

COMMISSION DES PROGRAMMES D'ÉTUDES

BRIEF TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION
ON THE BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING
IN THE QUÉBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM
FOR PRESCHOOL, ELEMENTARY
AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Educating Students as Citizens



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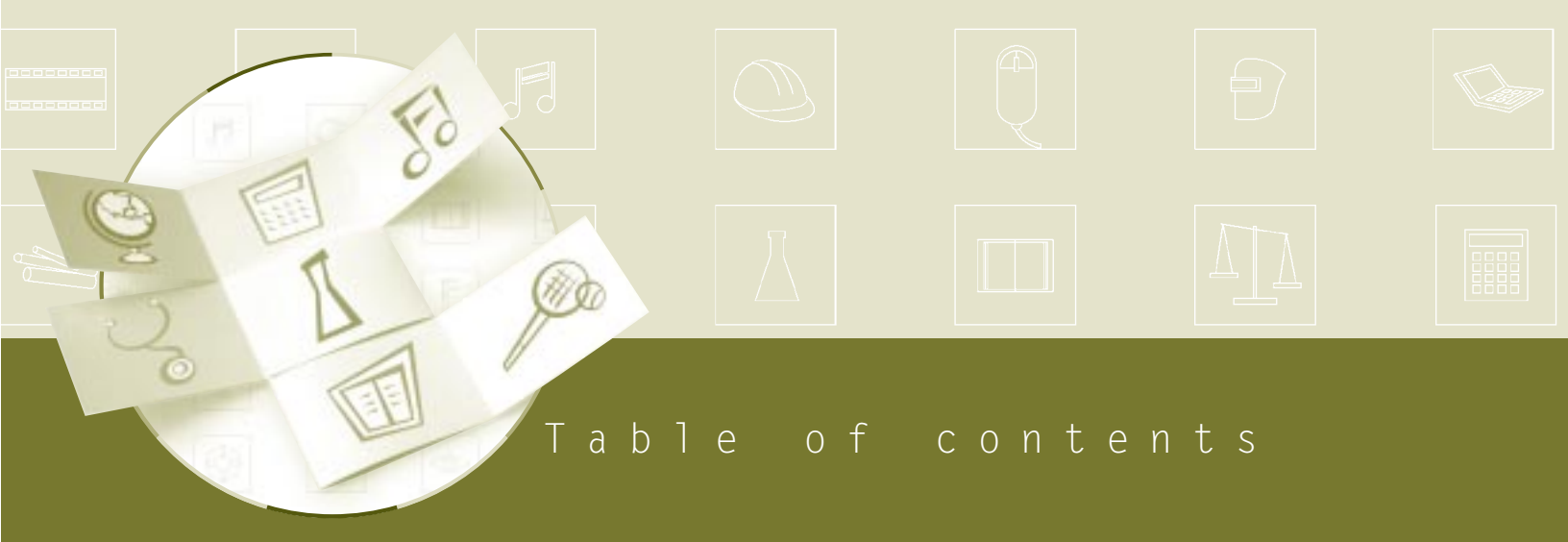


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I n t r o d u c t i o n

***Quand je sors comme citoyen, ce n'est pas
de la physique ou de la chimie que je vois:
c'est de la lumière ou de l'obscurité,
des rochers ou des nuages.***

***Ce que je souhaite dans les écoles,
c'est de voir ce sujet d'étude, la nature,
non la physique ou la chimie.***

(Szent-Györgyi, cité par Angers et Bouchard, 1984, p. 7.)

In this brief, the Commission des programmes d'études expresses its views on the broad areas of learning, an essential and prescribed element of the Québec Education Program (QEP), in accordance with its mandate regarding the ongoing adaptation of the programs. In defining its mandate, the Commission adopted an approach based, among other things, on a choice of programs or topics related to elements of the QEP. For the year 2003-2004, it decided to look at the broad areas of learning and make recommendations to the Minister of Education with a view to improving the QEP.

The Commission felt it necessary to produce a brief on the broad areas of learning because they are a new and important element of the QEP and because they are at the heart of the relationship between learning in school and the world outside the school. The broad areas of learning provide opportunities for students to acquire meaningful knowledge and develop competencies, thus enabling them to succeed not only in school but also in life (Meirieu 1996). They were introduced into the curriculum of the Québec education system in response to concerns expressed in various reports and briefs on meaningful learning for students (CSE 1991; MEQ 1996; Task Force on Curriculum Reform; MEQ 1997). In 1998, the Commission des programmes d'études itself, in the document *General Guidelines and Framework for the Development of the Québec Education Program*, proposed cross-curricular themes in order to enable students to acquire learning essential to their everyday lives and social integration.

Moreover, as early as 1999, the Commission, in its brief *Réactions et commentaires sur le Programme de formation de l'école québécoise (premier cycle)*, spoke of the need to clarify the way in which the broad areas of learning were to be addressed in students' education. This concern was evident in subsequent briefs of the Commission, in particular those on Elementary Cycle One and Secondary Cycle One. Already the Commission expected that the broad areas of learning would be the element of the QEP on which school teams placed the least emphasis. Its concern proved justified, because, according to many people consulted, the significance of the broad areas of learning and the question of how to address them are problematic at the present time.

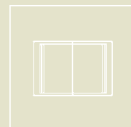
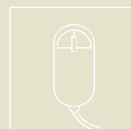


When we look beyond the term “broad areas of learning,” we may observe that the concern with measures to make learning meaningful for students is neither new nor unique to Québec. It has characterized some education systems for many years. The means used may be different, but the objective is the same: to counter failure and dropping out of school and to promote the acquisition of lasting, meaningful, effective and useful learning. In creating the broad areas of learning, the Québec education system has explicitly chosen to promote the development of competencies in context. Yet, even though this choice differs from that of other education systems, it does not, in and of itself, provide the further information needed to make the broad areas of learning tangible in teaching and learning.

In this brief, the Commission des programmes d'études does not discuss either the pertinence of the five broad areas of learning as defined in the QEP, or the internal consistency of their individual presentation. Such a discussion could by itself provide material for a brief. The Commission recognizes the validity of establishing educational priorities among the major issues of contemporary life in democratic societies and feels that it is more urgent to work to consolidate the concept of broad areas of learning and its application in the programs of study and in educational activities.

Being of the opinion that it might shed further light on the broad areas of learning, the Commission began its deliberations by establishing a procedure for their examination. This procedure is based on the analysis of the documents at the source of the education reform, a review of the literature on the subject and consultation with experts. After surveying people in their work environments, the Commission consulted individuals who have played a prominent role in the reform or contributed to the work leading up to it. Paul Inchauspé and Arthur Marsolais each came and discussed with Commission members the origins of the broad areas of learning, the meaning initially attributed to them, the solutions they were intended to provide and their place in the QEP. The Commission also drew on expertise in the universities regarding the contextualization, transfer and integration of learning, and organized visits to schools. Thus, it benefited from a variety of understandings and interpretations of the broad areas of learning, in both theoretical and practical terms. The Commission would like to thank all the individuals and groups consulted, a list of whom may be found in the appendixes, for their generous contribution to the drafting of this brief. The ideas and opinions they expressed and the practical experiences they undertook or supervised allowed it to consider the question exhaustively.

The Commission's brief consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the situation concerning the broad areas of learning. It raises questions regarding their status and the meaning that should be given them by educators and partners in the schools. It also queries the Ministère de l'Éducation on how the broad areas of learning are to be addressed in the subject-specific programs and other educational activities, and on the evaluation of the way in which they are addressed. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature and of various experiences with the broad areas of learning and describes the visits the Commission made to schools. Chapter 3 presents the Commission's vision of the broad areas of learning, drawing on experiences here and elsewhere and on theoretical thinking. On this basis, the Commission proposes a definition of the concept of the broad area of learning and takes a fresh look at some educational practices that make it possible to address them. The study of these experiences leads the Commission, in Chapter 4, to establish orientations to guide action or stimulate further reflection in order to clarify the understanding of the broad areas of learning, their place in students' education and their relationship to the cross-curricular competencies and the subject-specific competencies. Each orientation ends with one or more recommendations. The last chapter discusses the strategies and conditions needed in order for the broad areas of learning to be effectively addressed in students' education.



Chapter 1

The situation



The idea of exposing students to the major issues in important areas of their lives is part of the effort to make connections between school and life. There is a growing concern in education with giving meaning to learning (Meirieu 1996; Develay, n.d.; Legendre 2002), bringing it to life (Perrenoud 1999) and developing social and personal competencies (Angers and Bouchard 1984; CSE 1994). According to this perspective, education should enable human beings to use their physical, emotional, intellectual and, eventually, occupational abilities while exercising critical and ethical judgment in meaningful situations.

In Québec, the introduction of the broad areas of learning in the two approved versions of the QEP¹ implicitly reflects this focus on the development of the whole person. The broad areas of learning deal with issues related to health and well-being, the media, personal and career planning, the environment and consumer rights and responsibilities, and citizenship and community life. Students should, with the help of school personnel and partners in the education community, including parents, explore these areas with the clear intention of giving more meaning to their learning (Henry and Cormier, n.d.).

However, the presence and the presentation of the broad areas of learning in the QEP raise several questions that the Commission des programmes d'études would like to answer in this brief. Some of these questions concern the meaning that should be attributed to the broad areas of learning, their role and the relationship to knowledge that they may foster among students. Other questions concern the responsibilities of the members of the education community with regard to the broad areas of learning and strategies to ensure that they are addressed by the education partners in accordance with the different cycles and levels of education.

1.1 The status of the broad areas of learning and the way they are addressed

A careful reading of the presentation of the broad areas of learning in the QEP as a whole leaves the Commission with a sense of uncertainty because of the lack of details on their status and how they should be addressed in preschool education, elementary education and Secondary Cycle One. On the one hand, the broad areas of learning, as presented in the QEP, may be said to resemble subjects that have been dropped from the curriculum, cross-curricular competencies of a social and personal nature or programs. The multiplicity of terms used to designate them increases this confusion.

On the other hand, there are disparities in the way the broad areas of learning are to be addressed at the elementary and secondary levels. The Commission is conscious that the introduction of the broad areas of learning may vary in intensity within the same level of education. It considers, however, that their integration through various anchor points should receive similar treatment at both levels of education.

***The importance
of connections between
school and life***

***Learning in search
of meaning***

Preliminary questions

***An ambiguous
presentation***

1. The approved versions of the QEP are the Québec Education Program, Preschool Education, Elementary Education (2001) and the Québec Education Program, Secondary School Education, Cycle One (2004).

The broad areas of learning as subjects...

...as competencies, as programs of study or as complementary educational services

Shifting terminology

In short

□ Status of the broad areas of learning

Some of the founding documents of the curriculum reform suggest similarities between the broad areas of learning and certain subjects that have been dropped from the curriculum. The restructuring of the subject-time allocation led to the elimination of certain “minor subjects,” such as personal and social education, ecology, introduction to technology, human biology, economics, career choice education and home economics. These subjects were then attached to other subjects (Task Force on Elementary and Secondary Learning Profiles, 1994) or placed in the category of specific activities (Task Force on Curriculum Reform, 1997).

In addition, the Commission notes that the focuses of development of the broad areas of learning refer to knowledge and themes that recall subjects taught, which gives the impression that all the focuses should be addressed and that the corresponding knowledge should be taught. The Commission feels that if the broad areas of learning are presented in this way, teachers may view them as an additional task instead of a way to further learning.

Moreover, as the following quote shows, the Educational Policy Statement *Québec Schools on Course* describes cross-curricular competencies related to attitudes and behaviours in almost the same terms as the QEP uses for the broad areas of learning: “Our schools must also teach students how to live in society by providing intercultural education (with emphasis on respect for differences), entrepreneurship education, environmental education, media education and health education.” (Gouvernement du Québec, 1997, p. 19).² If these similarities are not explained or developed, they may lead educators to deal only with the development of the cross-curricular competencies, because these competencies are the object of evaluation, and to neglect the broad areas of learning.

Furthermore, a comparison of the broad areas of learning with other elements of the QEP or other aspects of the curriculum also shows similarities. For example, the broad area of learning *Media Literacy* contains elements similar to the cross-curricular competencies *To use information* and *To use information and communications technologies*. The broad area of learning *Citizenship and Community Life* shares features with the subject area *Social Sciences*, particularly with the *Geography* and *History and Citizenship Education* programs (in elementary education) and the *History and Citizenship Education* program (in secondary education). The broad area of learning *Personal and Career Planning* has similarities with the counselling, or assistance, services program and the guidance-oriented school measure. In addition, the promotion and prevention services are directly related to the broad area of learning *Health and Well-Being*. In the Commission’s view, these similarities are likely to create confusion unless explicit connections or cross-references are established.

The Commission also notes many concepts similar to the broad areas of learning in documents on evaluation. These documents refer to *meaningful contexts, learning and evaluation situations or activities that take context into account, everyday experiences that are related to public and scientific issues, situations that draw on resources from various contexts and meaningful situations, based on students’ interests, that provide opportunities for learning*. This plethora of terms is unlikely to enlighten educators on the actual meaning of the broad areas of learning.

* * *

The presentation of the broad areas of learning as a possible way of bringing back subjects that have been eliminated raises questions. Is this really a recycling of subjects that should be taught systematically? Should the broad areas of learning be associated with cross-curricular competencies of a more personal and social nature, such as those described in *Québec Schools on Course*? Do they duplicate certain cross-curricular competencies or complementary educational services programs? Is the multiplication of concepts pertaining to the broad areas of learning necessary and informative? In the Commission’s view, these similarities, instead of being constraints, could be used to clarify the status of the broad areas of learning within the QEP, on condition that the connections be made explicit, and even, in some cases, be reinforced.

2. It is interesting to note that in the Secondary Cycle One program, the personal and social cross-curricular competencies are described as being “related to several of the focuses of development of the broad areas of learning, particularly those that deal with the adoption of behaviours and attitudes” (MEQ, 2003a, p. 34).

□ Disparities in the presentation of the way the broad areas of learning are to be addressed at the elementary and secondary levels

In the preschool education and elementary education program, the broad areas of learning are said to give coherence and complementarity to the activities of the different services of the school: instructional services, special services, complementary educational services and child-care services. More specifically, each of the educational aims orients the activities of the teachers and partners in the education community. At the secondary level, the broad areas of learning are broader in scope. Teachers and other personnel within and outside the school “must not only work together to prepare and carry out activities related to the broad areas of learning, but should also be ready to act spontaneously, using events in school or the outside world as source material for targeted learning situations” (MEQ, 2003a, p. 21). It is also stated that the broad areas of learning affect the school personnel in a variety of ways in the subject-specific programs and interdisciplinary projects, but also in the school’s educational project and complementary educational services.

There are also differences in the integration of the broad areas of learning with the subject areas. At the secondary level, the QEP states, “The broad areas of learning generally provide the basis for the complex learning situations within which students employ and develop the subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies” (MEQ, 2003a, p. 57). Further on, in specific sections, connections are briefly made between the broad areas of learning and the various subject areas. However, for elementary education, there are no references to the broad areas of learning in the presentation of the different subject areas.

Moreover, while using authentic situations drawn from the broad areas of learning, students in preschool and elementary education are supposed to develop their competencies in contexts for learning in which the concept of the broad areas of learning is mentioned several times, often anecdotally. For secondary school students, these authentic situations are called pedagogical contexts and have a different structure. In addition, no clear connections are established between the complex learning situations drawn from broad areas of learning and such elements as *a learning and evaluation situation that embraces complexity*, *a situational problem* (Mathematics), *a meaningful, open and complex learning and evaluation situation* (Social Sciences), *a complex and meaningful learning situation* (Drama) and *a famille de situations* (Français, langue d’enseignement).

