

**TAKING OWNERSHIP OF
CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES AND
BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING**

**BRIEF TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION,
RECREATION AND SPORTS**

MARCH 2007

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER 1 AN OVERVIEW.....	5
1.1 The Main Objectives of the Education Reform	5
1.2 What Are Broad Areas of Learning?	6
1.3 What Are Cross-Curricular Competencies?	7
1.4 Subject-Specific Competencies and Essential Knowledge in Subject Areas	8
1.5 The Players: Key Roles and Spheres of Influence.....	8
1.6 Support For Change	9
1.7 Problem Indicators.....	9
CHAPTER 2 THE RELEVANCE AND APPLICABILITY OF BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING.....	11
2.1 The Cornerstones of Broad Areas of Learning	11
2.2 Broad Areas of Learning in the Current Curriculum.....	13
2.2.1 Restructuring the Curriculum.....	13
2.2.2 Two Examples of Curricular Reform	15
2.3 Major Changes in Teaching Practices	16
2.3.1 Aspects of Discontinuity	16
2.3.2 Broad Areas of Learning: Educational Goals and Acquiring Knowledge.....	18
2.4 Findings on the Implementation of Broad Areas of Learning.....	18
2.5 Government Support	20
2.5.1 Guidelines For Implementing Broad Areas of Learning In Elementary and Secondary Education	22
2.5.2 Guidelines For Personal and Career Planning For Secondary Students	22
2.5.3 Examples of Possible Guidelines	23
2.6 A Better Shift: Think “Taking Ownership” Instead of “Applying”	24
2.7 Conclusion and Recommendations	25
2.7.1 The Relevance of Broad Areas of Learning	26
2.7.2 The Applicability of Broad Areas of Learning	26
CHAPTER 3 CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES: SOURCES, INTERPRETATIONS AND PRACTICAL REFERENCES	29
3.1 The Origin and Status of Cross-Curricular Competencies	29
3.1.1 The Basic Definition of Cross-Curricular Competencies	30
3.1.2 The Origin of Present Cross-Curricular Competencies	32
3.1.3 The Choice of Integrating Several Groups of Competencies	33
3.1.4 The Objectives of Integrating Cross-Curricular Competencies.....	34
3.2 Lessons From the Implementation of Cross-Curricular Competencies.....	35
3.2.1 Multiple Interpretations: Are They Compatible?	35
3.2.2 The Current State of Affairs.....	37
3.2.3 A Call For Tools and Support.....	38
3.3 Recommendations	40
CHAPTER 4 EVALUATING CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES.....	43
4.1 The Complexity of Evaluation In A Competency-Based Approach	44
4.2 Evaluating Cross-Curricular Competencies: Issues and Concerns	45
4.2.1 Issues Linked to Feasibility	46
4.2.2 Issues Linked to Communicating Results to Parents	48

4.3	The Brochure <i>Evaluation of Cross-Curricular Competencies</i> : Essential But Insufficient	50
4.4	Approaches and Recommendations.....	50
4.4.1	Evaluating Cross-Curricular Competencies: An Essential Learning Aid.....	50
4.4.2	Communications To Parents: Clear and Essential Information	52
4.4.3	Expanding the Teaching Practice.....	52
4.4.4	Improving A Communication Tool For Parents.....	54
CHAPTER 5	REVIEW, RECOMMENDATIONS AND ONE GENERAL RECOMMENDATION.....	55
5.1	The Relevance and Applicability of Broad Areas of Learning	55
5.1.1	Relevance	55
5.1.2	Applicability	55
5.2	Implementation of Cross-Curricular Competencies	56
5.2.1	Competencies To Be Retained in the Québec Education Program.....	56
5.2.2	New Professional Competencies For School Teams	57
5.2.3	Skills to Be Developed and Practices to Be Shared	58
5.3	Evaluating Cross-Curricular Competencies	58
5.3.1	A Pedagogical Practice to Be Developed.....	58
5.3.2	Improving A Communication Tool For Parents.....	59
5.4	A General Recommendation For Creating Favourable Conditions for the Implementation of Cross-Curricular Competencies and Broad Areas of Learning	60
CONCLUSION		61
BIBLIOGRAPHY		63
APPENDIX 1 LETTER FROM THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, RECREATION AND SPORTS.....		67
APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY TABLE OF THE QUÉBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM.....		69
APPENDIX 3 FEATURES OF THE BASIC GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR ADULTS		71
APPENDIX 4 PERSONS CONSULTED IN THE PREPARATION OF THE PRESENT BRIEF		73

INTRODUCTION

In September 2006, the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports requested that the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation study two components of the education reform, namely cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning, with the specific mandate to produce a brief on the question of the implementation and evaluation of cross-curricular competencies as well as the question of the relevance and applicability of broad areas of learning in elementary education.¹

The Minister also requested that the Conseil's brief consider the latest developments in cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning in the Québec Education Program for Secondary Cycle I and Cycle II, acting on one of the recommendations of the Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique in its report of August 2006.² In this report, the Table de pilotage highlighted among other things the difficulties expressed by respondents in a 2006 survey conducted by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport on the implementation and evaluation of the development of some broad areas of learning as well as some cross-curricular competencies.³

Given the Minister's request and deadline for this Brief, the Conseil would like to clarify at the outset that the present Brief is neither an evaluation of the education reform, nor of the Québec Education Program.

In the present Brief, the Conseil will firstly examine methods used for the integration of broad areas of learning and cross-curricular competencies, the issues arising from their implementation, and the evaluation of the latter. Lastly, the Conseil will define the conditions needed to facilitate the integration of cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning by the education community and will present its recommendations to the Minister.

The Conseil's study of the relevance and applicability of broad areas of learning draws extensively on official documents such as policy statements, the Basic School Regulation and the *Québec Education Program*; as for their applicability, this is primarily based on field experience of their implementation in the education community. Because this implementation was begun earlier in elementary education than in secondary education, this perspective obviously has more weight in the present Brief, without, however, disregarding findings at the secondary level.

The study of the implementation and the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies is also based on official documents and first-hand experience in the education community. This has enabled the Conseil to identify the reasons behind the issues and how they are experienced in day-to-day practice.

¹ Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports. Letter to the President of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, September 15, 2006 (see Appendix 1).

² Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique (2006). *Bilan de l'application du Programme de formation de l'école québécoise : Enseignement primaire*. Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. The preliminary report was submitted to the Minister in August 2006; the final approved version was released in December 2006.

³ Ibid., p.129.

In preparing this Brief, the Conseil has undertaken a review of literature and research on the subject, an examination and analysis of official Québec documents, as well as a study and a comparison of data with other education systems.⁴ The Conseil has also considered the report of the Table de pilotage. Lastly, the Conseil has met with Elementary and Secondary Cycle I teachers, administration staff and education counsellors as well as post-secondary education experts who all shared their opinions and interpretations of the present Brief's objectives. The Conseil would like to acknowledge their valuable input and express its deep gratitude.

The present Brief is divided into five chapters. The first chapter will give a brief overview of the importance of cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning within the general scope of the Québec Education Program. The responsibilities of the various education players will also be discussed. In the second, third and fourth chapters, the Conseil will respectively address broad areas of learning, cross-curricular competencies, as well as the issue of latter's evaluation, steering its analysis toward practical recommendations. In the fifth chapter, the Conseil will review the main findings and recommendations, formulate one general recommendation and present them to the Minister.

⁴ The present Brief largely rests on two working papers, of which the Conseil cites certain passages: Réginald Grégoire Inc. (2006). *L'équivalent des domaines généraux de formation dans d'autres systèmes scolaires ou selon des résultats de recherche*. Québec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation. Desaulniers, Annie (2007). *L'intégration des compétences transversales dans les programmes de formation de la Communauté française de Belgique et de l'Ontario*. Québec: Le Conseil.

CHAPTER 1 AN OVERVIEW

In this chapter, the Conseil will first review the main objectives of the education reform before identifying the features of broad areas of learning and cross-curricular competencies as well as their place within the education reform. Second, after defining the roles of the principal players, the Conseil will address the issue of support for change. Lastly, indicators of the difficulties currently experienced in these areas will briefly be covered.

1.1 The Main Objectives of the Education Reform

Before examining the specific features of broad areas of learning and cross-curricular competencies, the Conseil will review certain aspects of the education reform that have had a direct impact on them.

The Ministerial Plan of Action *A New Direction for Success*,⁵ released in 1997 in the wake of the Estates General On Education, established courses of action for the implementation of the education reform, with the objective of greater success for all students. The Plan notably recommended a review of the curriculum and emphasized the need for a new program of studies focused on essential learning more adapted to social, economic and cultural change. By recommending a competency-based approach that was both subject-related and cross-curricular, with the goal of developing students' abilities and knowledge, this program would better prepare students to be citizens of tomorrow and meet 21st Century challenges.

