As with other types of tools, it is interesting to note, from one task to the next, whether difficulties that were observed could be surmounted, and how.

## Self-Evaluation Form

### Cross-curricular competency: To cooperate with others Cycle One

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of teammates: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Individual Reflection

- Put a checkmark beside each of the statements below that describe what you have done.
- Answer the question at the end.
- Then, share your thoughts with your teammates.

☐ I expressed my ideas in a constructive way.

☐ I listened to my teammates without interrupting or disturbing them.

☐ I made suggestions that helped my group finish the work we had to do.

What would I like to suggest to my teammates to improve the way our team works?

Next time,

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The tool on the next page is a **verification list** to be completed by the student for a Cycle One mathematics competency. It contains statements that encourage students to reflect on their problem-solving procedure in mathematics.

This kind of verification list allows students to formulate an opinion on a few targeted elements. When using the same tool from one task to the next, it is important to help students reflect on what they found most difficult and on the methods they used to improve.

## To solve a situational problem related to mathematics (Cycle One)

### **I understand the situational problem**

- I read the problem. ☐
- I know what I'm looking for. ☐
- I describe the problem in my own words. ☐
- I find information that is useful. ☐

### **I describe the situational problem**

- I draw a picture. ☐
- I use manipulatives. ☐
- I use symbols. ☐
- I use words. ☐

### **I try various strategies to find a solution**

- I draw a picture. ☐
- I use manipulatives. ☐
- I make a guess and check it. ☐
- I remember similar problems that have already been solved. ☐

### **I validate my solution**

- I ask myself whether the solution is what was asked of me. ☐
- I compare my result to my estimate. ☐
- I compare my solution with that of others. ☐

### **I communicate my solution**

- I use mathematical terms. ☐
- I use mathematical symbols. ☐
- I can explain my solution. ☐

The goal of the **conference** outline on the next page is to help Cycle Two or Three students to develop an awareness of themselves as readers and of the role of reading in their lives, to react to the content and to acquire the language they need to explain the strategies they are using.

Since conferences require much concentration, teachers should discreetly take notes during the conversation, then finish them as soon as possible after each conference.

Before the questions are asked, students must be told that there are no right or wrong answers and that they can ask for explanations if they do not understand a question.

During conferences, when the opportunity arises, teachers can indicate their approval of what students are saying by nodding their heads or smiling to encourage them to continue talking. Teachers should avoid discussing a student's problem areas or giving an on-the-spot lesson. To understand how a student is progressing, it is preferable to ask questions and focus on his or her answers.

## Conference on Reading Strategies (Cycles Two and Three)

Select only the most pertinent questions in order to generate student response.

1. Why did you choose to read this book?
2. What kind of a book is it?
3. What is the book about? What do you think of it?
4. Does this book remind you of any other books you've read? Which ones?
5. Are you like any of the characters in the story? Which one(s)? Why?
6. Which part of the story did you like best?
7. Is there anything in the book that reminds you of something that has happened to you? Tell me about it.
8. Are there any words or expressions that you didn't know? How did you figure out what they meant?
9. When you ran into difficult sentences, how did you go about understanding them?
10. What do you think is the most important part of the story? Why?
11. Did you learn anything new in this book? What?
12. Would you recommend this book to anybody in your class? To whom? Why?
13. Was the book hard, easy, or just right? What makes you say this?
14. Did you like this book more or less than the other one you just finished? Why?
15. Would you like to read other books by the same author, or other books like this one? Why?

## Notes