* * *

The Commission des programmes d’études is concerned about these disparities in the introduction of the broad areas of learning into the program at the different levels of education. In the presentation of ways in which they are to be addressed, there is no indication of a progression to be observed from cycle to cycle or from one level of education to the next. There is thus a risk that the same issues or problems will be addressed in the same ways year after year. With respect to the subjects, the Commission fears that unless the disparities are explained, they will limit the integration of the broad areas of learning into educational practices. It also considers that the absence of consistency in terms and the proliferation of concepts that at first glance appear similar are not conducive to a clear understanding of the place and role of the broad areas of learning. The Commission wonders whether these differences should be attributed to the normal progression from one level of education to the next, whether they are the result of an arbitrary choice on the part of the Ministère de l’Éducation or whether they are simply a consequence of maturation in the understanding of the concept.

■ 1.2 Collective responsibility for addressing the broad areas of learning

One of the objectives of the QEP is the formation of a true learning community by all the partners. Hence, the members of the cycle team, the school team, the administration, the governing board and the surrounding community are urged to work together to ensure the students’ success. This shared responsibility is concretized in the ways the broad areas of learning are addressed, as discussed in the previous point. Here, the Commission would like to pursue its reflection by examining how the QEP defines the contributions of the different partners in the subject areas, complementary educational services and the school’s educational project.

A variety of ways

Varying degrees of integration with the subject areas

In short

Roles of partners in education

Constraints regarding the development of competencies

An indiscriminate presentation

An interdependence that needs to be made explicit

Complementary educational services in students' education

A lack of reciprocity

The educational project as an integrative project for the school

☐ **The broad areas of learning in the subject areas**

Throughout its reading of the QEP, the Commission noted the absence of tangible, effective links between the broad areas of learning and the subject areas. This obscures the contribution of the broad areas of learning to the development of the cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies for people working in the school. This statement is based on two observations.

On one hand, the Commission wonders whether, after reading the presentation of the broad areas of learning, the members of the cycle team will be prepared to guide students in educational practices based on them. The indiscriminate way of presenting them creates the impression that all the broad areas are equally important. Addressing them may therefore seem merely a way of enabling students to acquire learning that, while meaningful and contextualized, is purely utilitarian in nature.

On the other hand, the Commission feels that, as they are presented, the broad areas of learning represent disjointed sets of issues that students must confront in their everyday lives. Although Gagnon and Van Neste (2003) speak of the interdependence of the broad areas of learning, the Commission notes that this systemic aspect is absent from the QEP. The QEP gives little indication that a problem drawn from a specific broad area of learning bears any relation to other areas, which limits the involvement of members of the cycle team and the school team in developing and carrying out projects.

☐ **The broad areas of learning and complementary educational services**

In the first versions of the QEP, the role of complementary educational services was already beginning to be defined as that of helping support learning both in school and through extracurricular activities. In the approved version of the QEP, this view of complementary educational services has been refined. The Secondary Cycle One program states that students may call on complementary educational services to learn about the resources available in the school, develop behaviour, attitudes and competencies that foster educational success, and establish connections between the school, their parents and the community.

However, the Commission is surprised to note that this fruitful and innovative idea, which was expressed explicitly in the chapter on the broad areas of learning, is lacking in the rest of the QEP, thus reducing the interdependence between complementary educational services and instructional services. This absence concerns the Commission, especially because the QEP is addressed not only to teachers, but also to the school's partners. In this context, the Commission deplores the fact that the most pertinent information on the relationship between complementary educational services and the QEP is found only in the MEQ document *Complementary Educational Services: Essential to Success*:

The broad areas of learning in the QEP provide a new view of the learning contexts traditionally associated with complementary services. They give renewed meaning to a host of activities that in the past were organized . . . as part of [these] services These activities give students opportunities to develop competencies and transfer them to new contexts. They may or may not be part of the timetable and they may take place in the classroom, the school or the community . . . The complementary educational services, or student services, listed in section 5 of the Basic School Regulation can provide valuable assistance in developing attitudes and behaviours in the five broad areas of learning. (MEQ, 2003b, p. 21)

☐ **The broad areas of learning in the school's educational project**

The Commission is aware that the new provisions of the Education Act have only recently been enacted and that schools and school boards are currently involved in either analyzing their situation or drafting their educational projects or success plans. These changes make school life the essential context for developing an educational project that rallies all partners of the education community to the effort to ensure students' success.³

3. Success in this context means, in keeping with the principle of equality of opportunity, fulfilling the threefold mission of the school: to provide instruction, to socialize students and to provide qualifications.

Although the Secondary Cycle One program makes connections between the broad areas of learning and the school's educational project (MEQ, 2003a, p. 22), the shifting tenor of the presentation makes it unlikely that all partners will perceive the significance of the broad areas and integrate them into school life in the educational project. Thus, for example, the verbs used in the section of Chapter 2 dealing with the educational project belong to three types of discourse. The first type is persuasive (*Any broad area of learning can form the basis . . . ; some are more likely to correspond . . . ; the . . . ways in which they are addressed are thus likely to vary*). The second type is normative (*all the broad areas . . . should, for that reason, be included*). The third type is prescriptive (*teachers and other educators must not only work together . . .*)

A confusing discourse

* * *

The Commission is concerned about the disjointed nature of the broad areas of learning, both in relation to one another and to the subject areas, complementary educational services and the educational project, which makes it difficult for the partners in the education community to see how to coordinate their different roles to ensure that the broad areas of learning become avenues for effective joint pedagogical action. Given the absence of a unifying thread, it is impossible to grasp the systemic aspect of the broad areas of learning or to define individual and collective responsibilities in the classroom, the school and the surrounding community.

In short

1.3 Addressing the broad areas of learning in the evaluation of learning

The Commission des programmes d'études sees the evaluation of learning as a major issue in the implementation of the QEP, and is troubled by the contradictory discourse regarding the evaluation of the broad areas of learning. Such evaluation sometimes appears to be mandatory—insofar as these areas figure among the prescribed elements of the QEP, and sometimes no—insofar as such evaluation is not required for the certification of studies.

Ambiguity regarding the evaluation of the broad areas of learning . . .

The QEP states that the evaluation of learning must take into consideration all the elements that make up the program: the cross-curricular competencies, the subject-specific competencies and the broad areas of learning. *The Policy on the Evaluation of Learning* stipulates that “evaluation of learning must be carried out in conformity with the education programs and programs of study” (MEQ, 2003c, p. 15) and that learning and evaluation activities and the certification of studies must therefore take into consideration all the components of the QEP. This is, however, contradicted by the statement on page 21 of the Policy that “evaluation for certification purposes must render account of the acquisition of competencies” and that it is on the basis of judgments concerning the acquisition of competencies that the decision to issue an official document is to be made.

. . . in the QEP and the policy on evaluation

Neither *Competency Levels by Cycle – Elementary School* nor *Evaluation of Learning at the Preschool and Elementary Levels – Framework* mentions evaluation of the broad areas of learning. Only the cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies are subject to the evaluation of learning, which must be carried out in meaningful contexts (MEQ, 2002a, p. 7) or in contexts ranging from the daily experiences of students to broad civic or scientific topics (MEQ, 2002b, p. 22).

. . . in the competency levels by cycle and the evaluation framework

* * *

The association of evaluation and certification exclusively with the development of the cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies is of concern to the Commission. It changes the status of the broad areas of learning from prescriptive to optional, which makes it less likely that the partners will bother to address them in planning learning and evaluation situations.

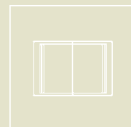
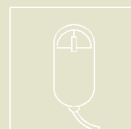
In short

However, supposing the broad areas of learning were subject to evaluation, as the other prescribed elements of the QEP are, how, the Commission wonders, would such evaluation be carried out? Who would be responsible for it and what would be their role? What kind of work would be expected of the students and how would they be able to demonstrate that they had acquired learning in accordance with the educational aims of the broad areas of learning?

■ 1.4 The questions of the Commission des programmes d'études

As we have tried to show in our preceding comments, the integration of the broad areas of learning into the QEP poses a number of problems, particularly as regards their status, the collective responsibility for addressing them and the possibility of their evaluation. The Commission raises the following questions concerning these points:

- How can the text presenting the broad areas of learning lead all the partners in the education community, and particularly the school team, to develop a shared understanding of the concept of broad areas of learning?
- How—without relying solely on their prescriptive status—can the treatment of the broad areas of learning in the QEP as a whole induce all partners in the education community to contribute to the success of all students by addressing these areas, not only in the various subjects but also in the complementary educational services and the educational project?
- How can we ensure, at the end of each level of education or each cycle, that all the broad areas of learning, including the educational aims and focuses of development, have been addressed by all partners in the education community?



Chapter 2

Educational practices that create links

with life outside the school:
Experiences elsewhere and in Québec



To fuel its reflection on the questions raised in the preceding chapter, the Commission des programmes d'études examined various educational practices that link school learning with life outside the school. In its review of experiences in Québec and elsewhere and its visits to schools, the Commission observed a number of practices, based on various approaches, that seek to expose students to issues in the world, prepare them for life outside the school and encourage their participation in the present, according to their respective capacities.

■ 2.1 Educational practices and issues of contemporary life in the curricula of other countries or provinces

Most of the countries and provinces with which Québec compares itself have undertaken reforms of their programs of study. The objectives of the different reforms are to counter failure in school and promote students' success. One approach is to make learning meaningful for students, which should increase their motivation. However, although several countries share this concern with Québec, few tested models exist, and practices may vary from one education system to another. Amid these variations, the Commission wanted to identify some constants that could fuel its reflections and give it a vision of the broad areas of learning.

□ The European Union

In a broad investigation of the definition of key competencies⁴ in the education systems of the member countries of the European Union, Eurydice, the information network on education in Europe, describes contextualization practices for developing these competencies (Eurydice, 2003). In some cases, these practices are used in subject-specific programs, where they are called vectors of enhancement of universal competencies (Belgium) or specific subjects (Italy). They are also found in specific contexts as cross-curricular subjects (Spain), cross-curricular themes (Northern Ireland) or cross-curricular questions (Finland).

Contextualization of learning is also practised in subjects outside the usual framework of the curriculum, such as learning support activities⁵ (England and Wales) or road safety awareness (Denmark) or in contexts that allow for the introduction of new knowledge into other subjects, such as the organization of everyday life at school (Belgium) or educational or pedagogical experiments (Portugal) and discovery paths (France). In addition, some cross-curricular activities in elementary education and some innovative

**Contextualization
practices used
in cross-curricular
subjects or themes**

**Contextualization
practices outside
the usual school context**

4. Eurydice defines key competencies as a combination of knowledge, know-how and attitudes that all individuals need in order to live their lives fully as active members of society. [Translation.]

5. These are learning activities in which students take part of their own initiative. Their purpose is to increase students' motivation, give them confidence and help them to become more responsible learners.

activities in secondary school (Greece)⁶ are used to contextualize learning of behaviour. Attitudes related to civic life, equality and international education are also developed in countries such as Finland and France.

□ Japan and Hong Kong

In the same perspective as the Task Force on Elementary and Secondary School Learning Profiles (1994) in Québec, the curriculum council in Japan (Curriculum Council, 1998) tried to determine how Japanese students could be led to develop harmoniously and to become full members of a nation and a society of the 21st century. Among the results of its work was a proposal to introduce subject areas into the curriculum to provide contextualization. These subject areas are necessary in order to respond appropriately to the social changes and industrial trends in Japanese society. Content and subject areas were carefully selected for their capacity to help students acquire learning and develop basic technical skills needed in the working world. These areas focus on national concerns such as home economics, agriculture, manufacturing, business, marine industry, nursing care, well-being and the study of information.

The special activities that have been developed take into account the students' desire for meaningful human relationships, moral and social rules and the ability to think autonomously and practically, which will enable them to cooperate in creating a better life. In addition, students are encouraged to build their national identity and cultivate a spirit of international cooperation by dealing with many problems.

In Hong Kong, the term *curriculum* is defined as all the students' learning experiences. This definition differs from the prevailing conception in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).⁷ More specifically, in Hong Kong, the curriculum is designed to give every student the opportunity for experiences that foster the integral development of the person. Contextualized learning is considered to be learning that enables students to attain more complex objectives in comparison to learning that is strictly academic.

This curriculum presents five essential learning experiences: moral and civic education in authentic contexts; community service; activities outside the school or classroom; awareness of the working world in relation to various subjects; intellectual development primarily through classroom instruction in various subjects.

□ Canadian provinces

Some provinces in Canada have adopted particular ways of introducing issues of contemporary life into their curricula. Alberta deals with them in two compulsory programs: *Health and Life Skills* (kindergarten to Grade 9) and *Career and Life Management* (Secondary Cycle Two). "The aim of the Health and Life Skills... Program of Studies is to enable students to make well-informed, healthy choices and to develop behaviours that contribute to the well-being of self and others." (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 1). The learning involved includes making effective personal decisions on current and future issues and challenges, developing critical thinking, coping with change and transition, managing stress, analyzing and managing career and health-related information, and recognizing, exploring and expanding career opportunities and options. The aim of the *Career and Life Management* program, which is a requirement for obtaining the Alberta secondary school diploma, is to enable students to make well-informed, considered decisions and choices in all aspects of their lives. The program aims to develop health literacy, which includes the key components of critical thinking, effective communication, self-directed learning and responsible citizenship. It enables students to continue to work toward becoming responsible, caring, creative, self-reliant and contributing members of a knowledge-based and prosperous society. One of the central requirements of comprehensive health education is close collaboration among schools, parents and communities.

**Addressing
social changes
and industrial trends**

**Practices targeting
the integral development
of the person**

**The use of social issues
in health education
and career education**

6. Two to four weekly lessons are reserved for these activities. At the elementary level, their purpose is to promote initiative, cooperation and critical thinking; at the secondary, their main role is to foster competency in communication, mathematics and information and communications technologies (ICT), cooperation, problem solving, decision making, health protection, critical thinking and creativity.

7. For the member countries of the OECD, the term *curriculum* designates all the elements of the school system intended to ensure that students receive an education (Task Force on Curriculum Reform, *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools*, 1997, p. 12).

In British Columbia, the education program includes subject areas such as *Career and Personal Planning* and *Applied Skills*. The latter area comprises the following programs: *Applied Skills* (grade 11), *Home Economics* (grades 8 to 10), *Business Education* (grades 8 to 12), *Technology Education* (grades 8 to 12). The objective is to deal at school with issues relevant to the students' lives. For example, the aim of the *Applied Skills* program (grade 11) is for students to apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes shared by business education, home economics, technology education, and physical education in meaningful contexts using problem-solving strategies. Students have to solve problems, communicate, use information and communications technologies and develop attitudes and personal and social responsibilities in various contexts: designing products, providing services, creating systems or developing ideas.

New Brunswick introduced the study of social issues into the curriculum in its francophone sector with education programs that are divided into two parts: the *Theoretical Framework* and the *Plan of Study*. The *Plan of Study* defines the curriculum outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes students should acquire, while the *Theoretical Framework* provides guidelines for teachers. Its purpose is to describe pedagogical aims corresponding to the goals of the education system (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2003). Some of the principles defined in the *Theoretical Framework* speak of the need to use approaches that make learning meaningful to students. These approaches should foster interaction and collaboration and the recognition that students are responsible for their own learning. Instruction should favour cross-curricular learning in order to accustom students to transferring their knowledge, skills and attitudes. The program also includes cross-curricular learning in the following areas: communication, information and communications technologies, critical thinking, personal and social development, culture and heritage, and work methods.