Thus the Québec Education Program, established in accordance with guidelines set in the Ministerial Action Plan, emphasizes the *process* of learning while still recognizing the importance of essential knowledge. The Program enables students to act and learn in a dynamic rather than a passive way and to be able to reinvest their knowledge in many environments.

The measures in the education reform can be summarized in three broad objectives: 1) *an education that is more fair when it comes to equal opportunity*, and therefore more accessible for all to succeed;⁶ 2) *a richer program of studies which is less diffuse or "scattershot"*, and lastly 3) *a greater cohesion and convergence* of curricular content.

Broad areas of learning are the result of both the objectives of a richer curriculum and of cohesion, as they require an internal processing of the subject areas rather than in different subjects parallel to the major disciplines. The end result is the elimination of courses that address similar issues in broad areas of learning, allowing a greater allocation of time to the subjects. This indeed calls for a greater cohesion and convergence of the key components of the curriculum.

⁵ Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (1997). *A New Direction For Success: Ministerial Plan of Action for the Reform of the Education System*. Québec: Le Ministère.

⁶ Worthy of mention are the initiatives to reduce school dropouts by then Education Minister Pagé in 1992. For its part, the 1997 policy statement *Québec Schools On Course* follows a similar path, but with a different approach, including measures to revise the Basic School Regulation and the curriculum in order to achieve greater opportunity for success.

The concept of cross-curricular competencies is also a direct result of the objective of a richer, more “demanding” education, which depends on high expectations as an element of quality in learning.⁷ By including these competencies in the various subjects, the value imparted to the latter is indeed increased.

1.2 What Are Broad Areas of Learning?

The Québec Education Program, under the category of “broad areas of learning,” lists a set of “important educational aims.” These areas are: Health and Well-Being; Personal and Career Planning; Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities; Media Literacy; and Citizenship and Community Life. They are called “broad” in contrast to the five more specialized subject areas that group subject-related competencies and essential knowledge.⁸

The broad areas of learning encompass all the key issues that confront society today, with the goal of developing the necessary aptitudes and competencies in students so that they may fulfil their roles as adults and citizens. Because broad areas of learning are tools for educational objectives that are not restricted to a single subject, they must be therefore be adopted by the entire school team.

From 1980 until the implementation of the new curriculum, the choice was to meet these educational objectives through specific subjects. In the current school system, the educational objectives for each of the broad areas of learning are undertaken by several subjects.

⁷ This objective echoes the consensus on the importance of “high expectations” as a quality factor in successful learning. See Corbo, Claude. “Finalités de l’éducation et mission de l’école : 1960–2000,” in Saint-Pierre, Céline and Jean-Philippe Warren (Ed.s) (2006), *Sociologie et société québécoise : présences de Guy Rocher*. Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, pp.97–117.

⁸ See the Summary Table in Appendix 2 on the subject areas and their respective fields, the broad areas of learning and cross-curricular competencies, taken from the *Québec Education Program: Preschool and Elementary Education*.

Table 1 Key Educational Objectives of the Five Broad Areas of Learning

Health and Well-Being	To ensure that students adopt a self-monitoring procedure concerning the development of good living habits related to health, well-being, sexuality and safety
Personal and Career Planning	To enable students to undertake and complete projects that develop their potential and help them integrate into society
Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities	To encourage students to develop an active relationship with their environment while maintaining a critical attitude towards exploitation of the environment, technological development and consumer goods
Media Literacy	To develop students' critical and ethical judgment with respect to media and to give them opportunities to produce media documents that respect individual and collective rights
Citizenship and Community Life	To ensure that students take part in the democratic life of the classroom or the school and develop a spirit of openness to the world and respect for diversity

Source: Ministère de l'Éducation (2003b). *Québec Education Program. Secondary School Education, Cycle One*. Approved Version, pp.20–28

1.3 What Are Cross-Curricular Competencies?

The nine cross-curricular competencies included in the Québec Education Program are grouped in four categories. The first category includes four intellectual competencies (“To use information,” “To solve problems,” “To exercise critical judgment,” and “To use creativity”). The second category includes two methodological competencies (“To adopt effective work methods” and “To use information and communications technologies”). The third category includes personal and social competencies (“To construct his/her identity” [for elementary education; the same competency is called “To realise his/her potential” for secondary education]; and “To cooperate with others”). The fourth category is communication-related (“To communicate appropriately”).

The development of these competencies is concurrent with that of subject-related competencies. Cross-curricular competencies must therefore be pursued in the day-to-day learning environments provided to students. Planning the development of these competencies in students must be a collaborative effort on the part of the entire school team.

While broad areas of learning encompass a range of objectives related to expected aptitudes and behaviours of students with regard to today’s major issues, cross-curricular competencies entail skills to be developed across the entire spectrum of the subjects and even within school life. They must prepare students to be able to behave and act successfully in different environments.

1.4 Subject-Specific Competencies and Essential Knowledge in Subject Areas

At the heart of the Québec Education Program, one of whose key objectives is to strengthen essential learning, lie the subjects themselves. These are grouped into five subject areas: 1) Languages, 2) Mathematics, Science and Technology, 3) Social Sciences, 4) Arts Education, and 5) Personal Development. The objective of grouping subjects into these areas is to avoid their isolation by integrating them into a broader field.

Competencies are identified for each subject, corresponding to the educational aim of that subject and the essential learning therein. The learning is generally grouped in knowledge, strategies and techniques directly linked either to one specific competency or to the entire subject area.⁹

1.5 The Players: Key Roles and Spheres of Influence

Cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning together with the subject areas are the pillars of the Québec Education Program, which is under the jurisdiction of the Government and the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport yet at the same time possesses its own influence and leadership.

The Québec Education Program was established within a framework of legislation for strengthening the institutional powers of schools and governing boards in the area of education, while fully recognizing the role of teachers in their classrooms. Thus, in addition to its strictly jurisdictional aspect, the Program recommends approaches, without, however, imposing pedagogical strategies or ideologies. In this light, its sphere of influence includes that of other players, namely the schools.

The implementation of the objectives of cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning is the responsibility of the schools. It is up to the school to organise the time needed to facilitate professional collaboration and thus promote the integration of these components of the education reform, as the Conseil has moreover recently highlighted.¹⁰ It is also the responsibility of the school team, supported by the school administration and its governing board, to ensure this integration is age-appropriate and in keeping with the dynamics of the school community.

As for school boards, they must ensure the implementation of the study programs established by the Minister of Education.¹¹ To do so, the boards must support and assist school administrators and teachers to facilitate them taking ownership of the Québec Education Program at the local level and implementing it in classrooms.

⁹ See the Summary Table in Appendix 2.

¹⁰ On this subject, see: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (2003). *L'appropriation locale de la réforme : un défi à la mesure de l'école secondaire*. Québec: Le Conseil.

¹¹ The Education Act, L.R.Q., c. I-13.3, Québec: Éditeur officiel du Québec, 2001, art. 222.1.

1.6 Support For Change

Over the years, the Conseil has studied the most suitable means for fostering change in education.¹² Indeed, for the Conseil, methods for managing change may have an impact on the implementation of cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning. Therefore, the Conseil desires to make a distinction in the present Brief between issues that arise from the nature of broad areas of learning or cross-curricular competencies themselves and issues that arise in their day-to-day implementation.

In current research on the advancement of education, there are two prevailing schools of thought: School Effectiveness and School Improvement. The Conseil's opinion is line with the latter approach, which conceives the advancement of education first and foremost as "taking ownership and interpreting" rather than "adopting and applying" and is based on a decentralization of responsibilities and transferable resources available to teachers. This approach requires room for institutional manoeuvring, which the governing boards provide.

In its 2003 Brief *L'appropriation locale de la réforme : un défi à la mesure de l'école secondaire*, the Conseil endeavoured to clearly define this distinction with regard to the current education reform. In the opinion of the Conseil, such ownership must first undergo an understanding of its foundations. This understanding paves the way to a gradual and planned adherence to pedagogical and curricular guidelines, leading to an eventual reform of professional, pedagogical and management practices.

An analysis from this perspective would enable to place the difficulties arising from the implementation of cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning in a much wider context.

1.7 Problem Indicators

The issues identified by the Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique with regard to the implementation of cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning, as well as the evaluation of the former, reveal that problems exist in these components of the education reform. More specifically, the issue of evaluating cross-curricular competencies has raised serious concerns among education players (parents, students, teachers), for which the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport has recently proposed a range of measures.¹³ Hence the reasons behind the request to the Conseil for the present Brief.

¹² See particularly: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (1993). *Rapport annuel 1991–1992 sur l'état et les besoins de l'éducation : la gestion de l'éducation : nécessité d'un autre modèle*. Québec: Le Conseil; Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (1995). *Vers la maîtrise du changement en éducation : rapport annuel sur l'état et les besoins de l'éducation 1994–1995*. Québec: Le Conseil.

¹³ See the letter addressed to teachers' union leaders by Education Minister Fournier, released on December 20, 2006. This document, which links evaluation of cross-curricular competencies to recommendations made in this area by teachers to school administrators, is available online at www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/renouveau/pdf/lettre.pdf.

Most of these concerns, however, have been expressed by individuals who are experiencing the education reform from within, namely teachers, education counsellors, and school and school board administrators. Nevertheless, the Conseil has noted a welcome reception for both cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning in some education communities.

The Conseil has noted that hitherto concerns of an impoverished curriculum and measures to counter school failures—such as differentiated learning, progression by cycle and the more collaborative and (ideally) faster management of student issues—have taken the limelight away from the implementation of broad areas of learning and cross-curricular competencies.

In brief, the Conseil acknowledges the concerns and issues noted in the recent report of the Table de pilotage. For its part, the Conseil will endeavour to identify the reasons for these issues and seek to determine how they are experienced in day-to-day practice. The Conseil's study will also make use of data from other education systems. But most importantly, it will base its understanding of the potential of and issues in cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning on a range of opinions of field experts and practitioners. The analysis of pertinent sources, comparisons with other school curricula, and a review of lessons learned by past and present experience form the three pillars of the present Brief.

CHAPTER 2 THE RELEVANCE AND APPLICABILITY OF BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING

In this chapter the Conseil will examine the relevance and applicability of broad areas of learning. The processes and objectives of their integration into the curriculum will first be introduced, followed by the major findings related to their implementation. Lastly, the Conseil will present its conclusions and recommendations regarding this component of the curriculum.

2.1 The Cornerstones of Broad Areas of Learning

Integrating broad areas of learning into the Québec Education Program represents a response to a desire expressed by various education players during the 1990s for greater cohesion in the curriculum through emphasizing essential learning. Calling into question the past mission of education and the curriculum, their objective was also to link educational aims to educate and prepare students to be responsible and active citizens.

Consequently, in 1994, the *Task Force on Elementary and Secondary School Learning Profiles Report* (the Corbo Task Force Report),¹⁴ stated that education should be focused on the intellectual development of the student and therefore place a greater importance on essential subjects. The Report also asserted that education must prepare students for life and the role of adult citizenship. This preparation is done not only through the acquisition of knowledge by each student, but also by developing aptitudes required to fulfil their role in society, be it as a citizen, worker, or employer.¹⁵ This was expressed once again in 1996 in the *Final Report of the Commission For the Estates General On Education*,¹⁶ which recommended to shift the focus of the mission of education onto these primary roles, providing a solid foundation and preparing responsible and active citizens. Moreover, the Report recommended that the curriculum be revised to emphasize essential learning. Curriculum renewal appeared, then, to be an opportunity to restore a certain cohesion.

Broad areas of learning are imbued with a quality to guide values, a quality that does not necessarily find an equivalent in specialized subject-related education. Broad areas of learning encompass attitudes and values whereby the relationship between a child or youth and a credible adult will have less to do with the adult's specialty (be he or she a music, math or history teacher) than with the credibility itself.

The choice of prioritizing the acquisition of essential learning and preparing students for their role as citizens, which led to the integration of broad areas of learning into the curriculum, is not unique to

¹⁴ Chaired by Claude Corbo, the mandate of the Task Force consisted in defining what students should know, do and be at the end of their elementary and secondary education so that they may meet 21st Century challenges: Task Force on Elementary and Secondary School Learning (1994). *Preparing Our Youth For the 21st Century*. Québec: Government of Québec.

¹⁵ It should be noted that the Corbo Report does not directly address broad areas of learning. However, some of the educational goals targeted in broad areas of learning are also found in the learning profiles, which define what students must be able to accomplish by the end of their elementary and secondary studies.

¹⁶ Estates General On Education (1996). *Renewing Our Education System: Ten Priority Actions. Final Report of the Commission For the Estates General On Education*. Québec: Government of Québec.

Québec. It is part of a larger trend, as similar approaches for curriculum renewal have been noted, notably in Finland and the United States.

Table 2 Key Areas of Development of the Five Broad Areas of Learning

Area and Educational Objective	Key Areas of Development
Health and Well-Being To ensure that students adopt a self-monitoring procedure concerning the development of good living habits related to health, well-being, sexuality and safety	Awareness of his/her basic needs Awareness of the consequences for health and well-being of his/her personal choices Active lifestyle and safe behaviour Awareness of the consequences of collective choices on individual well-being
Personal and Career Planning To enable students to undertake and complete projects that develop their potential and help them integrate into society	Self-knowledge and awareness of his/her potential and how to fulfill it Adoption of strategies related to a plan or project Familiarity with the world of work, social roles, and trades and occupations
Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities To encourage students to develop an active relationship with their environment while maintaining a critical attitude towards exploitation of the environment, technological development and consumer goods	Awareness of his/her environment Responsible use of goods and services Awareness of the social, economic and ethical aspects of consumption Construction of a viable environment based on sustainable development
Media Literacy To develop students' critical and ethical judgment with respect to media and to give them opportunities to produce media documents that respect individual and collective rights	Awareness of the place and influence of the media in the his/her daily life and in society Understanding of the media representations of reality Use of media-related materials and communication codes Knowledge of and respect for individual and collective rights regarding different media
Citizenship and Community Life To ensure that students take part in the democratic life of the classroom or the school and develop a spirit of openness to the world and respect for diversity	Promotion of the rules of social conduct and democratic institutions Participation, cooperation and solidarity Developing a culture of peace

Source: Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (2006c). *Programme de formation de l'école québécoise, deuxième cycle (Parcours de formation générale et parcours de formation générale appliquée)*. Approved Version, pp.10–22. It should be noted that the above definitions vary little from those contained in the *Québec Education Program: Preschool and Elementary Education*. Also, they are nearly identical to those in *Québec Education Program: Secondary School Education, Cycle One*.

2.2 Broad Areas of Learning in the Current Curriculum

In the establishment of a curriculum, any cultural analysis must consider issues regarding health education (including sex education), environmental issues, and some citizenship education. The latter not only encompasses traditional civics, non-violence and the promotion of cooperation and the common good, but also a political and democratic dimension that encompasses health, the environment, and citizenship. Therefore, in Québec as elsewhere, these themes in broad areas of learning are almost certain to be included in the curriculum in the objective of overall student development.

2.2.1 Restructuring the Curriculum

The five broad areas of learning in their current form are the *result of a decision to restructure the curriculum* as set forth in the Basic School Regulation. This modified a curriculum that dated back to the 1980s, when the objectives of broad areas of learning were incorporated in specific subjects and according to specific goals.

The Québec Education Program now recommends an integrated approach of these goals in the main subjects of the subject areas. This enables students to make connections between school and life situations, which becomes a lever to motivate students—without, however, excluding knowledge.

As a result, the Québec Education Program is, in part, a *continuum* of the past. For example, health has always been included in basic education, under the rubric of personal hygiene. Civic concerns have been taught for over a century as well and present obvious affinities with the current theme of community life. Similarly, awareness of nutrition from a health perspective and the world of work and careers also have deep roots. Personal planning, too, has been a major concern over the years.

Consequently there has been a clear *continuity* between the broad areas of learning and the five units of personal and social development at the elementary level, which teachers would gradually introduce as students advanced from one year to the next.

However, a certain *discontinuity* has been noted in methods of integrating individual educational goals which has resulted in the abandonment of parallels, and even a certain schism between teaching and learning. In fact, over the past two decades, specific courses were established for every aspect of “learning to”: courses on personal and social development with its five modules of health, sexuality and interpersonal relations; consumer and social skills; ecology; career; and an introduction to economics.

Moreover, the need to adapt the curriculum to changing social realities identified in the Task Force on Curricular Reform (The Inchauspé Report)¹⁷ has led to the consideration of new issues, and resulted in the addition of new subjects. Thus diversity necessitates that schools provide citizenship education. Likewise, the ubiquitous presence of the media demands that schools introduce their

¹⁷ Established following the Estates General On Education, this task force chaired by Paul Inchauspé was mandated to provide recommendations to the Government on modifications to the curriculum for elementary and secondary education so that students could meet the needs of the 21st Century. Task Force on Curriculum Reform (1997). *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools*. Québec: Government of Québec.

students to media literacy, to actively utilize the media, and to acquire critical faculties to counter the media's persuasive techniques. Lastly, new themes have been paired with older ones, notably consumer affairs, which is now coupled with environmental awareness, and entrepreneurship with careers and planning.