* * *

This overview shows that there is a common concern on the part of the countries and provinces surveyed to make school learning more relevant to issues in the students' personal, social, physical and cultural environment, although it may not be expressed in terms of the explicit introduction of broad areas of learning. The experience of these countries and provinces provides some ideas related to the problems raised by the Commission in Chapter 1. The practices and programs introduced into their curricula have a variety of functions: to contextualize learning, to favour the acquisition of complex knowledge that goes beyond school learning, to equip students to cope with national and global social and economic changes and make them aware of the world of work.

From the point of view of their status, practices dealing with issues of contemporary life may be presented in school curricula as subjects or cross-curricular themes. The aim is to enable students to acquire values, act as citizens and develop critical judgment, a sense of responsibility and the attitudes needed for community life. In some cases, this involves adding to the curriculum subjects that recall such programs as Personal and Social Education, Home Economics or Career Choice Education, which were dropped from the new secondary school curriculum in Québec.

The pedagogical approaches and methods used in these practices foster the development of an active and creative attitude to learning. Students learn by interacting and collaborating with one another and their teachers. They participate in cross-curricular learning and develop problem-solving and communication skills as well as attitudes and a sense of personal and social responsibility. The goal, in short, is to make learning more meaningful and more applicable to everyday life and to promote educational success. However, the choices made by these countries and provinces with regard to the development of competencies are not as clear-cut as those of Québec. Although their programs of study require a solid base of core learning, they are less explicit in demanding that the development of competencies be based on the ability to apply knowledge and skills in context.

***Various contexts
for developing
applied skills***

***Emphasis on
cross-curricular
learning and the
transfer of learning***

***Practices
that vary depending
on the context . . .***

***. . . but a shared concern
with meaningful
and transferable
learning in order
to promote
students' success***

■ 2.2 The broad areas of learning and educational practices in Québec

The Commission des programmes d'études visited some schools and did a review of educational experiences in various institutions in Québec. In the present situation, with the QEP in application or in the process of implementation in elementary schools and being tested in several secondary schools, the Commission wanted to identify promising practices that may be used to make the broad areas of learning tangible. Among the practices observed during the visits, in the official documents and in magazines such as *Vie pédagogique* and *Vivre le primaire*, some were part of international programs, others were the result of provincewide initiatives and still others were implemented locally in the schools.

□ An international initiative: The International Education Program

Several schools in Québec have opted to apply the International Education Program or its underlying philosophy. The aim of the program is to enable students to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills that will make them active citizens and lifelong learners. It extends students' horizons to the dimensions of the world, educates them to be informed, responsible citizens, and develops positive attitudes toward others. The students are encouraged to exercise critical judgment and to appreciate and develop the intellectual rigour that is indispensable to their studies.

The International Education Program promotes values that contribute to the education of citizens who are open to the world. In addition to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the program also stresses the development of attitudes. To ensure the integration of all these elements, the International Education Program defines five areas of interaction that enable students to discover connections among the various subjects and between the subjects and the world outside. Students have to integrate the areas of interaction into their experience and apply them in a personal project. These areas of interaction are an original and essential element of the International Education Program.

The aim of the area *Approaches to learning* is for students to acquire the work methods and intellectual rigour to be able to think autonomously. The area *Community and service* enables students to express themselves using their own experience in interactions with their environment (the family, school, neighbourhood, parish, municipality, country and even the world) and to develop their aptitudes for life. The aim of the area *Health and social education* is for students to feel responsible for themselves, other people and their environment, and to make decisions. The area *Environment* helps develop a sense of responsibility and respect for the environment, for both the current generation and those of the future, and stresses critical judgment. The last area of interaction, *Homo faber*, concerns the products of human creativity and their consequences for society and the human mind.

At the end of the program, students are asked to demonstrate their grasp of the areas of interaction in their *personal projects*. In the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO)⁸ document on evaluation and the certification of studies, a section on the evaluation of the personal project explains the criterion concerning the evaluation of the application of the areas of interaction. The student's capacity to make meaningful connections between the project and the areas of interaction other than *Approaches to learning* is evaluated. The personal project as a whole must reflect a personal understanding of the areas of interaction, and the connections with them should be stated explicitly in the report or personal comments.

**An education
that broadens
students' horizons**

**Areas of interaction
for the integration
of learning**

**Making the evaluation
of learning meaningful**

8. The IBO is a non-profit educational organization formed in 1968. Its mission is to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end, the IBO works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programs of international education and rigorous assessment.

□ Québec initiatives

Among the practices looked at in Québec, some were part of provincewide initiatives of the MEQ and some were spearheaded by other organizations. These include practices associated with the guidance-oriented school, a MEQ initiative, and those of the Brundtland Green Schools Network (BGS) (Établissements verts Brundtland).

The guidance-oriented school is defined by the MEQ as follows:

a concerted approach by a school team and its partners, in which objectives are set and services (individual and collective), tools and pedagogical activities implemented to guide students in their identity development and career planning. These activities and services are integrated into the school's success plan and its educational project. (MEQ, 2002c, p. 18.)

This approach makes academic and career information and counselling part of educational services in order to help students attain personal and social development, educational success and qualifications. The practices involved in the guidance-oriented approach enable students to become aware of their potential and their interests, to explore an occupational field and to broaden their horizons. In addition, they give students an opportunity to develop subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies by contextualizing elements of their learning and exploiting more than one broad area of learning.

The mission of most guidance-oriented school projects, such as the one entitled *Un pingouin en Angleterre* (A penguin in England), which was implemented in École de l'Accueil, an elementary school in the Commission scolaire de la Capitale, is to have students develop competencies and attitudes involving responsibility, awareness of their strengths and skills, and the exploration of tasks associated with the working world. In these activities, students have opportunities to reflect on the cognitive and methodological learning they have acquired and on their knowledge of the occupational field associated with the project.

Activities for personal and social development, success and qualifications for students

In the project *Un pingouin en Angleterre*, grade 6 students make a film under the supervision of their teacher and the guidance counsellor. The project started with the teaching of the story. After reading several well-known stories, the students and their teacher wanted to write one for the children in preschool education. They decided on the parameters, wrote texts and then voted on which one to film. Taking into account the interests and strengths of each one, the students carried out all the steps in producing a film (planning the scenes, writing the dialogue, finding costumes and props, choosing the actors and technicians, rehearsing, shooting). Some of the students, with help from the teacher, edited the film on a computer. The film was then shown to the preschool children, who enjoyed it very much.

The BGS⁹ network involves over 700 Québec schools and other institutions, such as child-care centres and CEGEPs. The objective of the BGS, which were started by the Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec, now known as the Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ), in partnership with the Société québécoise de récupération et de recyclage (RECYC-QUÉBEC), is to educate responsible citizens who take concrete, measurable actions every day to build a more ecological, peaceful, democratic, united world.

Educating citizens who work for a more ecological, peaceful, democratic, united world

9. Other experiences in Québec are very close to the EVB, but on the international scale. Among them are the Green School network and the Peaceful Schools International (PSI) network. The Green School network comprises over 8000 elementary and secondary schools across Canada, including more than 20 in Québec. Its aim is to help students develop an informed, committed awareness and to express it in their actions in relation to the environment. The Peaceful Schools International network in 2001 adopted a social mission to reduce violence by encouraging students to use conflict-resolution strategies. Some 75 schools throughout the world belong to this program, including two in Québec: Dorset Elementary School in Baie-d'Urfé and Seignior Elementary School in Pointe-Claire.

With the support of these two partners or others,¹⁰ and in accordance with the requirements for BGSs, the schools implement projects related to several of the broad areas of learning, such as *Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities*, *Personal and Career Planning* and *Citizenship and Community Life*. The *Brigade Poly-Sécur* project at the Polyvalente de Saint-Jérôme is an example of a project related to community life. Often—as in this case—activities for an ecological, democratic, peaceful, united world do not involve the whole school, but rather a committee or group of student volunteers who organize the activity in collaboration with various members of the school personnel.

The *Brigade Poly-Sécur* project is made up of 30 Secondary Cycle Two students between 14 and 18 years of age. Under the responsibility of a drug-abuse prevention counsellor and a supervisor, these students have received training in various areas, including first aid. They ensure security and order at school or extra-curricular activities and use preventive strategies to help students resolve conflicts non-violently. The brigade is also involved in organizing school sports events on a provincial scale.

Practices that fulfill several functions

BGS projects sometimes have a guidance function. This is the case of the micro-business *Écol-O-Papier* of the alternative school École Saint-Sacrement in Trois-Rivières. This project, which was set up by the school as part of the BGS program, enables students to experience the operation of a micro-business, to know themselves better and to explore their interests in terms of further studies and career choices. It also gives them opportunities to apply learning acquired in various subjects. They learn to run a business, become more autonomous and responsible, work as part of a team and respect the work of others, but above all, they learn to protect the environment through sustainable development.

The *Écol-O-Papier* project is a micro-business that recycles paper used by the students and makes paper and paper products from it. The students are the stockholders of the company. Cycle Three students act as supervisors and the management controls the various work teams: paper shredding, preparation of the pulp, quality control, drying, housekeeping and illustration of cards.

☐ **Local initiatives related to the broad areas of learning**

The school visits and review of experiences have shown that some projects concern the school as a whole, while others are carried out at the class level. These projects are not always based on the QEP, and some of them began several years ago, before its implementation.

Initiatives on the scale of the school or the class

The school-wide projects are generally collective projects for student volunteers interested in developing specific skills and attitudes, and they deal with issues that may be connected to various broad areas of learning. Their aim is to develop behaviours associated with community life, respect for the environment, etc. In class projects, teachers take the initiative to help their students make connections between subject-specific learning and the surrounding reality, while developing attitudes and behaviours. Although these individual or collective projects are carried out within the teaching of specific subjects, they sometimes allow students to make cross-curricular connections.

The *Groupes intégrés* project of l'École secondaire Sainte-Anne de Daveluyville involves two groups of students. It aims to offer them opportunities for meaningful learning, to increase their motivation to stay in school and to enable those with difficulties to return to their studies in regular classes. The project is based on the creation of an instructional framework that allows students to learn at their own pace in an individualized context and then to participate in project learning. Through their projects, students acquire not only contextualized subject-specific learning, but also skills such as cooperation, communication and organization and attitudes such as tolerance, respect for others and open-mindedness.

10. The list of partners of the BGS/EVBs may be found on the following Web site:
<http://www.csq.qc.net/section6/default6.html>.

Groupes intégrés is a project involving two groups of 25 students from Secondary Cycle One. The students are chosen on the basis of criteria such as voluntary action and autonomy. They are guided by three teacher-tutors—in English, mathematics and science—as well as a French teacher and a social sciences teacher. After spending a morning working on the basic subjects in a context of individualized teaching and learning, the students spend the afternoon applying and consolidating their learning while acquiring new learning through group projects.

Some projects that involve the whole school provide support for learning and help improve the climate in the class or the school, as well as raising students' awareness of questions related to health, the environment, the media or community life. The activities in these projects may be connected to the educational aims and focuses of development of these broad areas of learning. A good example of this type of project is the school government at the Polyvalente Bélanger in the Commission scolaire de la Beauce-Etchemin. This project allows students to be "actively involved in decisions that concern them and in collective problem-solving through discussion and negotiation" (Céré 2003, p. 10 [Translation]). In addition, all students in the school can participate in the democratic experience by taking part in the election campaign, exercising their right to vote, attending sessions of the parliament, asking to be heard on some subject, keeping informed on what is happening in the parliament and being consulted. The connections between this project and the subject-specific competencies in the *Social Sciences* subject area and the broad area of learning *Citizenship and Community Life* are obvious.

The school government project allows 29 student representatives to experience parliamentary government at school. These students meet once every nine days to make recommendations to the school administration and the governing board about their everyday concerns or specific projects. This government is formed on the basis of certain criteria, but any student may run for office. The elections take place following the election campaign. Various ministries are then formed, which represent the spheres of activity of a secondary school. For example, the Ministry of Arts and Culture takes care of shows, theatre, the school radio and the band.

Projects carried out on the class level are proposed by the teacher, alone or in collaboration with the complementary educational services staff. They stress the development of subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies, using real-life situations. The *Radio-Étincelle* project, an initiative of the special education technician and a teacher at École Sainte-Marguerite in the Commission scolaire de la Beauce-Etchemin, is an example of one such project.

Every morning from Monday to Friday, students in grades 5 and 6 at École Sainte-Marguerite do a radio show, which is broadcast on 88.7 FM. In groups of five, the students plan, prepare, carry out and evaluate a daily 30-minute program, with less and less support provided by the teacher. The subjects are varied and they include activities that take place in the community. The whole school and everyone connected with it are invited to participate in this project by presenting productions made in class or drawing on the students' talents. Parents also play a role: by listening to their children and giving their opinions on the program, they contribute to the students' development. The students also acquire technical learning by using the equipment and communication codes.

This project, which demonstrates the kind of collaboration that is possible between instructional services, complementary educational services and the community, involves a radio program totally planned and carried out by students under supervision by a teacher. A program host from the local community radio station contributes to the students' training and occasionally gives advice. Not only do the students develop a certain number of subject-specific competencies in various subject areas, especially languages, and cross-curricular competencies, but they have also observed a change in their attitudes with regard to tolerance, responsibility, solidarity and motivation. In addition, they are able to critically assess their radio broadcasts, particularly with regard to linguistic and aesthetic quality. The project readily mobilized the students, and thus reduced disciplinary problems. It brought certain parents closer to the school and made them take a greater interest in the students' learning. The potential of this project in relation to the use of the broad areas of learning *Media Literacy* and *Citizenship and Community Life* is clear.

Practices to raise students' awareness of various questions

Collaboration among different categories of school personnel

Practices based on the QEP

We are beginning to see local initiatives based on the QEP. In other words, these experiences are implemented in order to help students develop cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies by drawing on the broad areas of learning. This is the case for the project *À la recherche de mon héros* at École de Val-du-Lac in the Estrie region, which is described by Hélène Guy (2004) in the magazine *Vie pédagogique*.

The *À la recherche de mon héros* project, an initiative of four teachers and a non-teaching professional, involves 35 students between the ages of 5 and 12 who have serious behaviour problems. The goal of the project is to make each of these students his or her own hero. Missions and training to help them develop self-confidence are spread over the whole school year. The activity ends with a ceremony recognizing them as heroes. The students have to go through various types of training in order to accomplish their missions: observing heroic actions in movies and then carrying out similar actions; doing exercises requiring physical skills, cooperation and precision in the school gym in order to perform feats at an outdoor centre; learning a song to record at a professional recording studio. Finally, the students take part in all the preparations for the closing ceremony, where they will be awarded medals by the “unknown hero,” an imaginary character who has provided motivation for them throughout the project. [Translation]

The objectives set by the five main staff members on the project are connected to the broad areas of learning, the cross-curricular competencies and the subject-specific competencies, while addressing the social and family situation of the students. On the basis of individual programs, the students train, carry out their missions, reflect on their learning and describe the high points of their missions. The whole school team and various resource persons collaborate in the implementation of the project, providing occasional contributions or ongoing participation.