The integration of broad areas of learning into the curriculum has led to considerable change, notably in secondary education, with the elimination of around 20 units of this type of study program from the course list. As a result, hundreds of pages of programs were eliminated from the Québec Education Program as official references and are now replaced by 20-odd pages to create the five broad areas of learning.

As an illustration, instead of imposing one single method of teaching throughout elementary and secondary school, the three pages on health education more or less implicitly present a range of contributions, notably: that traditional investments by elementary teachers in health education retain their validity; that physical education remains a constant source of contributions to health education; ethics and religious culture can also provide some enrichment; and lastly, early scientific introduction to biology can provide multiple contributions as well. The same principle can be applied to the other broad areas.

This integration is not limited to the confines of the classroom. It also rests on complementary services such as the school's education plan and other measures in the Basic School Regulation, including learning paths in secondary schools, integrative projects¹⁸ and personalized orientation projects.¹⁹

¹⁸ The Ministère is currently preparing the integrative project, a two-credit compulsory course for all Secondary V students which is closely linked with broad areas of learning. It has many similarities with measures in other curricula: "independent study" in the U.K. and North America, *projet personnel encadré* in France, and "personal projects" in international education programs. Many projects such as these are situated either in a framework of social engagement or professional exploration, or in the use of media or environmental issues, or lastly in situations or events closely related to broad areas of learning. There is naturally a great number of projects that could be linked to broad areas of learning for those dedicated and persevering enough, even if they are not obligated to do so.

¹⁹ An optional course of four credits in Secondary III. This subject is compulsory for students who will enter the applied general education path, and is an optional course for those in general education.

2.2.2 Two Examples of Curricular Reform

Similar integration approaches have been undertaken by other education systems elsewhere. Like Québec, both Finland and many American states have opted to revise their curricula.

Finland

The current Finnish curriculum is a good example of an integrative approach whose similarities with Québec are considerable:

“[...] at the beginning of a long chapter which details the content of the curriculum, The Finnish National Board of Education outlines seven ‘cross-curricular themes’ which it deems to be the ‘central emphases’ of teaching and learning according to the adopted curriculum. They are as follows:

- personal development;
- cultural and institutional identity;
- media and communications skills
- citizenship and entrepreneurship;
- environmental awareness and sustainable human well-being;
- adapting safe behaviours in different environments and situations;
- relationships between the individual and technology.

The National Board of Education establishes targeted educational objectives as well as basic content for each of the above themes. However, none of these themes are taught in the specific subjects. Rather, these objectives and their content are integrated in the various subjects depending on the approach of each one, and by taking into consideration the developmental stage of the student.”²⁰
[translation]

²⁰ Finnish National Board of Education (2004). *National Core for Basic Education*. Helsinki: The Board, p.36, cited in Réginald Grégoire Inc., *op. cit.* footnote 4, pp.6–7.

The United States

It is also instructive to compare how in an American state such as Oregon, “standards” are voluntarily applied in health education:

The current standards in health education were approved by the Oregon State Board of Education in February of 2005. “The study of health education prepares students to make healthy decisions and take healthy actions on matters concerning personal, family and community health.” In the general introduction which governs health education standards, it is stated that the goal of this education is to develop in the student “the ability to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services.”

The standards are grouped into nine themes called ‘conceptual areas’:

- alcohol, tobacco and other drug use prevention;
- prevention and control of disease;
- promotion of environmental health;
- promotion of healthy eating;
- promotion of mental, social and emotional health;
- promotion of physical activity;
- promotion of sexual health;
- unintentional injury prevention;
- violence and suicide prevention.²¹

2.3 Major Changes in Teaching Practices

2.3.1 Aspects of Discontinuity

As noted above, broad areas of learning are part of a continuum of existing educational concerns, yet still display major aspects of discontinuity. Their integrated implementation has led to change in three different areas:

First area: Previous personal and social education development modules provided a somewhat predetermined learning path, detailing intermediary objectives leading to well-defined end goals, and included pedagogical content. With the Québec Education Program, there has been a shift from these specific benchmarks, closely connected to frameworks for pedagogical initiatives, to more concise references that act more as guidelines rather than being explicit and mandatory.

Second area: Integrating broad areas of learning requires a major effort in establishing cohesion by the school team. In fact, this requires a collaborative effort and could lead to questions regarding various aspects of school life. To wit, examples of both sanctioned and disciplinary actions have been observed which are at odds with the rights taught in citizenship education courses. As well, there are cafeterias that are poorly adapted to health objectives. In a cohesive approach, broad areas of

²¹ Oregon Department of Education (2006). *Oregon Standards*. Salem: ODE, pp.38A–42A, cited in Réginald Grégoire Inc., *op. cit.* footnote 4, p.10.

learning require a shared integration on the part of the school team that goes beyond the scope of former personal and social development programs.

Third area: The components of the various programs of study provide natural cornerstones for one or more broad areas of learning. However, beyond these naturally convergent points, there are potential links to be developed. The question is, then, whether or not the Québec Education Program provides a minimum of links between broad areas of learning and the individual subjects. Indeed, as parallelism and learning modules have been forsaken in the move toward integration, should the Québec Education Program not include a minimum of such links? If, however, broad areas of learning are primarily perceived for their pedagogical potential and as a stimulating source for projects, it becomes logical, then, not to provide cornerstones or links, in order to promote greater professional autonomy in the field of pedagogy.

The Québec Education Program appears to adhere to the latter approach.²² In the Conseil's opinion, this creates a major challenge for the integration of broad areas of learning, with a risk of leaving the school players on their own and possibly resulting in a loss of knowledge.

²² A quick study of the Québec Education Program essentially confirms that the cross-references provided in the broad areas of learning in study programs for preschool and elementary education are tenuous and only suggestive. For some linguistic competencies (competencies 1, 2 and 3) there is a brief mention of broad areas of learning in the sections entitled "Context for Learning" and "Developmental Profile" (pp.74, 77, 81). In these sections there are only suggestions for writing topics, texts to be read, and learning activities that are related to the subject or broad areas of learning. Beyond this there are no details on how this integration could be done. Moreover, in the French version of the Québec Education Plan, suggestions of cultural experiences (p.87) include elements related to the broad areas of learning "Media Literacy" and "Personal and Career Planning." In the case of Mathematics, there are no links at all. As for Science and Technology (Elementary Cycle II and III), links between broad areas of learning are made, but only in an suggestive fashion. Indeed, here too, cultural references (p.172) could have been used as a guide for creating given links. In the Social Sciences (Geography, History and Citizenship Education) the Program does not provide any integration tools for broad areas of learning, save a simple mention in the section "Context For Learning" in Cycle I, "To construct his/her representation of space, time and society": "This competency is developed through the programs of study and it has particular anchor points in the broad areas of learning." (p.182) In Arts Education, it is simply stated that: "the stimuli for creation are chosen according to the broad areas of learning." (p.208) As for Physical Education and Health, there are no links to any broad areas of learning in "Health and Well-being." In the soon to-be-redundant programs of Protestant Moral and Religious Instruction and Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction, there are no explicit links to a given broad area of learning. It should be noted, however, that the upcoming Ethics and Religious Culture program (currently under validation) will be clearly targeting significant links to broad areas of learning. Ministère de l'Éducation (2001). *Québec Education Program: Preschool and Elementary Education*. Approved Version. Québec: Le Ministère.

2.3.2 Broad Areas of Learning: Educational Goals and Acquiring Knowledge

If the Québec Education Program approaches broad areas of learning in an integrated manner rather than in parallel, it is because it deems that this is the best course of action. It should be noted, however, that the target objectives remain the same: integrating both knowledge and social practices in the curriculum.

Moreover, the Conseil has noted that in the development of the Québec Education Program a shift has occurred in the transfer of knowledge in the broad areas of learning toward an almost complete legitimization of their pedagogical potential.

The *Devis pour l'élaboration du Programme des programmes et des programmes d'études*, released by the Ministère de l'Éducation in May 1999, also stated that it is not so much a question of broad areas of learning as a question of areas of life experience. The *Devis* also recommended that the areas of “vision of the world and personal identity” as well as “socio-relational development” be added to current areas of learning. While these recommendations were eventually dropped,²³ the underlying polarization between knowledge and life experience appears to remain. It seems, then, that favouring a pedagogical approach over a curricular approach or vice-versa has until now been the object of much back-and-forth movement, and the Québec Education Program bears the traces of this ambiguity.

In Brief

The Conseil acknowledges the relevance of broad areas of learning in the curriculum. They are firmly entrenched in the educational continuum begun decades ago and reflect what is being done elsewhere. The new elements are the widening of the subjects and the integrated approach carried out within the curriculum.

The integration of broad areas of learning into the curriculum is the result of taking into consideration concerns expressed by various education players over the past few decades, in other words, a long and not exactly new process. The current integration of the broad areas of learning is, however, effecting major changes to teaching practices, changes that require support.