Secondary schools preparing for the reform

Although most of the experiences described here concern elementary education, there are many secondary schools that are already involved in the reform. The principal of one school stated that schools that have begun the process will experience the change in a more positive way and that they should thus not wait until September 2005 to implement the reform or they will find themselves using the materials without understanding their spirit. Lindsay Place High School in Montréal's West Island area undertook to prepare its teachers for the implementation of the reform in secondary school, using the theoretical framework of “understanding by design.”¹¹ Applying this model, the teachers worked on projects in a three-step sequence: identify the results desired; determine what constitutes acceptable evidence of the development of competencies; plan learning experiences. In planning the activities, teachers chose situations that answered the following questions. What facts, concepts and capacities will students need to accomplish the tasks required? What activities are the most appropriate for attaining the objectives? What resources will teachers need to teach and students to learn? Is the sequence established coherent and relevant?

☐ **The new instructional materials approved in Québec**

Some of the projects presented above show that connections between school learning and the issues of contemporary life may also be addressed in the subjects. Instructional materials may contribute to subject-specific learning. Along these lines, the new instructional materials approved by the MEQ since the beginning of the reform provide scenarios for teaching and learning that integrate the subject-specific competencies, the cross-curricular competencies and the broad areas of learning in the different subjects. A great many teachers use these materials, some as “sources of inspiration” for class projects, while others consider them the “main resource” for their teaching.

Varying treatment of the broad areas of learning

The Commission consulted some of the collections of instructional materials offered primarily to elementary schools. Far from seeking to make an exhaustive critical examination of these materials, it looked for the comprehension of the broad areas of learning that they conveyed in order to form its own view. It observed that there is a definite interest in the broad areas of learning, although the quality of their treatment varies. In some collections, a process of contextualization, decontextualization and recontextualization is clearly presented. Learning starts from real situations, which are used

11. Understanding by design is a theoretical model developed by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins (1999) that may be used as a matrix for designing projects. It is basically a model for planning teaching and learning, using the results expected from the students to create learning situations. The authors call this process backward design.

as the basis for learning situations, and the learning is applied in other real situations similar to the one presented at the start. This process is used to work on both cognitive and personal and social learning.

Other collections of instructional materials present situations or projects introduced by an issue of contemporary life. In addressing the issue, the focus is primarily on cognitive learning. Sometimes, the good intention governing the choice of the issue is forgotten in the development of the project or learning situation: the subject-specific learning is covered and is not reapplied later in the context of the original issue. It is as if the issue were only a pretext and once the students were involved in learning, it was dropped from use in favour of subject-specific learning.

However, the presentation of the projects or learning situations in these materials gives teachers room to manoeuvre. The planning of the activity and its connection with an educational aim of a broad area of learning are up to the teachers. The inclusion in the instructional materials of learning situations that address issues related to the broad areas of learning is thus already a step in the right direction. It gives teachers a clear signal that they are to be addressed in teaching and learning.

* * *

In Québec, the introduction of issues of contemporary life does not mean the addition of more subjects to the curriculum. It generally means creating projects to address the issues students confront in their everyday lives. These projects are taught in the context of a subject, a subject area, a set of subjects or one or more of the broad areas of learning, and they contribute to the development of the competencies and the acquisition of the knowledge defined in the QEP.

These practices are found in schools of all sizes, in all communities. They help all students give meaning to their learning (those with difficulties as well as those considered ordinary or high-performing). They are generally implemented not because the broad areas of learning are prescribed elements in the QEP, but rather to encourage students to remain in school, to lower the failure rate, in response to constantly decreasing enrolments in some schools or simply to speak to the students' interests. The intention in most cases is to foster the development of meaningful attitudes, behaviours and knowledge. The main functions of these projects vary: educating citizens who embrace social and cultural diversity or educating for international humanism; preparing students for life in society; developing a sense of responsibility, respect for the environment and critical judgment; academic and career guidance; contextualization and integration of learning.

School personnel do not always see these projects as ways of addressing the broad areas of learning. Teachers admit that they do not always begin the activities with the intention of using the broad areas of learning, but rather introduce them by chance as a response to the students' interests or their own ideas. However, it is often easy to make connections between the activities that are part of the projects and the educational aims of the broad areas of learning. The projects, for a class or the entire school, are based on issues from one or more of the broad areas of learning. From the school visits and the literature consulted, it appeared that the areas *Personal and Career Planning*, *Citizenship and Community Life* and *Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities* are the areas most often used.

With respect to the responsibility of the various players in the implementation of the projects, a great deal of collaboration was observed, not only among teachers, but also within the school team and with the community. Projects associated with the BGS movement or the guidance-oriented school, as well as several local projects, highlight the need to involve all categories of personnel. Similarly, through the activities of student life services, the broad areas of learning give personnel in complementary educational services opportunities to intervene and to make connections with subject-specific learning. All this shows that relating school learning to issues of contemporary life concerns everyone. However, this collective responsibility for addressing the broad areas of learning in students' education comes up against a penury of mechanisms and spaces for collaboration among the various partners.

***Room for teachers
to manoeuvre***

***From projects
within subjects...***

***... addressing all
students and a variety
of objectives***

***Implicit connections
with the broad areas
of learning***

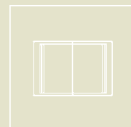
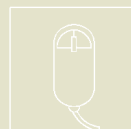
***Possibilities
for collaboration
among partners,
but mechanisms
need to be defined***

***The need to evaluate
how the broad areas
of learning are addressed***

The activities that take place within the projects generally provide no indication that would make it possible to evaluate how the issues of contemporary life are addressed in teaching and learning, except in the case of the *Career and Life Management* program in Alberta and the areas of interaction in the International Education Program. The teachers the Commission met in the course of its school visits do not see the need to evaluate the way the broad areas of learning are addressed and, in fact, do not know how to do so, although these areas are, like the cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies, prescribed elements of the QEP.

***The social role of the
school reaffirmed in the
broad areas of learning***

The school visits showed that the social role of the school is important, and that it is stronger in some schools than others. The reading of the broad areas of learning and the examination of their educational aims and focuses of development have led some teachers to wonder about the kind of adults the school is helping to create. In each of the areas, we see one aspect of the “child citizen,” as some people would say, or the “responsible citizen” or “social agent,” as others would say. The idea that transcends all the projects is that of the education of citizens who possess cognitive and social competencies and a critical spirit and are respectful of their environment and capable of getting involved in their community.



Chapter 3

The concept of the broad area of learning



In accordance with the basic principles it set out in the *Guide général pour l'examen du Programme de formation* (CPE, 2003g), the Commission des programmes d'études has articulated a conception of the broad areas of learning that takes into account both the theories on learning and the concerns of schools and educators. It looked first at the history and evolution of the concept of the broad areas of learning from the perspective of the founding documents of the reform. It then gave the QEP a close reading, consulted experts, did a review of the pertinent literature and surveyed practices here and elsewhere as a basis for its reflections. School visits provided opportunities for observation and discussion with educators on the front line. The Commission drew on all these investigations to form its conception of the broad areas of learning.

3.1 History of the broad areas of learning

In the late 1970s, a great many teachers and parents were complaining about the lack of programs that provided clear, precise objectives and graduated content (CSE, 1978, p. 214-215). In response to these concerns, the consultation that followed the publication of the green paper *Primary and Secondary Education in Québec* led to the publication of *The Schools of Québec: Policy Statement and Plan of Action* in 1979. Then in February 1981, the *Basic school regulations for preschool education, elementary education and secondary education* were enacted. They abolished the options in science, science and mathematics, and arts and science. They also reduced the time allocated to electives and increased and diversified compulsory subjects, with the remaining electives determined mainly by the prerequisites for college-level education. In addition, they detailed the curriculum content and pushed forward admission to vocational education to after Secondary IV.

These regulations defined the basic school, in which differences were reduced to the minimum, and general education was stressed. However, the curriculum of the 1980s, based essentially on the logic of subjects, with a sprinkling of subjects of a moral nature to foster students' overall development,¹² was incompatible with the aim of basic education¹³ and with the integration of learning.

***The Green Paper and
Québec schools***

***The goal of
the development
of the whole person***

12. This overall development involved personal growth, values education and individual autonomy, thus reinforcing the subjective aspect of the students' education.

13. The fact that the curriculum, and especially the subject-time allocation, was so full and that the programs were designed to respect this increased complexity without taking into account the other subjects meant that some essential learning was neglected. This learning involved what was known in the 1980s as basic education, a concept used to mean "the result of learning that is essential for continuing personal development and dynamic integration into a society in constant change" (CSE 1985, p. 5-6 [Translation]).

The need to target essential learning

In the early 1990s, discussion crystallized around the need to target essential learning, that is, what every student should know by the end of elementary and secondary school. This question, which was first asked by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation in its report on the integration of learning (CSE, 1991, p. 29), was taken up in certain ministry documents¹⁴ on the establishment of educational profiles. However, the proliferation of subjects limited the cross-curricular aspects of social and personal learning. On one hand, it seemed difficult to make students grasp the importance of vocational guidance when it was reduced to two credits. On the other hand, how was it possible to give meaning, for example, to the personal and social education program without making connections to subjects or to learning in other subjects or subject areas?

The eliminated subjects

In addressing the major trends that influence the school—internationalization or globalization, the knowledge explosion, rapid technological development and the increased complexity of life in society—the Task Force on Elementary and Secondary School Learning Profiles, known as the Corbo Group after the name of its chair, proposed that certain aspects of these subjects be attached to the broad subject areas it had defined. In 1997, the Task Force on Curriculum Reform, chaired by Paul Inchauspé, recommended that some elements of these subjects be integrated into other subjects or replaced by activities. It also envisioned that some content would be eliminated from the subject-time allocation because of overlaps or because it was the responsibility of the family. The solution it proposed was the concept of the *Program of Programs*, which included cross-curricular competencies and guidelines to help define certain proposed competencies.¹⁵ These elements were presented from the perspective that they should form part of the curriculum. They included specific content and anchor points in the programs of study for elementary and secondary education.

The evolution of the concept of the broad areas of learning in the QEP

The Policy Statement *Québec Schools on Course* placed the concept of broad areas of learning under the heading “attitudes and behaviours” (Gouvernement du Québec, 1997, p. 18). Later, the MEQ used the notion of *areas of lifelong learning* before settling on that of *broad areas of learning*. The approved versions of the QEP for preschool and elementary education and for Secondary Cycle One define the same broad areas of learning: *Health and Well-Being; Personal and Career Planning; Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities; Media Literacy and Citizenship and Community Life*.

The predominance of the cognitive dimension

The Commission des programmes d'études considers that the reform undertaken in the mid-1990s represents a remarkable shift, recentring the curriculum on the development of intellectual activity and the acquisition of knowledge rather than on the development of the whole person, which had characterized the previous curriculum. However, the return to a more cognitive dimension of the curriculum should not obscure the social and personal dimensions. As Paul Inchauspé (2000, p. 5) has observed, this reform also aims to improve the quality of the intellectual education of all students without neglecting the efforts made up to now to ensure their overall development.¹⁶

■ 3.2 The view of the Commission des programmes d'études

The broad areas of learning: for transferring, contextualizing and integrating learning

The QEP states that the purpose of the broad areas of learning is to enable students to make connections between their school learning, situations in their everyday lives and contemporary social phenomena. Their function is also to connect the various areas of learning and enable students to look critically at their surroundings. Finally, they are contexts from which teachers may draw learning situations that help students make connections between what they learn in the different subjects and situations in their lives in and outside of school (Gagnon and Van Neste, 2003, p. 14-15).

This conception of the broad areas of learning implies that they should be seen as opportunities for transferring, contextualizing and integrating learning while fostering the development of critical judgment. Thus, to grasp the concept of broad areas of learning, we must clarify these functions and concepts implicit in it (CPE, 2003c).

14. *Moving Ahead – Elementary and Secondary Education in Québec: Orientations, Proposals and Issues* (MEQ, 1993) and *Preparing Our Youth for the 21st Century* (Task Force on Elementary and Secondary School Learning Profiles, 1994).

15. The elements proposed for defining the competencies were consumer education, health education, environmental education, citizenship education, media education, educational and vocational information, intercultural education, international understanding, methodological skills and new information and communications technologies.

16. The other goal is to meet the curriculum needs of young people in order to prepare them to deal with new situations as we perceive them at this time.

□ The transfer of learning

Generally speaking, the transfer of learning is a cognitive mechanism that involves using in a target task knowledge constructed, or a competency developed, in a source task (Tardif 1999, p. 58). However, the transfer mechanism is subject to certain constraints: the pragmatic relationship to knowledge and information (the cognitive student), the motivation to transfer (the affective student), self-regulation of strategies (the reflective student), and the importance of support from the teacher and interaction with peers (the social student).

***The relationship
between a source task
and a target task***

Qualifying this definition, some authors maintain that for a transfer of learning to occur, the previously constructed knowledge must be placed in a context in which it acquires meaning through a process of contextualization-decontextualization-recontextualization (Jonnaert, 2002, p. 11). Thus, it is not sufficient that two situations possess similarities; a relationship must also exist between them: the first must contain cognitive, affective or social elements that are also present in whole or in part in other situations that can be grouped in families of situations.¹⁷ Along these lines, Jonnaert uses the concept of *adaptation*, which he feels better expresses the dialectical relationship between the knowledge constructed by a student in a source task or a given context and the student's representation of a new situation and its context in a target task (Jonnaert, 2004, p. 202).

□ The contextualization of learning

Studies of learning, and more specifically, meaningful learning, highlight the crucial role of the contextualization of learning. Learning has meaning because it is rooted in a context in which tasks must be concretized in a finished product and various competencies integrated in a complex task. In addition, the context should be conducive to the development of a long-term view and planning skills and it should stimulate the student's motivation by providing work that is useful and visible (Henry and Cormier n.d.). Thus, within families of meaningful situations, knowledge must be put in perspective so that the student can make connections between the different contexts in which it may be pertinent. The context places the student in a situation in which he or she is exposed to various kinds of knowledge and can decontextualize it in order to grasp the various concepts and use them in a new task. For this process of construction to take place, it must be supported by a context of genuine interaction and cooperation, such as is found in project learning (Arpin and Capra 2001; Gosselin 1994), the integrative project (Angers and Bouchard 1984) or the problem-based approach (Bédard, forthcoming).

***Placing learning
in perspective in
various situations***

□ The integration of learning

The integration of learning may be defined as "a process made up of several organically linked actions and several dimensions of personal existence, [which] advances, spiral-like, by dint of repetition and reflection on previous actions or ideas" (CSE, 1991, p. 5. [Translation]). For the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, this process involves three major steps: connecting new knowledge to previous learning, restructuring one's inner world and transferring the learning. Through these three steps, new connections are made between the learning acquired, this learning is reorganized and then it is used in similar or new situations or contexts—which goes back to the concept of transfer of learning discussed above. The integration of learning is a goal to be pursued, and it ultimately demonstrates the success of the act of learning, which itself has three essential focuses: foundations, connections and meaningful learning.¹⁸ However, in order to integrate learning, students need to learn, step by step, a whole series of specific elements with the help of the teacher, who acts as mediator¹⁹ in a meaningful situation.

***The importance of
restructuring learning***

The integration of learning thus refers to prior learning that has to be organized, connected, structured and mobilized in meaningful situations. However, it seems possible to push these thoughts on learning further by using the model of Angers and Bouchard (1984), according to which students translate into

17. A family of situations is a set of meaningful situations that are similar.

18. The foundations concern students' need and desire to learn, on which every act of learning is based. The connections express the fact that learning involves making many successive meaningful connections. Meaningful learning implies that students are only interested in pursuing their learning in a subject if they grasp the significance that knowledge of the subject may acquire for their minds and their lives (CSE, 1991).

19. The role of mediator may be associated with the concept of cognitive apprenticeship as defined by Frenay and Bédard (2004). Cognitive apprenticeship requires that the teacher provide a context that allows students to put into practice the learning acquired, but it pays special attention to the way in which the learning will be used through a process of observation and a process of guided, supervised practice based on the following pedagogical practices: coaching, scaffolding, modelling and gradual withdrawal.

action the learning they have acquired. They must not only know, but also, and especially, apply the competencies developed in other situations. They must make decisions, communicate their discoveries and transpose their learning into their everyday lives—in short, acquire responsible learning. They thus become resources for others, or social students.

☐ **The concept of broad areas of learning as seen by the Commission des programmes d'études**

A definition associated with the three functions discussed

The broad areas of learning, as implicitly defined in the QEP, may be associated with the three functions discussed above. Through the transfer of learning, students mobilize knowledge in situations with similar parameters in order to develop competencies. Through contextualization, students are motivated and learning is given meaning by means of connections between codified, institutionalized, decontextualized knowledge and reality. Through integration, connections are made between school knowledge and skills and situations beyond the school context that help develop a critical spirit.

A definition in line with the brief of the Commission

Placed in relation to the cognitive, social and personal dimensions described above, this view of the broad areas of learning is consistent with the position the Commission des programmes d'études set out in the *General Guidelines and Framework for the Development of the Québec Education Program* (CPE, 1998), in which it presented its conception of the *Program of Programs*. At the time, the Commission saw the *Program of Programs* as a vehicle for the integration of various sorts of learning. The *Program of Programs* consisted of cross-curricular competencies, but also of cross-curricular themes,²⁰ which enabled the curriculum to keep pace with social changes. By studying these themes in school, students would acquire learning essential to contemporary life and to their social integration, and would develop values, attitudes and behaviours enabling them to learn in many situations within and outside school and to integrate smoothly into society.

Considering the above, the Commission des programmes d'études defines the broad areas of learning as **areas conducive to the transfer, contextualization and integration of learning that permit the development of students' cognitive, social and personal dimensions**.

A definition that entails a new relationship to knowledge

So defined, the broad areas of learning express a renewed vision of the teaching and learning process because they underlie a new relationship to knowledge in the development of cognitive, social and personal competencies. This definition makes it clearer that the broad areas of learning call for a cross-curricular response and interaction among the members of the school team. It implies the need for a reaffirmed commitment by the partners in the education community to the goal of ensuring success for all Québec students.

A pragmatic and informed definition

The Commission's definition of the broad areas of learning is both pragmatic and informed. It is based on the expertise of the members of the Commission, who come from all levels of education, all categories of personnel and both linguistic communities. It is also based on the literature on connecting school learning with issues of contemporary life and on the observation of educational practices implemented in Québec and elsewhere.



In accordance with this definition, the Commission des programmes d'études feels that the practices observed during its school visits or described in its review of experiences in this area could readily be connected to the use of the broad areas of learning. This definition has two consequences:

- a reorientation of the school's role to the achievement of student success through the development of the cognitive, personal and social dimensions
- the construction by students of a new relationship to knowledge and to the world around them

20. The cross-curricular themes suggested by the Commission at that time were intercultural education, citizenship education and international understanding; consumer education; educational and vocational information; entrepreneurship; media education and information and communications technologies; health education, safety education and sex education; environmental education.

The majority of the experiences described are not specifically designed to ensure the process of transfer, contextualization and integration of learning. However, through those processes, they target one or more of the dimensions to be developed in the students' education. Among them, the personal and social dimensions are the ones most often addressed in many types of activities. For example, the *École-O-Papier* project was not set up to help students contextualize their learning in mathematics and the arts, although it does enable them to do so, but to raise their awareness of the environment and encourage career exploration.

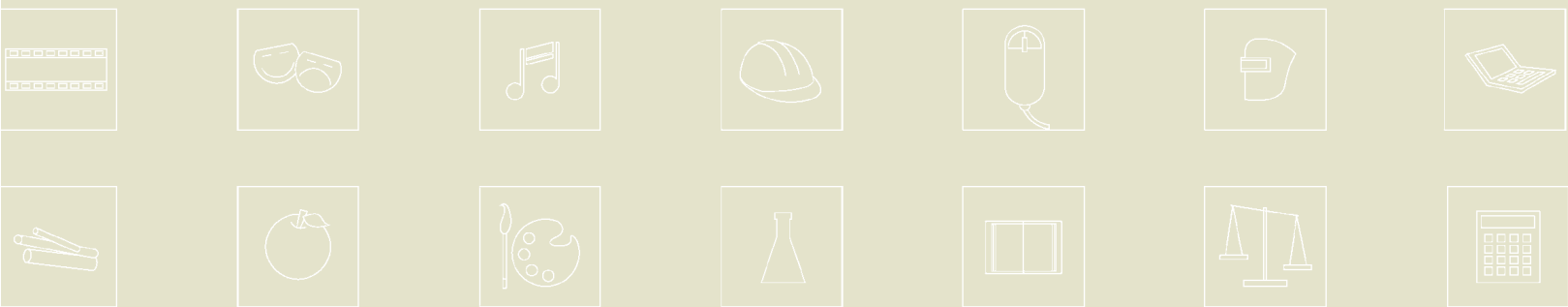
The implementation of practices designed to contribute to the development of certain dimensions of students' education may create possibilities for addressing the broad areas of learning. The formulation of the various educational aims of the broad areas of learning has a personal or social dimension that is based on cognitive learning. Therefore, even if teachers do not necessarily make connections between their projects and the educational aims of the broad areas of learning, there are elements of their practices that may be used to exploit these areas. While it would not want to limit education to a programmed focus on issues of contemporary life, the Commission des programmes d'études is convinced that the exploitation of the broad areas of learning is a very advanced stage in students' cognitive, personal and social development. These areas help students to become more reflective and more conscious of their learning and to develop the ability to connect the different aspects of their education.

As a result, students develop the ability to view the meaning and social function of knowledge and school, the various subjects taught, the learning situation and themselves with a newly critical eye, which contributes to their educational success. The Commission feels that the introduction of the broad areas of learning into teaching and learning allows students to identify the main characteristics of their relationship to the world, to others and to themselves. In other words, the use of real, meaningful situations enables students to establish new relationships, in terms of meaning and values, with the processes or products of learning (Bernardin, 2003). They thus construct a new relationship to knowledge.

Although the examples presented in the preceding chapter do not involve all the dimensions of the Commission's views, these experiences show that there is definitely a potential for exploiting the broad areas of learning in the education of Québec students. The commitment of school personnel to developing personal, social and cognitive competencies through projects is one example of this. We are thus not starting from zero in introducing the broad areas of learning into educational practices in Québec.

***The dimensions
addressed in projects***

***The innovative aspect
of the broad areas
of learning***



Chapter 4

Orientations for addressing the broad areas of learning in students' education



In this chapter, the Commission defines four orientations for which it makes recommendations in order to help clarify the meaning of the broad areas of learning and their connections with the other components of the QEP and to ensure that they are effectively addressed in the education of students. These orientations, which are the Commission's attempt to provide some answers to the questions raised in Chapter 1, are based on the practices and experiences described in Chapter 2 and the Commission's view of the broad areas of learning.

■ 4.1 A common frame of reference for the broad areas of learning

The presentation of the broad areas of learning in the QEP does not bring out clearly enough the fact that the issues in any one broad area of learning are related to those in other areas. The presentation ignores the systemic aspect of reality. As we have already stated, it also gives the impression that all the broad areas of learning are equally important. Thus, the use of the different areas may be seen merely as a way of contextualizing learning. This is certainly one of their functions, but the use of the broad areas of learning also helps students to develop competencies and acquire learning that enables them to act effectively and responsibly in their society. Beyond its role in encouraging students to draw on their knowledge, the introduction of the broad areas of learning in the QEP calls on schools and their surrounding communities to form an educational community to educate young citizens.

The contribution of the broad areas of learning thus seems to the Commission to fall within the category of citizenship education in the broadest sense. Citizenship education goes beyond education for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. This learning related to socialization and democratic values can no longer be seen as merely supplementing academic learning (Galichet, 2002). It transforms the very meaning of academic learning, presenting it as a task that belongs to the entire education community.

The goals of citizenship education are related to knowledge and understanding of culture and democracy, civic values and skills in learning and acting socially. Through special programs or community projects (for example, the International Education Program, the *Brigade Poly-Sécur* project and the school government project), students participate in activities in the school or the community. They develop knowledge and competencies that are essential to exercising citizenship, including basic skills in critical thinking and participation. Thus the use of the broad areas of learning not only favours the contextualization, transfer and integration of learning, but it also helps students establish a new relationship to knowledge, themselves and society.

***The systemic aspect
and social nature of the
broad areas of learning***

***An essential contribution
to citizenship education***

**A broadened
conception of
citizenship education . . .**

According to Audigier (1999), citizenship education comprises cognitive, ethical and social competencies.²¹ In this view of citizenship, the civil, political, socioeconomic and cultural realms interact in a dynamic and complex way (Hébert and Sears 1998) and citizenship education involves the qualities, attitudes, behaviours and knowledge needed to build a society in which individual differences and shared values are accommodated and every person is actively involved.

This broadened conception of citizenship education is evident in the description, educational aims and focuses of development of the broad areas of learning. A close reading of the presentation of each of the areas shows that citizenship education is implicit in them and that it gives them an underlying unity.

**. . . is evident in the
broad areas of learning**

Thus, it is stated in the area *Health and Well-Being*: It is essential that young people recognize the negative consequences . . . on their own psychological health and that of their peers.” (MEQ, 2003a, p. 23). In *Personal and Career Planning*, the focus “Familiarity with the world of work, social roles, and occupations and trades” is an essential part of citizenship education, because it is related to qualifications and the students’ integration into society and the job market. The same is true for the focus “Knowledge of and respect for individual and collective rights and responsibilities regarding the different media” in *Media Literacy*. In *Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities*, the educational aim, “To encourage students to develop an active relationship with their environment while maintaining a critical attitude toward consumption and the exploitation of the environment,” is quite explicit on its contribution to citizenship education. It may therefore be stated that citizenship education connects all the broad areas of learning and gives meaning to education.

**Aims connected to the
broad areas of learning**

In addition, with respect to the broadened conception of citizenship education, it can readily be shown that the aims of the QEP are concretized in the broad areas of learning: “schools do more than give students academic tools; they also . . . prepare them to contribute to society” (MEQ, 2003a, p. 6). Without making one-to-one connections between the aims of the QEP and the citizenship competencies, it is easy to see that the description of the aim *Construction of world-view* (which is common to preschool, elementary and secondary education) can be translated into the development of the citizenship competencies of an ethical nature defined above. Similarly, the citizenship competencies of a social nature contribute a great deal to the attainment of the aim *Construction of identity* (Secondary Cycle One). Finally, the aim *Empowerment* (Secondary Cycle One) is related to the citizenship competencies of a cognitive nature.

**A conception
of knowledge related
to citizenship education**

All this reflects a new conception of knowledge. In the 21st century, in a changing society, we tend increasingly to feel that knowing also means thinking and acting as a responsible citizen, rather than merely acquiring subject-specific competencies and knowledge. In fact, all the subjects with their distinct characteristics should be considered as contributing to citizenship education, not only because of the cognitive learning they allow students to construct, but also by virtue of the attitudes they promote, the values they put forward and the skills they provide. Citizenship education is a major issue in societies caught in the maelstrom of rapid change. The Conseil supérieur de l’éducation (CSE, 1998, p. 30) states that in Canada,

there is a major trend toward seeing citizenship education as an integral part of all the subjects in school, and thus focusing on facets of citizenship other than those that concern the functioning of political institutions and mechanisms. [Translation.]

21. According to Audigier, citizenship competencies of a cognitive nature involve knowledge of law and politics, scientific, technical and technological knowledge of the contemporary world that has a historical and cultural dimension, methodological knowledge (argument and reflection) and knowledge of values and principles related to human rights and democratic citizenship. Citizenship competencies of an ethical nature involve the acceptance of diversity, social cohesion, critical participation in democratic life and process, equity, equality, the preservation of life on the planet and sustainable development. Citizenship competencies of a social nature involve community life, cooperation, planning and carrying out common projects, conflict resolution in accordance with the principles of democratic law and participation in public debate, reasoned argument and making situation-appropriate choices.

Students develop the various citizenship competencies through the broad areas of learning, which provide a framework that is intellectually stimulating and conducive to the development of the cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies needed for living in a democratic, pluralistic society. Thus, citizenship education can no longer be seen as a separate area apart from others. It should no longer be associated only with community life, but should be present in all the broad areas of learning as their unifying thread, their foundation and their ultimate purpose, to enable students to develop citizenship competencies of a cognitive, ethical and social nature. Finally, this stress on citizenship values would give meaning to what Philippe Meirieu calls the student's "job."

Without excluding other social questions that may go beyond the areas currently proposed, the Commission would see the following five broad areas of learning in the QEP:

- Health and well-being
- Personal and career planning
- Environmental awareness and consumer rights and responsibilities
- Media literacy
- Community life

The point is to educate informed, responsible citizens who are capable of understanding and explaining the events and phenomena that fill their everyday lives, making connections, acting in a thoughtful and critical way and living together in a pluralistic, democratic society. Like Angers and Bouchard (1984), the Commission feels that it is by developing competencies in various subjects and by working with the broad areas of learning that students can best be educated as citizens. Thus, the subjects taught become tools that enable students to understand the world around them in order to communicate with others, exercise an occupation, manage their everyday lives and, finally, to pursue new goals.

***Citizenship education
part of all the broad
areas of learning***

***Citizenship education
as the foundation and
purpose of education***

Recommendation

Whereas the QEP gives little indication of the interdependence of the broad areas of learning in relation to one another or to the other components of the QEP,

whereas the descriptions, educational aims and focuses of development of the broad areas of learning express a broadened conception of citizenship education while the function of developing citizenship competencies seems to be limited to the area *Citizenship and Community Life*,

whereas the aims of the QEP served as guideposts in its conception and are clarified in the Secondary Cycle One program by the educational aims of the broad areas of learning,

the Commission des programmes d'études recommends to the Minister of Education that the five broad areas of learning be presented in the QEP in terms of a common frame of reference—citizenship education—and purpose—that of enabling students to develop citizenship competencies of a cognitive, ethical and social nature.

Hence, the five broad areas of learning would be the following:

- Health and well-being
- Personal and career planning
- Environmental awareness and consumer rights and responsibilities
- Media literacy
- Community life

Questions that remain unresolved

■ **4.2 Clarifying the place of the broad areas of learning in students' education**

Already in 1999, the Commission, in *Réactions et commentaires sur le Programme de formation de l'école québécoise* (premier cycle) (CPE, 1999, p. 30), expressed its concern regarding the clarification of how the broad areas of learning were to be addressed in students' education:

For each of the broad areas of learning, instead of borrowing the pattern of the programs of study, it would be preferable simply to provide the presentation of the area, the statement of its objective, an explanation of the social and educational relevance of the area, and suggestions for educational situations in which it could be used in the programs of study and in school life.
[Translation]

The Commission restated this concern in a brief on the Elementary Cycle One program (version of March 1, 2000), stressing that without tangible connections among the various components of the QEP, “there is a danger that the integration and transfer of learning will fail to take place” (CPE, 2000, p. 22 [Translation]). In another brief, on the Secondary Cycle One program, the Commission continues in the same vein, stating its fear that, “without more tangible connections, the cross-curricular competencies and the broad areas of learning, which have been identified as prescriptive, could be perceived as extra tasks added to the already crowded program content” (CPE, 2003a, p. 8 [Translation]).