2.4 Findings on the Implementation of Broad Areas of Learning

After having defined the cornerstones for the broad areas of learning the Conseil will now examine how they are implemented by the different education communities and what has occurred since their implementation began several years ago in elementary schools and, more recently, in Secondary Cycle I.

²³ Some of these themes (“Helping students construct their world-view, construct their identity and become empowered”) can be found in part in the Introduction of the *Québec Education Program*, and correspond to the three main objectives of the Program: to instruct, to socialize and to qualify.

In general, an agreement in principle has been noted on the interest to harmonize all programs of study with issues arising from broad areas of learning. This agreement is mitigated, however, by findings on considerable limitations and difficulties²⁴ and by concerns whether the Québec Education Program itself can provide sufficient support to overcome them.

Examples of First-Hand Accounts

In this section, the Conseil relates first-hand accounts from teachers and school teams which reflect some of the issues directly related to integration. In general, the well-intentioned basis of the integration is not questioned, but the practical support by the Québec Education Program is perceived to be almost non-existent. Beyond “the need to integrate,” the Program does not provide any practical implementation benchmarks expected by the schools. One first-hand account, below, provides an illustration.

How an elementary teacher compared “before” and “after” the reform:

I used to have a personal and social development program. It set out for me what pertained to first grade, second grade and so on. At the appropriate time in my class I would teach a unit of personal and social development, and then move on to the next. I wouldn't “run them through” math or French first. I can see how everything can be potentially connected to the big objectives of the broad areas of learning, but... They don't even specify who does what and when! A student who starts Cycle II, will he be repeating what he has already done in Cycle I, depending on the teacher's personal choice? Is it up to the individual teacher then to decide how this is integrated in the various subjects? [translation]

At another elementary school in a disadvantaged area participating in the *École-famille-communauté* [School/Family/Community] project,²⁵ the implementation of the reform was primarily based on the regular work of cycle teams. While broad areas of learning did receive support in principle, their implementation was often not a priority, however, even if it rested on the collaboration of the cycle teams. In the school in question, the initial effort led to the creation of a climate of mutual respect between teachers and students in keeping with the spirit of the broad area of learning “Citizenship and Community Life.” The school team now tends to strengthen itself by minimizing the departure of teachers for “easier” schools. The focus is now on implementing differentiated learning, including “homework,” which is no longer standardized.

A secondary school with a large clientele from rural areas was also studied. This school had volunteered to participate a year prior to the implementation of the reform. There it was noted that the teachers had adopted compulsory teamwork schedules and had defined two key priorities: to be able to incorporate competencies in the various subjects, and to help students with learning difficulties. As for broad areas of learning, the teachers did acknowledge the importance of integrating them, but they also noted the lack of concrete guidelines other than the suggestive ones in the Québec Education Program.

²⁴ Here the Conseil relies on the results of a study conducted on perceptions of broad areas of learning found in the report of the Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique (*op. cit.* footnote 2, pp.54–58 and 103–106).

²⁵ A smaller-scale network similar to the “L'école montréalaise” program.

Some elementary school teachers consulted believed that what helped them to continue their commitment despite problems was the fact that the themes of the broad areas of learning were also found in the teaching materials of various subjects.

Another school team reported that for “Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities,” the current science and technology program for secondary schools was better adapted than the old Ecology course taught in Secondary Cycle I. In contrast, some players question whether merging History with the broad area of learning “Citizenship and Community Life” would not relegate the former to simply being a tool.

In light of these accounts and the analysis of the Québec Education Program, the Conseil concludes that with regard to broad areas of learning, the Program is more like an “integratable” program than an integrated program as it does not provide a minimum of benchmarks for implementation and essentially refers the responsibility and entire task for the integration back to the players. This necessitates that teachers retroactively establish, according to their talents, links between broad areas of learning and subject areas, which calls for immediate changes in teaching practices.

If we are to acknowledge the difficulties ensuing from these changes, it is imperative that broad areas of learning are not perceived as additional effort. Consequently, benchmarks should be provided for their implementation. Herein lays what might shape the future of broad areas of learning.

2.5 Government Support

The above observations require a clarification of responsibilities, be they of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir, et du Sport, the school teams or the teachers.

A will on the part of the Government to strengthen the responsibility of each education community and to better recognize the teaching profession, notably by amending the Education Act, has emerged from the education reform.

Does the experience of implementing the reform in elementary schools indicate whether the boundaries of responsibility between the Government, schools and teachers are appropriate? What pertains more to responsibility or more to influence or leadership on the part of the Ministère? How is this to be determined?

Firstly, the Conseil concedes that if the Government has decided to include broad areas such as health, environment, media and citizenship, etc., in an integrated approach, that certainly falls under its jurisdiction. However, the Government would then be obligated to promote this integration in the curriculum and in the various subjects. In this regard, the Conseil deems that the Ministère has invested very little.

Health Education is one such case. In the Basic School Regulation, Health Education is no longer relegated to the specific subject of personal and social development, but has now become an educational theme shared among several subjects and a common concern for the entire school team. The school team, then, turns toward the Québec Education Program. In it they will find legitimacy and

a clear confirmation of *raison d'être* for this broad area of learning. In addition, the school team will look in the Program for both links between the subjects and broad areas of learning as well as benchmarks that trace the stages of this area of learning over the cycles.

If the Québec Education Program respects the restructuring choices of the Basic School Regulation, what sort of discourse would one expect to find therein with regard to the different broad areas of learning? Obviously, one would expect to see under the broad area of learning “Health and Well-being” elements that would serve as a guide for integrating it in some subject-related area.²⁶ Similarly, one would also expect to find integration strategies for Science and Technology—known for its obvious affinities with the broad area of learning “Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities”—for the first four years of secondary education.²⁷

The Conseil notes, however, that the Québec Education Program does not contain benchmarks for the integration of broad areas of learning.²⁸ For example, there is no progression in the implementation of broad areas of learning at the elementary level. Consequently, students could, at the end of their education, have learned a lot or a little about any of the broad areas of learning.

The lack of integrative benchmarks for broad areas of learning in the various subject areas, moreover, is sharply contrasted by the eloquence of the Québec Education Program when it comes to the pedagogical potential that subject knowledge and broad areas of learning offer.

In fact, the Conseil notes that the Québec Education Program includes more elements that emphasize the pedagogical potential of broad areas of learning than elements that would promote the implementation of student educational goals by the entire school team.

²⁶ For example, the broad area of learning “Health and Well-Being” can bring into play contributions from Physical Education with regard to safety (cycling, traffic, swimming, etc.) in any given year or cycle. It can also draw on certain aspects of scientific learning: for instance, some are directly linked to awareness of the cardiorespiratory capacity in Physical Education. The specific contribution of one’s mother tongue (English or French), consisting in reflexive reactions to emotional and social aspects of health in storytelling, tales, songs, etc., could reveal the link between mental health and the emotional scars of violence, taunting and ridicule... Likewise for basic knowledge about mental diseases, whose signs are very often interpreted as bad behaviour or hate. Lastly, the contribution of “Ethics and Religious Culture” could, at the very least, bring to a given area of Health Education links to interpersonal relations, sexuality and couples, parents and children, and sibling relations.

²⁷ For example, the Program has a specific and essential contribution to Health Education because in a given year, students are initiated to breathing, energy and calories, genetics, the nature of virii and bacteria from a biology perspective. Its contribution to Education and Citizenship implies a minimal awareness through the introduction of themes on energy (fossil fuels, hydroelectricity and nuclear power), on urbanization and the effects of industrialization, and to the relationship between communications technologies and new issues in democracy. Lastly, in emphasizing the possibility of work or careers in areas ranging from mines to agriculture, including forestry, veterinary medicine, civil or mechanical engineering, as well as cutting-edge technology, medicine, architecture and urban planning, it could show how Science and Technology can be linked to the broad area of learning “Personal and Career Planning.”

²⁸ See, for a similar analysis, Commission des programmes d’études (2006). *Enseignement secondaire, deuxième cycle (phase 1)*. Québec: La Commission, p.12.

If the objective of broad areas of learning is the implementation of these educational goals and their integration in the subject areas, then there must be a minimum of benchmarks. Without such guidelines, the broad areas of learning could be considered only for their motivational potential and not as knowledge to be imparted and acquired. As a result, the curriculum could become impoverished.

2.5.1 Guidelines For Implementing Broad Areas of Learning In Elementary and Secondary Education

One of the concerns raised by education players with regard to broad areas of learning involves the uniformity of the language used both for elementary and secondary education. Some have suggested it be modified specifically for elementary education.

In the opinion of the Conseil, there is no need modify the language of the broad areas of learning. The Conseil is aware, however, that how these areas are developed will depend on the age of the student and teaching level as well as on the choices made by the school team, choices which should take into account the dynamic of each school community. A guide prepared to facilitate the implementation of broad areas of learning could thus provide practical benchmarks depending on the level of study.

2.5.2 Guidelines For Personal and Career Planning For Secondary Students

Personal and career planning has always occupied a very important place in secondary education. Indeed, the 1997 report *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools* emphasized that the cancellation of courses in career planning in Secondary III, Secondary IV and Secondary V would not lead to a decrease in resources but rather a restructuring of them.

Several projects now illustrate that Secondary Cycle II is crucial in supporting education and career choices: the introduction of two education paths, one of which is more vocational-based, the other the new “Personal Orientation Project”; and in Secondary V, the Integrative Project focused on the interest areas of the student. For the Conseil, these are areas that are closely linked with the broad area of learning “Personal and Career Planning” as well.

Within this context, the Conseil notes that Secondary IV and Secondary V elective courses—which typically serve as a career guide—also constitute a great opportunity to diversify learning. However, the number of elective courses included in the Basic School Regulation of 2006 has dropped considerably from those in the Basic School Regulation of 2001. Here, too, the overall cohesion between the school education plan, complementary educational services, and a success plan would undoubtedly promote both the elective subjects and the broad area of learning “Personal and Career Planning.”

2.5.3 Examples of Possible Guidelines

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

Below are a few guidelines taken from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) in the United States that correspond to those found in the five broad areas of learning of the Québec Education Program:

- a) Health and Physical Education standards are developed separately. Likewise for History and Citizenship (civics).
- b) The environment is clearly taught in more than one subject (Health, Science, etc.); more specifically in Geography.
- c) Two of the ten standards in Language Arts are related to the media. Many aspects are taken into consideration from Kindergarten until Grade 12.
- d) The standards for Economics include an area for entrepreneurship.
- e) The subject of Consumer Affairs is taught in Health and a few other areas, and to our knowledge, nowhere else in an extensive manner.
- f) Lastly, Career Planning, meaning an education centred on education or career planning, does not appear to be part of the defined categories in this compendium. The latter is included, however, under the rubric of “Career Education” with career standards in areas such as Agriculture and Family/Consumer Sciences.²⁹

²⁹ 2006 standards and benchmarks taken from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) are available online at www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks

Oregon

Réginald Grégoire's comparison with the curriculum of the state of Oregon is informative:

In the area of "Speaking and Listening" under English/Language Arts in the curriculum, one of the education objectives is as follows: "Evaluate the significance and accuracy of information and ideas presented in oral, visual, and multimedia communications across the subject areas." For each school year, starting with Grade 3 to Grade 8, under the rubric "Analysis" the standards to be adhered to are defined as follows:

- at the end of Grade 3, the student must be able to "distinguish between a speaker's opinions and verifiable facts;"
- at the end of Grade 5, the student must be able to "identify and discuss the purposes of media—information, entertainment, persuasion, interpretation of events, and transmission of culture;"
- at the end of Grade 7, the student must be able to "analyze how images, text, and sound in electronic journalism affect the viewer" as well as "identify, analyze, and critique persuasive techniques, such as promises, dares, flattery, and glittering generalities used in oral presentations and media messages."

2.6 A Better Shift: Think "Taking Ownership" Instead of "Applying"

A preliminary analysis of these findings may lead one to conclude that there is some confusion as to the division of decision-making responsibility between the Ministère and the school team. However, this evident impasse should be analyzed through two possible approaches for implementation. The first approach emphasizes "adopting" and "applying," in which the Ministère would play an important role of decision-making and standardization. In the second approach, "taking ownership," initiatives and responsibilities are carried out from within, and Government guidelines would serve more as benchmarks and sources of inspiration and incentive, not simply as levers of obligation.

For its part, the Conseil ascribes to the approach of "improving education," particularly since the release of its 1994–1995 annual report entitled *Vers la maîtrise du changement en éducation*.³⁰ This process will require a longer timeframe, to be sure, however the Conseil believes that ultimately it will prove to be the most successful. The Conseil has also endorsed this view more recently, in its 2003 Brief *L'appropriation locale de la réforme : un défi à la mesure de l'école secondaire*.

³⁰ See: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *op. cit.* footnote 12; *Pour un renouvellement prometteur des programmes à l'école*, 1998; *L'école, une communauté éducative : voies de renouvellement pour le secondaire*, 1998.

In Brief

The following is a summary of the six key elements:

- The broad areas of learning exist because a decision was made to no longer teach health education, environment, social and career planning, media awareness, and consumer affairs and entrepreneurship as parallel courses. For the Conseil, the decision to integrate is a legitimate one. Moreover, it reflects current practices found in many other education systems. The five areas of learning as defined in the Québec Education Program are relevant from the beginning of elementary education until the end of secondary education;
- In developing this choice, already stipulated in the Basic School Regulation, the drafting of study programs seems to have vacillated between a pedagogical approach of leaving the maximum manoeuvrability in the development of broad areas of learning and the approach of a curriculum that defines a minimum of required benchmarks for the various subject areas;
- The few links between broad areas of learning and subject areas provided in the Québec Education Program are perceived as a serious issue by practitioners who fear a potential regression, particularly in the areas of health education, environment and community life;
- The difficulties arising from the implementation of broad areas of learning in elementary education have caused some concerns that call for benchmarks;
- The Conseil is aware of concerns expressed with regard to career planning in Secondary Cycle II and that this merits consideration. When making decisions in the implementation of the Québec Education Program, the importance of career planning must be taken into consideration so as to utilize the measures in the Program to their fullest.
- Lastly, issues arising from the integration of broad areas of learning highlighted by the Conseil in the present Brief do not justify forsaking a management of change that encourages and equips, nor does it justify returning to a more detailed and rigid form of management. In the opinion of the Conseil, there is reason to continue with the “taking ownership” approach of the education reform rather than the “adopting and applying” approach;

2.7 Conclusion and Recommendations

After having presented the cornerstones of the broad areas of learning, discussed the responsibilities of the education players in the development and implementation of the curriculum and defined the key aspects of the issues, the Conseil now presents its conclusion and recommendations.

2.7.1 The Relevance of Broad Areas of Learning

In the Conseil's opinion, broad areas of learning in the Québec Education Program are widely accepted in principle both with regard to their chosen areas and for their inclusion in the curriculum in various programs of study rather than in specialized subjects.

The Conseil also deems that broad areas of learning as specified in the Québec Education Program are relevant both for elementary and secondary education. It is the responsibility of each school to ensure that their implementation is student age-appropriate and in keeping with school dynamics. The Conseil thus upholds the relevance of broad areas of learning as they are currently defined in the Québec Education Program.

2.7.2 The Applicability of Broad Areas of Learning

The Conseil deem that broad areas of learning are applicable. However, their implementation entails major change in the way things are done and requires the support of both the Ministère and school boards, and particularly the participation of all school teams. Also, the Conseil is aware of the time needed to take ownership of broad areas of learning by all education players according to their respective communities.

The Conseil has noted that the implementation of broad areas of learning has thus far not been among the top priorities expressed by education players, despite a process of taking ownership that is already in place.

The Conseil believes that a shared implementation of the student's educational objectives must be supported by benchmarks and content that promote the integration of broad areas of learning in the curriculum and in the subject areas. The Conseil has noted that the Québec Education Program provides very few guidelines to support the applicability of broad areas of learning and that the defined benchmarks emphasize more their pedagogical potential. It The Québec Education Program also provides very few links between the subject areas and broad areas of learning, except for brief references in the objectives, references that do not, however, provide concrete examples.

In the absence of such guidelines, the implementation of broad areas of learning is often limited to their motivational aspect. Broad areas of learning include not only aptitudes and skills but also knowledge. If broad areas of learning are to be used simply as models for learning environments, the Conseil fears that important aspects of the student's development may be left out, possibly resulting in an impoverished curriculum.

The Conseil is also aware that additional support is needed on the part of the Government so that ultimately the original objectives may be achieved.

Should, then, parts of the Québec Education Program be revised? No. It appears that a reference guide (rather than a regulatory manual) would fulfil this need, a guide with well-defined interdisciplinary benchmarks for broad areas of learning and guidelines for their sequential progression which would ultimately ensure cohesion and progress.

Moreover, the Conseil has emphasized the challenges posed in the implementation of “Personal and Career Planning,” particularly for Secondary Cycle II.

Considering that the educational aims pursued in the integration of broad areas of learning are not sufficiently supported in the Québec Education Program—hence the risk of an impoverished curriculum—and considering as well the difficulties arising from taking ownership of broad areas of learning by school teams and their implementation depending on the cycle, the Conseil deems it imperative that a non-regulatory reference guide be created. This guide—not a manual—would provide education players with a range of potential links with the subject areas, while still leaving sufficient manoeuvrability needed for integration at the local level.