When, in Chapter 1 of this brief, the Commission raised questions concerning the way in which the broad areas of learning were addressed, its aim was to ascertain whether the QEP is clear enough about the teacher's task, which is to involve and guide students in the practices of transferring, contextualizing and integrating learning, using situations taken from the broad areas of learning. The many questions raised by teachers during the school visits show the problems involved in using the broad areas in teaching the various subjects and in establishing connections between the broad areas of learning and the cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies.

The Secondary Cycle One program describes the following ways of addressing the broad areas of learning in the subject-specific programs:

- Use issues from the broad areas of learning as opportunities to establish connections between questions that concern students and the more formal knowledge presented in the subject-specific programs.
- Create interdisciplinary projects to approach issues related to one or more broad areas of learning.

Connections to be clarified . . .

While this provides school teams with some information, the connections between the pedagogical context of the subjects and the broad areas of learning are rarely made explicit in the subject-specific programs. The Commission feels these connections need to be clarified. In the Secondary Cycle One Mathematics and Science and Technology programs, the presentation of the learning situations shows the connections that should be made. This presentation could serve as a guide for the establishment of connections between the pedagogical contexts and the broad areas of learning.

. . . to better address the social and occupational contexts . . .

It must be made clear that the most important learning acquired in school is applied outside school and that the broad areas of learning, by providing authentic learning situations, favour precisely this. While students have to meet requirements of a purely academic nature, it is even more important that they be able to develop competencies that allow them to meet the demands of their social, cultural and economic environment. Elliot W. Eisner (2003, p. 10) reminds us that “the primary aim of education is not to enable students to do well in school, but to help them do well in the lives they lead outside of school.” From the perspective of contextualized, authentic teaching and learning, it is essential that the planning and carrying out of educational activities take into account the social or occupational contexts to which the knowledge and competencies acquired will be transferred.

Furthermore, the definition of a competency as the capacity to draw on resources, including knowledge, gives rise to a need to provide educators with the connections to be made between the concrete situations of life (issues from the broad areas of learning), which are by nature complex, and the learning situations, which in some cases are simplifications of reality for study purposes (realistic situations). The movement back and forth between the simplified reality (the realistic situation) and the authentic reality (the real situation) is important in the students' education. They need teachers' help to accomplish it.

The Commission feels that clear connections should be made between the authentic situations from the broad areas of learning and the learning situations described in the pedagogical context for each subject. Thus, students could acknowledge their first culture, move toward a second culture,²² and then go back to the first one with a renewed, enriched view of it. This is analogous to the process of contextualization-decontextualization-recontextualization. It enables students to better understand problems dealt with in the various subjects, the questions to which the subjects provide answers and the approaches used in the subjects. This, as Lessard and Portelance (2001) point out, would contribute to raising the cultural level of the QEP. Addressing the broad areas of learning would thus give the cultural references—whose role is to help integrate historical and epistemological knowledge—their full meaning.

*... to connect
real situations and
realistic situations...*

*... and increase
the cultural content
of the QEP*

Recommendation

Whereas the role of the broad areas of learning in the application, transfer, contextualization and integration of learning—which is to foster students' cognitive, social and personal development—is hardly perceptible in the QEP,

whereas the connections between the broad areas of learning and the other components of the QEP are hardly evident,

whereas connections are made between the aims of the QEP and the educational aims of the broad areas of learning only in the Secondary Cycle One program,

whereas the number of educational aims differs between the preschool and elementary education program and the Secondary Cycle One program,

whereas the place of the broad areas of learning in the educational project, which is mentioned in the Secondary Cycle One program, is not discussed in the preschool and elementary education program,

whereas the connections between the authentic situations from the broad areas of learning and the subject-specific learning situations are not made very explicit,

whereas the absence of connections makes it difficult to properly address the broad areas of learning in students' education,

whereas it is essential that students acquire school learning that they will be able to apply outside the school,

whereas the broad areas of learning offer potential anchor points for cultural references and possibilities for cultural enrichment of the QEP,

the Commission des programmes d'études recommends to the Minister of Education that the status, place and role of the broad areas of learning be clarified in the QEP and other MEQ documents.

22. To Fernand Dumont (1968), the first culture consists of all the features characteristic of the way of life of a society, community or group, including the most ordinary ones. The second culture offers a second look at reality. It consists of the sum of works produced by human beings in order to understand themselves in the world.

To do so, the Commission proposes:

- that the broad areas of learning be presented as sets of families of situations with no particular learning content, which students, with the help of all educators in the school, use to develop citizenship competencies by making connections with subject-specific learning situations
- that it be clearly stated in the pedagogical context of each subject that the broad areas of learning, as sources of authentic situations for the acquisition of knowledge and the development of subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies, favour the application of learning while creating a new relationship to knowledge
- that the role the broad areas of learning can play in increasing the cultural content of the QEP be highlighted
- that the connections between instructional services and complementary educational services be made explicit as regards the exploitation of the broad areas of learning
- that the educational aims of the preschool and elementary education program and those of the Secondary Cycle One program be harmonized
- that the place of the broad areas of learning in the educational project be clarified in the preschool and elementary education program

■ 4.3 The contribution of the broad areas of learning to differentiation and diversification

Many practices associated with the broad areas of learning were introduced in order to address students' and teachers' interests (*Un pingouin en Angleterre*, *Brigade Poly-Sécur*, etc.) and schools' particular needs (*Groupes intégrés*). This shows that educational experiences or projects can be used to address the diversity of the student population through differentiation and diversification.

A variety of meaningful situations to address the diversity of the students

In a brief on differentiated programs and optional programs (CPE, 2002), the Commission proposed a form of differentiation of programs aimed at reaching students through their interests and needs, by varying the context for learning. These interests are often found in the five broad areas of learning set out in the QEP. Students, like their teachers, will be more interested in one broad area of learning than others. Addressing these differences among students in order to enable each one to carry out meaningful and stimulating learning activities requires a variety of learning situations or contexts.

The diversity of the broad areas of learning is thus an important element in creating learning situations that meet everyone's interests. The broad areas of learning provide issues that speak to students' individual concerns and enable them to increase their knowledge and reinforce their competencies while maintaining their motivation to learn. Frenay and Bédard (2004) point out that the interaction of a variety of factors affects the process of learning and, in turn, the probability of transfer. Students have to acquire, mobilize and adapt cognitive, motivational and affective resources, recognize potential situations for transferring learning, and be motivated to carry out the transfer when these situations arise.

A role in academic and vocational guidance

In addition, all the broad areas of learning, and not only *Personal and Career Planning*, can play an important role in academic and vocational guidance. They enable students to test their tastes and interests with regard to further study or career choices. While the broad areas of learning provide situations for the pedagogical differentiation that is desirable in preschool and elementary education and Secondary Cycle One, in Secondary Cycle Two, they also provide ways of defining differentiated programs and optional programs that better correspond to students' characteristics.

By dealing with a variety of issues, the exploitation of the broad areas of learning contributes to the success of all students, particularly those with difficulties. Individual or collective projects and activities carried out as part of complementary educational services or in collaboration with resources in the community, when they are focused on the students' reality and interests, ensure success in learning. The use of issues from the broad areas of learning makes it possible to address both the cognitive and affective dimensions of students. It also exposes students to subjects that correspond to their particular type of intelligence.²³ Therefore, the Commission feels that the broad areas of learning should play an essential role in the development and implementation of the programs in a perspective of differentiation and diversification.

A contribution to success for all students

Recommendations

Whereas the broad areas of learning provide situations that make it possible to respond to students' needs, interests and skills,

whereas the broad areas of learning offer ways to define differentiated programs and optional programs, thus helping students to acquire in-depth knowledge and contributing to academic and vocational guidance,

whereas the broad areas of learning have important pedagogical potential for both preschool and elementary education and secondary education,

the Commission des programmes d'études recommends to the Minister of Education:

- **that the role the broad areas of learning can play in teachers' pedagogical choices be stressed in the QEP, so that all students are reached and enabled to succeed**
- **that the capacity of the broad areas of learning to help students construct their own learning profiles, with the help of the various partners in the education community (school personnel, community resources), be clearly indicated in the QEP**

4.4 Clarification of tasks and responsibilities in addressing the broad areas of learning

The QEP states that the cross-curricular competencies and subject-specific competencies are developed in the subject-specific programs and the broad areas of learning. For this to happen, students must be provided with support and supervision by teachers, non-teaching professionals, parents and the community. The challenge is to ensure that all these partners understand their roles and the need to work together to foster meaningful learning by students and to establish connections among their actions.

A collective responsibility to be clarified

The Commission's school visits showed that the particular interests of the teachers and their experience working with a broad area of learning determine their choice of a specific issue to use. Even in cognitive terms, collaboration within the teaching team is essential. For example, a single teacher cannot be expected to be interested in all the broad areas of learning and work on all of them: this is a mandate for a team. In order to effectively exploit the broad areas of learning, teachers have to work together as a group, with each one contributing his or her experience with a broad area of learning. Collaboration within the cycle team or school team can help all members of the team better understand the broad areas of learning outside their own initial interests and enable them to use them with students. It also ensures continuity, which is not the case when actions are initiated only by one or two people in the school.

Collaboration by all partners should be encouraged

As well, with the broad areas of learning, the division between instructional services and complementary educational services becomes less rigid, and all categories of school personnel should collaborate more with parents and partners of the education community to foster the development of the essential competencies in all students and their integration into society. While working on the cognitive dimension of students' education is primarily the teachers' responsibility, the social and personal dimensions concern everyone. The QEP seeks to open the school more and more to its surroundings by mobilizing all personnel, parents and the community to help students acquire the competencies and knowledge every young person needs in contemporary life.

23. Howard Gardner (1993) describes eight types of intelligence that make it possible to understand the differences among students.

The broad areas of learning should be integrated into the educational project

The need for a mechanism for verification of the use of the broad areas of learning

The integration of complementary educational services into school entails the establishment of a new relationship to school reality. The different complementary services programs bear similarities to the broad areas of learning. They should be seen and dealt with as tools that allow personnel to address the broad areas of learning, and not as distinct programs that complementary educational services personnel have to implement. It is through the similarities that collaboration between teachers and the other categories of school personnel is established in the use of the broad areas of learning. For the Commission, activities within the framework of the broad areas of learning should extend or open up subject-specific learning in order to ensure that it is rooted in the students' social and personal reality.

Moreover, although all of the broad areas of learning cannot be addressed at the same time, and although some areas may correspond better than others to the specific characteristics of a school, the broad areas should be an integral part of the educational project. Since they concern issues or social problems more than knowledge, they may be seen as elements around which it is possible to structure the life of the school. The educational project helps all individuals and bodies involved in the school to agree on a strategy and, above all, to ensure that their actions are consistent. Some extra-curricular activities that mobilize the school, the parents and the community around the educational project are related to the broad areas of learning. They should therefore be considered useful educational activities that complement those in the subject-specific programs, if they cannot be integrated into these programs.

The prescriptive nature of the broad areas of learning and their integration into the educational project raise the question of evaluation of how they are addressed. On one hand, the broad areas of learning are among the prescribed elements, and thus must be present in teaching and learning. On the other hand, given that each one of the broad areas of learning can form the pivot of the educational project, it may be expected that accountability with regard to the educational project and the success plan should include the broad areas of learning. Without suggesting that the broad areas of learning should be evaluated, the Commission des programmes d'études feels it is the responsibility of the whole school team to create mechanisms to ensure that it addresses them in the students' education. The various official documents on the evaluation of learning should be absolutely unequivocal.

Given the possibilities for collaboration offered by the broad areas of learning, the Commission sees a need for clarification, in the QEP, of collective and individual roles in both the development and evaluation of competencies. Without wishing to reduce educational activities outside the classroom and the school to the exploitation of the broad areas of learning, the Commission des programmes d'études suggests that educational actions be oriented toward the acquisition of learning that can help students understand and respond to issues of contemporary life that they themselves face and as well as those faced by other members of their society.

Recommendations

Whereas the broad areas of learning make it possible to extend or open up school learning in order to ensure that it is rooted in the students' social and personal reality,

whereas the presentation of the broad areas of learning in the QEP provides only a vague impression of the potential for collaboration among the partners in the education community in the development of cross-curricular projects,

whereas the QEP places little emphasis on the advantages of such collaboration with complementary educational services and community resources in the development of individual or collective projects,

whereas the QEP and the documents on evaluation lack clarity,

the Commission des programmes d'études recommends to the Minister of Education:

- that collective and individual roles in addressing the broad areas of learning in both the development and the evaluation of competencies be clarified in the QEP
- that the need to orient educational actions toward the acquisition of learning that can help students understand and respond to the issues of contemporary life be clarified in the QEP

The diagram presented below, *Connections between the broad areas of learning and the other components of the QEP*, illustrates the fact that the broad areas of learning overlap with one another. An issue related to environmental awareness and consumer rights and responsibilities, for example, also has aspects related to health and well-being or personal and career planning, although these may be less obvious. Thus, addressing an issue in a given broad area of learning means that the main aspects of the issue are in that area.

An illustration of the connections between the broad areas of learning and the other components of the QEP

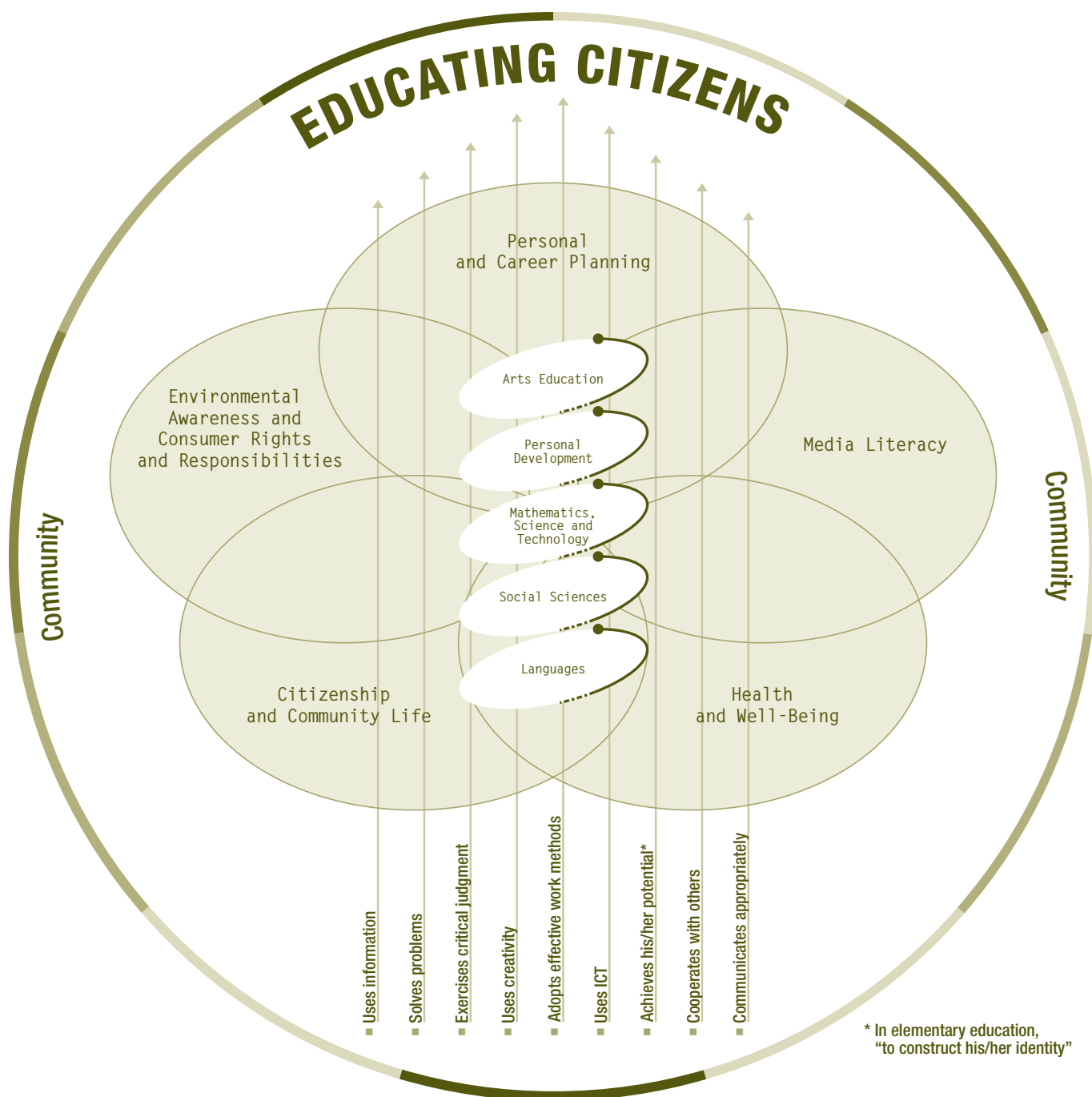
The diagram shows that the subject areas do not provide all the tools needed to explore the broad areas of learning in depth. They provide some elements, which are supplemented by other personnel and resource persons in the school and the community. The spiral shape of the subject areas expresses the desire to make connections among the subjects and to strive for the integration of knowledge. The boundary around the subject areas represents the transition from the teaching of the subjects to the realities dealt with in the broad areas of learning. This is where all the actions taken with students converge. This boundary is permeable, allowing knowledge and resources to flow from the school to the community and from the community to the school.

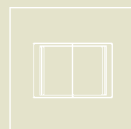
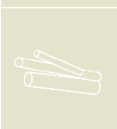
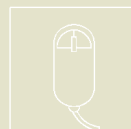
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The orientations defined by the Commission are intended to provide a better understanding of the broad areas of learning, their place in the QEP and the responsibilities of the various parties for addressing them. They should make it easier to relate the broad areas of learning and the other components of the QEP. In particular, they should guide educators in the use of the broad areas of learning in the subject-specific programs and learning activities in the classroom or outside the class and the school. The diagram shows that the development of cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies through the subject areas and the broad areas of learning enables students to acquire citizenship competencies. In this way, they learn to construct their identities and world-views and become empowered.

Orientations for the use of the broad areas of learning

Connections between the broad areas of learning and the other components of the QEP





Chapter 5

Emerging strategies for addressing the broad areas of learning

The exploitation of the broad areas of learning in educational practice is a collective undertaking of great scope. By enabling students to construct more meaningful and integrated knowledge and develop cognitive, social and personal competencies, the introduction of the broad areas of learning promotes success for all students. It thus changes current practices, opening the school more to its community and to issues of contemporary life, and opening the classroom to various partners from the education community.

The Commission des programmes d'études is aware that the changes associated with the broad areas of learning create new challenges, and it has defined some strategies for addressing them in students' education. These strategies are based on data gathered during the Commission's school visits and consultations and on its own reflection. They require better-trained and better-informed personnel and they involve new responsibilities for the different partners. They also demand an organization that is more open to the community and more willing to learn; they are based on a variety of resources that enable educators to respond to innovation. Together, these elements should ensure the effective integration of the broad areas of learning by everyone in the education community.

■ 5.1 Information and training

The contextualization of learning, as we have seen, requires taking learning out of the traditional school framework and transposing it into the environment. Where memorizing facts, solving simplified problems and carrying out fragmented tasks have for a long time taken precedence, today the social, personal and, eventually, employment situation students face demands that they acquire relevant learning, solve problems and carry out complex tasks. In this context, the Commission des programmes d'études identifies two types of action involving the different partners: information and training.

☐ Information needs to be clarified

Comments made to the Commission during its visits to elementary and secondary schools show that interpretations of the significance of the broad areas of learning vary considerably. For some teachers, they represent an attempt to make the school take on a series of responsibilities that once belonged to parents and the community, making the school something of a catchall. For others, the broad areas of learning are a camouflaged way of bringing back subjects such as home economics and personal and social education. Some feel the use of the broad areas of learning in the classroom or the school often includes utilitarian aspects or can only graze the surface of the issues treated. In the opinion of the Commission, these ways of seeing the broad areas of learning show not only that they have not been assimilated by everyone, but also that there is a lack of information. The result is that their use is often random and accidental, and connections with projects or activities are made *a posteriori*.

***A change in
educational practice***

***Some strategies
for action***

***Two types of action that
should be intensified***

***Conceptions that
should be put aside***

Possibilities for action

Nevertheless, there are some schools that have developed interesting approaches to the meaning of the broad areas of learning. Thus, at École L'Aquarelle, an elementary school in Rimouski, they are used as basic frameworks within which it is possible to make a selection of projects. At École Bienville in Montréal, they are used as entry points into projects involving partners from the school and the community, and which may be conducted at the school or elsewhere.

The broad areas of learning need to be given meaning

These efforts in the schools show that there are various understandings of the broad areas of learning. In this context, the MEQ has the ultimate responsibility to see that all school personnel are properly informed. Apart from peripheral documents such as the *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning* or documents on complementary educational services, the QEP remains the most essential, if not the only, tool to enable the school team and other partners to grasp the state's orientations and priorities in education. As the Commission has shown in Chapter 1, there are differences between the preschool and elementary education program and the Secondary Cycle One program as well as a lack of clarity on many aspects. The Commission would therefore like clarifications to be made to both programs, or for the preschool and elementary education program to be reviewed in light of the secondary education program.

A neglected aspect of training

☐ **Training needs to be reviewed**

The current curriculum reform entails a radical change in the act of teaching, and it is up to the MEQ to orient the development of the requisite competencies. The fact is that in many cases, the training teachers receive deals only with the subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies and barely touches on the broad areas of learning. In other cases, it seems to take the form of occasional discussions among teachers or between teachers and other categories of personnel. The Commission feels that the training provided by the MEQ, the school boards and the schools should, on one hand, aim for the integration of the broad areas of learning with the other components of the QEP in educational practice and, on the other hand, reach all partners in accordance with their respective roles.

Teacher training needs improvement

The Commission also feels that the system of teacher training does not always prepare teachers to address the broad areas of learning. The institutions where student teachers do practicums and the faculties of education are two parallel universes that, in order to meet, must make better use of the authentic learning contexts that exist in the school and thus contextualize the training of future teachers.

Toward a reflective practice

Taking into account the comments made during its school visits, the Commission feels that relevant training with respect to the integration of the broad areas of learning could take the form of guidance based on the principles of the reflective approach (Schön 1983). This process encourages thinking about thinking, thus fostering the development of analytical skills and critical judgment. The Commission feels that this approach could also be made part of mentoring practices such as those used in the Portneuf and L'Amiante school boards. The activities included in these practices could not only serve as supports in training related to the components of the QEP, but could also reduce the number of teachers leaving the profession, which weakens the Québec school system (Grimard, 2004).

Collective involvement by the school team

5.2 New responsibilities

The broad areas of learning are justified by the need to give meaning to learning, to make it live, and to develop cognitive, social and personal competencies. Their integration into education, however, places demands on teachers, complementary educational services personnel and administrators, who must work together for students' success.

Collaboration to be encouraged

☐ **Teachers**

For the Commission des programmes d'études, teachers' involvement should take the form of collaboration with each other, bringing out each one's strengths in particular areas. Thus, as may be observed in the guidance-oriented school measure, some people could be asked to rally the school's partners around the broad areas of learning and to see that these areas are addressed in teaching by providing support in developing projects. This approach to teachers' involvement is also applied elsewhere, such as the École des Cimes in Beauport, where cycle and inter-cycle teams have been set up. The main focuses of shared work are improving report cards, acquiring a better understanding of the QEP, and evaluating new basic instructional materials. The teachers at Lindsay Place High School held a "retreat" to study the QEP, share their various points of view and develop projects for integrating the subjects.

☐ Complementary educational services personnel

In many of the schools visited, collaboration between complementary educational services staff and teachers is not always easy. In fact, the current context favours the separation of “powers” between the classroom, where the exercise of pedagogy takes place, and complementary educational services, where support of a more personal and social nature is provided. The professionals are responsible for several schools or have to provide services to a larger number of students. In addition, their location in the school, which is often separate from the classrooms, does not make it easy to change perceptions of the connections between instructional services and complementary educational services.

Limits that should be overcome

Being a target school for the implementation of the reform, having students with certain kinds of difficulties or taking part in government or private programs allows a school to have access to additional resources, but these resources do not automatically change the relationship between complementary educational services staff and teachers. The Commission feels that the broad areas of learning could give rise to a new model of cooperation by building bridges between these two realities. Chapter 2 of this brief discusses many projects that are based on the broad areas of learning and that make connections between complementary educational services and instructional services. For example, the *Brigade Poly-Sécur* project of the Polyvalente de Saint-Jérôme is under the responsibility of a drug-abuse prevention counsellor, a supervisor and some teachers. The project *Un pingouin en Angleterre* is directed by a teacher and a guidance counsellor, and the *Radio-Étincelle* project, which is run by students, is supervised by the special education technician and a teacher.

Connections to be made with services

☐ School administrators

The curriculum of the 1980s consisted of a multitude of programs, aiming for a kind of self-sufficiency in the classroom and focusing on the overall development of students. At the other extreme, the current curriculum reform proposes a single program implemented by many people. This implies not only a new conception of the act of teaching but also a new form of leadership on the part of school administrators, who now have to be like orchestra conductors, providing coordination, sometimes in the limelight and sometimes in the shadows but always enabling the different categories of personnel to work together harmoniously to provide cognitive, social and personal support and supervision for students.

A change to be dealt with

However, the Commission has some concerns about the role of administrators in the integrated management of resources. First, school administrators are placed at the point where MEQ requirements and the reality of the schools meet. They have to act as interpreters and leaders in curriculum renewal while mobilizing the various categories of personnel (CSE 1999, p. 61). As we have tried to show in the previous chapters, there is a lack of clarity in the integration of the broad areas of learning into the QEP and, in its present form, it does not enable either administrators or personnel to fully grasp their respective roles.

The mobilization of personnel

In addition, the heavy demands involved, the legal obligations related to the governing board, the educational project and the success plan, and the budgetary and administrative constraints may all hinder administrators from playing their crucial and fundamental role as agents of change in education (Fullan, 1991) and confine them to administrative tasks. Like the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, the Commission feels that school administrators should prioritize their tasks in order to maintain pedagogical responsibility as the central focus of their role (CSE 1999, p. 61).

The need for leadership

Furthermore, most school boards in Québec are in the process of renewing their administrations, and all administrators will have to be replaced by the end of this decade. In this context, the Commission feels that the universities, in collaboration with the MEQ and the school boards, should play a larger role in the initial training and the professional development of administrators.

Adjustments needed in training

☒ 5.3 Openness to the community and the world

☐ A more open organization

The development of everyday problem-solving skills and of attitudes and behaviours that improve relations among members of a community requires contact with groups and individuals outside the school. The broad areas of learning can serve as points of convergence for the development of students' competencies and for appropriate action by parents and other individuals.

Involving all stakeholders

Parents' competencies should be recognized

□ Meaningful collaboration

To reinforce attitudes resulting from the exploitation of the broad areas of learning, the school should strive for collaboration with parents in order to extend the activities of the school into the home environment. For example, at the alternative school École Saint-Sacrement, parents are involved in providing support and supervision for students, particularly in the *Écol-O-Papier* project.

The Commission feels that more effective participation by parents in education is largely a result of the involvement of teachers, who should not only open up the classroom to parents, but also themselves be open to the “hidden knowledge” found in families (Larose, 2003) and take it into account in developing projects. Such projects would be more motivating for students and provide opportunities for parents and teachers to work together. However, without going from “dropout parents” to “professional parents” (Laferrière 2003), parents should feel that the school is not inaccessible, their child’s teacher is not only the bearer of bad news and that they have legally constituted bodies for participation and decision making in the school and the school board.

Building bridges with partners of the education community

The school is an organization that is influenced by its social, cultural and economic environment. The broad areas of learning provide ways to encourage “positive interference” from the environment that can bring learning closer to the students’ everyday concerns and give it meaning. For example, the alternative school École Saint-Sacrement opens the classroom to the community by inviting resource persons to come and present their activities to the students. These meetings give rise to projects that address the students’ interests. The school also has mini-internships that allow students to learn in real-life situations. This openness is also shown in research and development activities, as in the relationship the school has formed with the Département des sciences de l’éducation of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. Connections with outside organizations may take the form of agreements with different ministries, such as the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, or participation in the development of instructional resources, as with the Ministère de l’Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l’Alimentation, or collaboration with television stations such as Télé-Québec.

Responsibility to be shared through the educational project

An open organization needs broad participation by a variety of players in decision making, dialogue and information sharing. It is an intelligent system in the sense that it needs to be able to interact with the surrounding community, to apply information received in order to adjust its behaviour and make any corrections that are necessary. The difficulty the Commission sees is, on the one hand, finding a balance in this participation and, on the other hand, ensuring that the broad areas of learning are addressed.

For the Commission, the educational project and actions based on it can provide a response to these concerns. However, as has been stated, the Commission feels that the QEP lacks clarity concerning the integration of the broad areas of learning into the educational project so that they become a shared responsibility. It would therefore like to see further information added to the QEP or indications provided so that schools’ educational projects are developed from the perspective of educating students as citizens.

Evaluation that draws on the education community

The Commission feels that the manner in which the broad areas of learning are addressed should not be subject to the same sort of evaluation that is envisaged for the cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies.

These areas, and in particular their educational aims, should not be considered compulsory, but rather should be seen as a way of orienting the educational actions of the different partners in the school. Furthermore, establishing a path for the development of the broad areas of learning, as is done for the competencies, is out of the question.

The Commission feels, however, that it would be desirable for the partners to establish evaluation mechanisms for the broad areas of learning. Thus, the school team could make periodic assessments to ensure that as many aspects of a student’s life as possible have been dealt with and to determine which areas best enable students to exercise their subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies. The evaluation should also show some kind of consistency in the way the broad areas of learning are addressed and in their progression from cycle to cycle and from one level of education to the next.

The Commission feels that tools such as the portfolio, on paper or in electronic form,²⁴ the personal project integrating the areas of interaction in the International Education Program or the assessments of the group projects carried out at the secondary school École Sainte-Anne make it possible to demonstrate this progression insofar as there is a relation between the broad areas of learning and the other components of the QEP.

The process of evaluation of the educational project could provide a framework for verifying whether the broad areas of learning have been addressed by all the partners, in different ways and degrees. For example, teachers at the École des Cimes have suggested that the accountability prescribed by law should be applicable not only to the educational project and the success plan, but also to the development of the competencies in the QEP. This would make it possible for the school and the community of which it is a part to state whether the educational aim and focuses of development of a broad area of learning have been dealt with and whether they have enriched the students' learning.

An organization even more focused on learning

By transposing classroom learning into students' lives, the broad areas of learning enable them to learn more than what is provided in the subject-specific programs. These areas also allow them to think about the learning they acquire and to consider its potential importance in their everyday lives and in terms of lifelong learning. However, none of this can take place unless the school organizes in a way that enables students to make connections between school and the world outside. To do this, the school must limit competition among the subjects and allocate time and space for activities related to the broad areas of learning.