Therefore, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 1) to provide schools, as a complement to the Québec Education Program, with a reference guide that would include potential links between the subject areas and broad areas of learning, including possible methods of implementation of the broad areas of learning according to the cycle.

CHAPTER 3 CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES: SOURCES, INTERPRETATIONS AND PRACTICAL REFERENCES

For some, cross-curricular competencies are valuable assets, while for others they represent a source of concern. In this chapter, the Conseil will first clarify the original sense of cross-curricular competencies, then discuss the lessons to be learned from the way they are implemented in practice. Lastly, the Conseil will present its recommendations.

3.1 The Origin and Status of Cross-Curricular Competencies

Taken as a whole, what do the principal sources that have led to the inclusion of cross-curricular competencies in the Québec Education Program reveal? One general misconception with regard to the Program—that competencies come first and subjects second—must be immediately corrected. In fact, quite the opposite is true: the curriculum is basically designed around subjects. It is within the subjects that the emphasis has been placed on competencies, and not in the overall structure of the curriculum.

Some education systems have specifically incorporated subjects to target competencies, or what is called in the United States *competency-based education*.³¹

In Québec this approach has been explored in the form of “exit profiles,” for which the Minister of Education had mandated in the Spring of 1994 the Task Force on Elementary and Secondary School Learning Profiles, chaired by Claude Corbo. Yet ultimately, neither the final report by The Estates General On Education, nor the *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools* report, nor the Policy Statement *Québec Schools on Course* recommended a revision of the curriculum based on exit profiles or target “end-goal” competencies. Instead, the emphasis was placed on a traditional restructuring of the studies based on subjects and programs.

Choosing to place a competency within a subject expresses a will to sufficiently broaden knowledge until it reaches a level where it is self-evident how to sufficiently reapply the knowledge in similar or new contexts. This in no way means, however, marginalizing or devaluing subjects with an approach that is too functional or utilitarian.

The restructured Québec curriculum of the past decade, far from marginalizing knowledge and subjects, has given them a more central and defined role than previously, and draws from a competency-based approach which allows the benefits of learning to be more sustainable, whether they are in mathematics, foreign languages, history, art or sciences and technology.

³¹ A study on competency-based education conducted by Réginald Grégoire clearly explains what this entailed for many American states that have adopted this approach. Réginald Grégoire Inc. (1999). *Le renouvellement du curriculum : expériences américaine, suisse et québécoise*. Québec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, pp.77–111.

3.1.1 The Basic Definition of Cross-Curricular Competencies

In Chapter 1 the four groups of cross-curricular competencies were briefly introduced and examined from a global approach of immersion in all the activities, something akin to comparing and contrasting general skills to specialised ones. In the Adult Education sector,³² moreover, these competencies are known as transferable skills (to communicate, to adopt work methods, to use creativity, to use logic, to use critical and ethical judgement, and to cooperate with others). Beyond the label, just what are cross-curricular competencies? A general definition for each cross-curricular competency and its key features is found below.

The table below lists the nine cross-curricular competencies for elementary education, which are nearly identical to those in secondary education with the exception of the competency “To construct his/her identity,” which becomes “To realise his/her potential” for secondary education.

³² See Appendix 3, “Features of the Basic General Education Curriculum For Adults.”

Table 3 **Key Features of Cross-Curricular Competencies**

Competency	Key Features
Intellectual Competencies	
To use information	- To gather information - To recognize various information sources - To put information to use
To solve problems	- To analyse components of a situational problem - To formulate possible solutions - To test a solution - To adopt a flexible approach - To evaluate the procedure used
To exercise critical judgment	- To form an opinion - To express his/her judgment - To qualify his/her judgment
To use creativity	- To become familiar with all the elements of a situation - To imagine ways of proceeding - To begin the procedure - To adopt a flexible mode of operation
Methodological Competencies	
To adopt effective work methods	- To analyse the task to be performed - To begin the process - To perform the task - To analyse his/her procedure
To utilise information and communication technologies (ICT)	- To master information and communications technologies - To use information and communication technologies to carry out a task - To evaluate his/her use of information and communication technologies
Personal and Social Competencies	
To construct his/her identity*	- To be open to his/her surroundings - To become aware of his/her place among others - To make good use of his/her personal resources
To cooperate with others	- To interact with an open mind in the various contexts - To contribute to team efforts - To use teamwork effectively
Communication-related Competencies	
To communicate appropriately	- To establish the intention of the communication - To select the mode of communication - To carry out the communication

Source: Ministère de l'Éducation (2001). *Québec Education Program: Preschool and Elementary Education*. Québec: Le Ministère, 2001, pp.11–39.

* In secondary education, "To construct his/her identity" becomes "To realise his/her potential" and "To be open to his/her surroundings" become "To recognize his/her personal characteristics." The other two features of this competency remain the same both for elementary and secondary education.

3.1.2 The Origin of Present Cross-Curricular Competencies

Cross-curricular competencies can be interpreted in a number of ways and this can partly explain the issues related to their implementation. To truly grasp this multiplicity of meanings, it is perhaps best to first review their origins.

Cross-curricular competencies are the result of the combination and convergence of four approaches:

- the emphasis on the development of higher skills;
- the concept of sustainable life-long skills or competencies;
- the growing interest in metacognitive learning;
- the importance of psychology and personal development.

The above approaches can be summarized as follows:

1. The notion of emphasizing the development of higher skills originated from studies conducted during the 1980s which revealed a risk associated with not sufficiently eliciting students' abilities, particularly those in secondary schools and to, a lesser degree, those in colleges. This theory, based primarily on studies conducted on "essential learning," advanced that each subject had to contribute in its own way to the development of reasoning, analytical and synthesis skills, "thinking outside the box" by using creativity and critical judgment.³³

The report *Apprendre pour de vrai*, prepared by the Conseil in 1984, also came to a similar conclusion. There was a wide consensus that subjects, programs and textbooks were not evolving toward the required marshaling of the student's skills beyond the elementary and the routine. In a context where the so-called "best schools" are characterized notably by high expectations for their students,³⁴ the concern for eliciting higher skills became more an indicator of curriculum quality than an objective to be evaluated in the students themselves.

2. The concept of life-long sustainable competencies is based in large part on the origins of the current Québec curriculum and the work of the American Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS).³⁵ The commission's work revealed that in addition to specialized skills, the workplace was also demanding "competencies" acquired through a common general education, particularly communications and interpersonal skills.³⁶

³³ Established during the 1980s, the Québec concept of essential learning is closely related to that of North American general education and liberal education and their issues. The studies mentioned were conducted and published by the Centre d'animation, de développement et de recherche en éducation (CADRE): see Laliberté, Jacques (1984). *La formation fondamentale : la documentation américaine*, Montréal: CADRE. By the same author (1987): *La formation fondamentale : la documentation française, 1981–1986*, Montréal: CADRE.

³⁴ See the review of these analyses in Bissonnette, Steve, Mario Richard and Clermont Gauthier (2006). *Comment enseigne-t-on dans les écoles efficaces?* Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, p.145.

³⁵ SCANS was established in 1990 by the U.S. Secretary of Labor to define the skills required by American youth to succeed in the marketplace.

³⁶ In the adult education sector, the work of SCANS—which established how to organize links between non-specialized competencies and more specialized learning—has been adopted and adapted; see Grégoire, Réginald (1996). *Les*

3. From the latter part of the 1980s until the Policy Statement *Québec Schools on Course* in 1997, the emphasis on research in education focused on strategies and learning processes, known as “metacognitive” learning.

The focus on metacognitive learning touches on the cross-curricular competency “To adapt effective work methods.” This metacognitive process is primarily centred on learning while the concept of “higher skills” is based on the quality of the curriculum. It is in this approach that cross-curricular competencies may have an influence on pedagogical strategies.³⁷

4. The last approach refers to the importance of psychology and personal development. In 1979, the policy statement *L'École québécoise* provided a definition of the meaning of education which was deeply rooted in a psychological approach concerned with the holistic growth and development of the individual. The cross-curricular competencies “To construct his/her identity/character” and “To realise his/her potential” are to some extent the results of this interest for the overall development of the individual.

3.1.3 The Choice of Integrating Several Groups of Competencies

The cross-curricular competencies found in today's curriculum are a result of a process to group or integrate the various abovementioned approaches. This process, which took place between 1994 and 1997, is summarized below.

In 1994, the Corbo Report³⁸ emphasized the need for an education more focused on higher learning for students and that education had to contribute to the development of general skills necessary for life-long learning, skills that had to be transferable. It also stated that education must prepare students for their roles as citizens, workers or employers. The Report then proposed a definition of the skills required by students at the end of their elementary and secondary education which included technical and general methodological skills. It is interesting to note that the expected skills differed for elementary students and secondary students: Not only were the expected levels of mastery different, but so was the language.

habiletés et les comportements requis dans le monde du travail : éléments essentiels de la commission SCANS et guide général d'application. Projet Atout, Longueuil: Commission scolaire Jacques-Cartier.