It is possible to find schools that are organized in such a way. At École Sainte-Anne, a secondary school, a project entitled *Groupes intégrés* aims to establish an instructional framework that allows students to learn at their own pace in an individualized context, and then work on projects in which they apply and consolidate their learning and go on to new learning. Weekly meetings and daily follow-up are provided as part of the homeroom system. Staff members work collaboratively on pedagogical days and theme activities take place at lunch time. Although all the teachers can deal with the broad areas of learning on the basis of their own and students' interests, their collaboration goes beyond sharing resources and lesson plans to the discussion of educational practices within and outside the classroom, with results that are enriching for the students.

École Bienville has special human, pedagogical and financial resources through its participation in government and private programs. At the same time, it has opted for a type of pedagogical organization that is better suited to its situation. It has established multi-age classes, occasional groupings of students on the basis of projects developed by the cycle team or school team, and *looping*.²⁵ Within the limits set in the Basic school regulation, it has also chosen to structure the school timetable differently in order to make time for pedagogical meetings or discussion meetings between personnel from within and outside the school, such as those from community centres or CLSCs.

The school organization should also be reflected in the physical set-up of the school. For example, at École Sainte-Anne, a secondary school, spaces have been allocated to create work areas for technology, language laboratories, reading, etc. At Lindsay Place High School, the Secondary Cycle One teachers are grouped in a room adjacent to the classrooms so as to facilitate discussion, joint planning, greater availability to students and better support and supervision of projects.

In the Commission's view, these ways of placing school organization at the service of students' success require the school as a whole to break with the past in order to rally the support of school personnel. By reducing competition among the subjects and channelling power relations among the personnel, it is possible to go from a fragmented organization to an interdisciplinary organization. The Commission also feels that, through the broadest possible participation of the different partners, the organization can develop the capacity for change in its structure, its culture, its conceptions and its work organization, thus fostering the development of a true community of learners, an organization

***Accommodations
to be made***

***Some examples
to follow***

***Spaces conducive
to learning
and collaboration***

***An organization
that learns***

24. The *MiTic* (Matières intégrées aux technologies de l'information et de la communication) project, developed at Collège Durocher in Saint-Lambert, includes a digital portfolio on PowerPoint that allows students to record projects: http://www.cdsl.qc.ca/vie_scolaire/psl/mitic.htm.

25. *Looping* means that a teacher stays with the same class of students for a whole cycle.

in which individuals use their abilities to achieve the results they want, where new ways of thinking are developed and people's collective aspirations are encouraged (Senge 1991).

■ 5.4 Resources for innovation

Assimilating experiential knowledge

The broad areas of learning are a new element in the QEP, and their newness may give rise to a certain insecurity in the different partners in the education community. Nevertheless, the Commission des programmes d'études feels, as a result of the process it went through in drafting this brief, that the school system has the resources it needs to address these areas.

Indeed, the Commission has a profound conviction that schools and communities possess a wealth of expertise and that the challenge is to mobilize the resources within and outside schools in order to foster learning, the development of competencies and the acquisition of occupational skills. Along these lines, schools may be seen as organizations dedicated to gathering and sharing experiential knowledge. This knowledge is usually hidden, not only in processes, practices and people, but also in the values underlying the learning organization itself.

Instructional resources for addressing the broad areas of learning

This knowledge could be brought out by providing several concrete examples for each broad area of learning to guide teachers and support their pedagogical practice. The examples of learning situations in mathematics, science and technology in Secondary Cycle One are interesting in this respect. The Commission feels that, although instructional materials are undeniably useful, it can be dangerous to use only those developed by publishers in the hope of having personnel contextualize the learning and having students find meaning in it. The use of material from a single source for a class can limit a teacher's options with regard not only to learning and evaluation situations, but also to pedagogical methods and approaches. Furthermore, it seems virtually impossible for a single item of instructional material to take into account all the issues students will have to face, which limits the possibility of addressing their interests and needs.

A partnership that should be consolidated

To the Commission, university research has a major role in the integration of the broad areas of learning into educational practice, because it can pave the way and provide the basis for this change. By making connections with the schools, university researchers can provide the system with the tools to prepare for innovations in curriculum, pedagogy or didactics. The work of university researchers, whether or not they are affiliated with centres,²⁶ is of inestimable value and is representative of the partnership between schools and research institutions, providing a response to the concern expressed by the Conseil supérieur in 1995, regarding the need to "create a greater synergy among the interests of society, the education system and research and researchers" (CSE 1995, p. 65 [Translation]).

The need to forge links

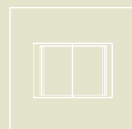
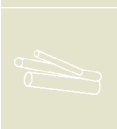
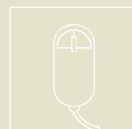
The Commission also feels that the broad areas of learning require the creation of links not only among people in the schools, but also between them and resource persons outside the school. Forums and conferences, the Internet and organizations such as the Center of Excellence set up by Lindsay Place High School can all contribute to the emergence of a more global education community.

In the preceding pages, the Commission encourages the MEQ to support the commitment of the schools. The MEQ should always ensure a supply of pertinent services in professional development. It should also pursue its efforts to ensure that the different partners, first and foremost school personnel, can develop models of joint action and collaboration. The Commission feels that additional budgets are not an essential condition for student success but they do increase the schools' power to influence the conditions governing that success.

The responsibilities of the MEQ

The MEQ should also ensure that instructional materials and pedagogical tools are consistent with both the letter and spirit of the curriculum reform, especially as regards the integration of the broad areas of learning. Above all, it should ensure consistency in everything it produces, in particular the QEP, so that everyone involved in education can understand that the whole program is more than the sum of its parts.

26. The objective of many of these centres is to maintain links between the schools and university research institutions. The following centres were covered in the research for this brief: Centre de recherche et d'intervention sur la réussite scolaire (CRIRES), Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la formation et la profession enseignante (CRIFPE), Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche sur l'apprentissage et le développement en éducation (CIRADE), Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec (CTREQ) and the research chair of the Centre de formation en entreprise et récupération (CFER).



C o n c l u s i o n



This brief on the broad areas of learning was produced on the initiative of the Commission des programmes d'études, as was the one on differentiated programs and optional programs in Secondary Cycle Two, entitled *A Question of Motivation: Different students, different programs*. It is the Commission's first contribution under its mandate concerning the ongoing adaptation of the programs, and its objective is to improve the quality of the Québec Education Program. Its starting point is the Commission's concerns regarding the broad areas of learning, concerns that have also been expressed in previous briefs. The QEP contains ambiguities with regard to the status of the broad areas of learning, a very innovative element of the QEP, and how they are to be addressed.

The broad areas of learning have an integrative potential. Unfortunately, their vague presentation and the variations in how they are dealt with in the QEP do not do justice to their richness or bring out all the possibilities they offer for the development of competencies and the acquisition of knowledge. Furthermore, it is difficult for the various categories of people working in schools to grasp their responsibilities with regard to this element of the QEP, whether it be in relation to the subjects, complementary educational services or the educational project. Evaluation of the manner in which the broad areas have been addressed is also problematic.

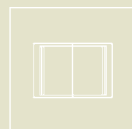
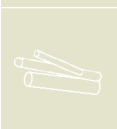
The Commission proceeded to verify, through research and observation in the field, whether its apprehensions were founded. Its findings confirm that there are shortcomings in the understanding of the broad areas of learning and their integration into educational practice. In most cases, the projects examined in the school visits and the review of experiences were related to the broad areas of learning, but only after the fact and by chance. The fact remains that there are problems in preschool and elementary education, particularly with regard to the integration of the broad areas into project planning, and in secondary school education, the description of how they should be addressed lacks clarity.

Through this process and some serious reflection, the Commission developed its own view: the broad areas of learning are avenues for the transfer, contextualization and integration of learning essential for the development of students' cognitive, social and personal dimensions. They increase the value of education, sustain a new relationship to knowledge, make learning meaningful and maintain students' motivation. In addition, they encourage active intervention by the various partners.

The Commission suggests four orientations for addressing the broad areas of learning. The first orientation is to make citizenship education the common frame of reference of these areas. This orientation stresses their contribution to the education of young citizens. Citizenship education is not limited to these five areas; it is also integral to the subject-specific programs and the educational aims. This leads to the second orientation, which is to make frequent explicit connections between these areas and the subject-specific programs, the complementary educational services programs and the educational project. In addition, because of the range of topics the broad areas of learning offer, they open the door to differentiation and diversification; they could therefore provide the basis for differentiated pedagogy and for the development of differentiated programs and optional programs, thus contributing to educational success. Finally, since the broad areas of learning give rise to joint action and collaboration by the partners in the education community, it would be advantageous to define the partners' tasks and responsibilities.

Although the Commission is aware that the curriculum reform is still recent and the implementation of the QEP has not yet officially crossed the threshold of secondary school education, it nonetheless is making the recommendation that the place of the broad areas of learning be clearly defined and that steps be taken to ensure that everyone working in the school understands their significance and perceives their relationship with the other components of the QEP. The Commission concludes by defining some strategies to encourage educators to address them. These strategies highlight the need for the partners to be informed, trained, committed, collectively responsible and able to develop in a learning organization in which they have access to a variety of resources.

Throughout its work, the Commission used a process that was consistent with the major principles guiding it in the preparation of its briefs, a process that was transparent, rigorous, rooted, constructive and coherent. Within the framework of its mandate with regard to the ongoing adaptation of programs, the Commission exercised the monitoring function that keeps it in contact with education research and practice. The Commission feels this mandate is important, because it ensures the constant updating of the QEP and thus obviates the need for it to be totally rewritten every 10 or 15 years. This ongoing adaptation also ensures its adjustment to the rapid changes of society and, like the analysis of programs, helps guarantee the quality of the QEP. The aim of this brief is to enable students to acquire more contextualized and meaningful learning in a new relationship to knowledge, to themselves and to the world. This brief also aims to increase the cultural content of the QEP, while fostering more integrated learning. The Commission hopes that it will lead to productive reflection by all partners in the education community and further the common goal of success for all.



A p p e n d i x 1

Experts consulted in the drafting of this brief



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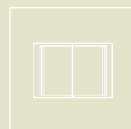
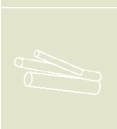
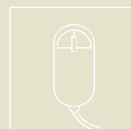
Consultant

*Chair of the Task Force on Curriculum Reform
Member of the Task Force on Elementary and Secondary
School Learning Profiles
Member of the Commission for the Estates General
on Education*

Arthur MARSOLAIS

Consultant

Former staff member of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation



Appendix 2

Schools visited



■ ÉCOLE PRIMAIRE L'AQUARELLE, RIMOUSKI

Sylvie DUBÉ, principal
Diane D'ASTOUS, vice-principal
Manon GAGNON, chair, governing board
Hélène BÉGIN, teacher, Cycle One
Lise CHOUINARD, teacher, Cycle One, special education
Marie GAUDREAU, coordinator, child-care service
Colette SAINDON, teacher, Cycle Two, special education
Hélène ST-PIERRE, remedial teacher
Joannie LECLERC, student, Cycle Three
Anne-Marie RIOUX, student, Cycle Three

■ ÉCOLE SECONDAIRE SAINTE-ANNE, DAVELUYVILLE

Alain DESRUISSEAU, principal
Éric MERCIER, vice-principal
Marielle HALDE, chair, governing board
Stéphane LAROCHE D., teacher, mathematics and science, Cycle One
René PRINCE, *Groupes intégrés* project
Marie-Claude THÉRIAULT, guidance counsellor
Xavier BLAIS, *Groupes intégrés* project
Alexandra RAYMOND, student, regular secondary education

■ ÉCOLE ALTERNATIVE SAINT-SACREMENT, TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Pierre BLANCHETTE, principal
Nathalie CAUCHON, chair, governing board
Renée BEAUCHESNE, teacher, Cycle Two
Martine BERGERON, teacher, Cycle One
Nathalie COSSETTE, teacher, Cycle Three
Line DESGAGNÉ, animator, spiritual care and guidance and community involvement

■ ÉCOLE BIENVILLE, MONTRÉAL

Francine LADOUCEUR, principal
Marie PÉLOQUIN, vice-principal
Julie BEAUSÉJOUR, teacher, Cycle Three
Christian BÉLIVEAU, teacher, physical education; resource teacher
Claude CORBEIL, education consultant
Richard ÉMOND, resource teacher
Julie HÉBERT, teacher, Cycle Three
Claudine LAJEUNESSE, Cycle One, multi-program class

■ LINDSAY PLACE HIGH SCHOOL, MONTREAL

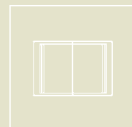
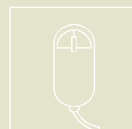
Bernie BUCKLEY, principal
Deberah HEUFF, vice-principal
Stephen BRAYNE, education consultant
Susan BRAYNE, teacher, mathematics and science
Christiane CORBEIL, teacher, moral and religious education, history
Martine LEMAIRE, teacher, French, geography, history
Keith MORRIS, teacher, English, mathematics

■ ÉCOLE DES CIMES, BEAUPORT

Claude BLAIS, principal
Sylvie LÉVESQUE, governing board
Hélène BLAIS, teacher, preschool education
Louise-Marie DESBIENS, teacher, music, dance
Julie DESROCHES, special educator
Nathalie NEAULT, teacher, Cycle One
Paula TREMBLAY, educator, child-care service
Laurenne TURCOTTE, teacher, Cycle Two

■ RADIO-ÉTINCELLE PROJECT

Lyse-Diane LAFLAMME, principal, École Saint-Paul-Apôtre, Commission scolaire de la Capitale
Johanne MORIN, teacher, Cycle Three, École Sainte-Marguerite, Commission scolaire de la Beauce-Etchemin
Nicolas BEAULIEU, special education technician, École Sainte-Marguerite, Commission scolaire de la Beauce-Etchemin



Appendix 3

Members and personnel of the

Commission des programmes d'études

CHAIR OF THE COMMISSION

Monique HÉBERT, director general
Commission scolaire des Patriotes

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

Anne BEAULIEU, parent
Commission scolaire de la Capitale

Hervé BERGERON*, teacher, French, secondary school
Commission scolaire des Navigateurs

Jean BISSONNETTE, teacher, social sciences, secondary school
Commission scolaire des Navigateurs

Brigitte FECTEAU, teacher, presecondary level
Commission scolaire de Portneuf

Kim GROMKO**, teacher, elementary education
Lester-B.-Pearson School Board

Richard (Dik) HARRIS, professor, physics
McGill University

Pierre LAPERRIÈRE*, teacher, history, secondary school
Commission scolaire des Trois-Lacs

Gisèle LARAMÉE, associate academic dean
Collège Édouard-Montpetit

Carole LAVOIE***, academic dean
Cégep de Sainte-Foy

Mario MOISAN, education consultant
Commission scolaire des Laurentides

Richard PALLASCIO, professor, teaching methods in mathematics
Université du Québec à Montréal

Édith ROUSSEL, teacher, elementary education
Commission scolaire René-Lévesque

Diane SAVARD, teacher, arts, secondary education
Commission scolaire des Rives-du-Saguenay

PERSONNEL OF THE COMMISSION

Abdoulaye BARRY, specialist in education

Francine BÉDARD-HÔ****, research officer

Francine BÉLANGER, coordinator

Agathe Fiset, specialist in education

Marcelle MAHEUX, secretary

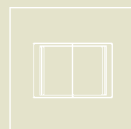
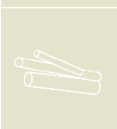
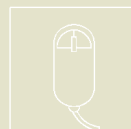
Denis ROYER, specialist in education

* Mandate ended in January 2004.

** Mandate ended in September 2003.

*** Mandate ended in March 2004.

**** Member of the staff until November 2003.



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