³⁷ This is done through “To evaluate the procedure used” in the competency “To solve problems;” through “To evaluate his/her use of information and communications technologies” in the competency “To use information and communications technologies;” and “To adopt a flexible mode of operation” in the competency “To use creativity.”

³⁸ Task Force on Elementary and Secondary School Learning Profiles, *op. cit.* footnote 14.

Following the Corbo Report and in order to address concerns voiced during the Estates General of 1996 that education was overly oriented to imparting subject-based knowledge and not sufficiently promoting the development of higher learning and methodological competencies,³⁹ the Task Group on Curriculum Reform in 1997 recommended the inclusion of cross-curricular competencies in the curriculum.

The Task Group on Curriculum Reform distinguished what it called cross-curricular competencies from the broad competencies recommended in the Corbo Report; the latter related to methods and intellectual skills while the former also included social and language skills. For the Task Group, social competencies were related to coexistence, values and behaviours that promoted social cohesion. It also stated that cross-curricular competencies are developed not only through learning in the various subjects, but also throughout school life and through extracurricular activities. The Policy Statement *Québec Schools on Course* would then wholly embrace all these recommendations, which eventually led to the Ministère establishing four categories of cross-curricular competencies.

The education policy tabled by the Ministère in 1998 was, then, based on recommendations made by the Task Group on Curriculum Reform. The policy included changes to be made to elementary and secondary education. The policy specified namely that education should promote the development of cross-curricular competencies in students, competencies grouped as follows: intellectual, methodological, competencies related to behaviour and attitudes (called “Personal and Social” in the Québec Education Program) and language competencies (called “Communication-related”).

3.1.4 The Objectives of Integrating Cross-Curricular Competencies

Throughout the various stages that have led to the education reform, it is possible to see that the integration of cross-curricular competencies into the Québec curriculum has its origins in a wide range of concerns. Originally, the emphasis was placed on issues related mainly to the development of higher learning and methodological skills as well as the development of required social and workplace competencies. To these initial concerns were then added the development of social-related competencies, which essentially involve living in society and include the command of a language.

The concerns behind the development of the abovementioned competencies dovetail with the tripartite mission of Québec education: to *instruct* (by prioritizing the development of intellectual activities and acquiring knowledge), to *socialize* (by promoting a sense of belonging to a community and learning to “live together”) and lastly to *qualify* (by giving all students a chance to succeed in their education or to successfully integrate in society through acquired vocational competencies). Also included is the quality of the curriculum, that is the quality of learning acquired—from compulsory education through a more demanding education—which elicits further intellectual skills on the part of students. Lastly, they engage the practice of teaching professionals by requiring that the latter be more attentive to the learning process of students and to adopt tools in order to identify and understand learning problems so that they may best work with them.

³⁹ In the report of the Estates General released in 1996, the need to raise the quality of the curriculum was noted, and also that education contributes not only to the acquisition of subject-related knowledge, but also to the development of more broad knowledge in students. These competencies correspond to methodological and higher intellectual skills, basic aptitudes that promote life-long learning, which enable the accomplishment of tasks, and which are a prerequisite in the new reality of the workplace.

3.2 Lessons From the Implementation of Cross-Curricular Competencies

For several years now, first in elementary and more recently in secondary schools, education players have been undertaking the implementation of cross-curricular competencies to the best of their abilities. Yet how does one separate confidence from mistrust, taking ownership from deception, barriers from benefits? How does one reconcile the gap between agreement in principle and doubt about feasibility? The current state of affairs requires further consideration. To do so, the Conseil will review the experience of teachers in the field.

The teachers' first-hand accounts steer the Conseil's analysis in two directions. Firstly, they call attention to a conflict between several potential interpretations of the meaning of cross-curricular competencies. Secondly, they urgently call for the organization of the competencies through practical tools that would help them move forward.

3.2.1 Multiple Interpretations: Are They Compatible?

Opinions on the relevance of cross-curricular competencies will of course vary according to the prevailing interpretation. The Conseil would like to herewith elaborate on three partially overlapping interpretations of cross-curricular competencies.

Cross-curricular competencies can be interpreted as end goals of education. They can also be regarded primarily as indicators of curriculum quality. And lastly, they can be seen as an integral part of the learning process.

Each of these interpretations can be summarized as follows:

1. **End goals of education.** Taken as a whole, intellectual and methodological competencies directly echo the mission of education, to instruct. These competencies articulate in a certain way that acquiring the various knowledge found in the curriculum can lead to sustainable skills. They support the notion of continuing education, for applying and developing these skills can usher in a greater chance of life-long learning. Intellectual and methodological competencies continue with the mission "to instruct" by including it within the context of a knowledge-based society. The competency "To cooperate with others," which enables an individual to work or collaborate effectively with others, is such an end goal: both in school or in workplace, one succeeds better with others than alone.

Lastly, the competency "To construct his/her identity" in elementary education, as its secondary education equivalent "To realize his/her potential," are subjective expressions of the meaning of school education, practically synonymous with growing up and succeeding both in and through one's educational experience;

2. **As indicators of curriculum quality,** cross-curricular competencies are seen more as benchmarks for the curriculum, its implementation and pedagogical materials used rather than student knowledge. With this interpretation, cross-curricular competencies can help to distinguish between an education that is well-founded from one that is not. Does teaching history in concrete terms foster critical thinking or not? Similarly, does the manner in which mathematics or

chemistry are taught optimally elicit the intellectual skills of the student? What we have in this interpretation are benchmarks for broad intellectual competencies that can direct teachers to ask these type of questions and motivate them to further elicit the skills of their students. Used as indicators of curriculum quality, cross-curricular competencies are particularly useful as a barrier against the temptation of overloading characteristic of “encyclopaedic” curricula. In fact, working by eliciting higher intellectual skills requires that one pragmatically develop a circumscribed area rather than work superficially in an widespread area;

3. As an integral part of the learning process, cross-curricular competencies can, in principle, guide and inspire better learning environments that teachers establish in their classrooms. To paraphrase a point made by a teacher, sometimes we teach by crossing our fingers and hoping that the eventual results will be there, but without any guarantees. However, we can try to adopt means to understand the process at work, the characteristics of a given student's approach and the reasons why he stumbles in certain areas. Only then will we know why the objectives were not reached. This type of concern for cross-curricular competencies is especially inspiring: to dare to begin from a learning situation conceived for the implementation of these competencies and use them to decipher the approach of the student.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Those who have adopted or adapted cross-curricular competencies in a spirit of a (often collective) rethinking of classroom practices often find in them a source of inspiration and a strong affinity with the professional vision of the “reflexive practitioner” advanced by Donald A. Schön (1987) in *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

3.2.2 The Current State of Affairs

How are the abovementioned interpretations of cross-curricular competencies the result of efforts in the implementation of the education reform? From the data collected by the Conseil, some conclusions, as well as a few clear hypotheses, can be drawn.

An agreement in principle has often been noted, particularly in elementary education. This agreement takes the form of interpreting cross-curricular competencies as end goals of education, an ideal which, at times, due to a paucity of tangible methods of integrating them in day-to-day practice, can lead to a vague feeling among teachers of not being up to the task. Secondly, still in elementary education, the prevailing interpretation is not one of indicators of curriculum quality, but rather specifications of certain components of the learning process. This perception of cross-curricular competencies at this level of education is not surprising, given that the concept of higher skills was originally conceived for secondary education. Partial data, which requires further investigation, leads the Conseil to believe that secondary school teachers would more readily develop practical combinations of the different intellectual and methodological competencies and their respective subjects.

Still at the elementary level, there currently seems to be little difficulty in adapting the cross-curricular competencies “To adopt effective work methods” and “To cooperate with others.” At times, the competency “To communicate appropriately” and certain subject-related competencies are also easily adapted; at times, however, with some redundancy. The set of four intellectual competencies interest teachers in principle but are deemed more pertinent to a higher level of education. What would their equivalent be for a more lower level? Teachers often stress that there is a lack of details in the Québec Education Program, undoubtedly due to the uniformity of the language from the beginning of elementary to the end of secondary education.

Two of the nine cross-curricular competencies—“To communicate appropriately” and “To construct his/her identity”—present particular problems at the elementary level. If the former is interpreted mainly in linguistic terms rather than through a kaleidoscope of “languages” (graphic, symbolic, multimedia, etc.) this competency is little different than the objective of mastering language in elementary education. It should be recalled that in *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools* this competency was primarily a linguistic goal. The place to implement this cross-curricular competency, then, would naturally be in secondary education. This competency follows the spirit of the article in the Basic School Regulation according to which all administrators, teachers and technicians are required to take the quality and mastery of language to heart; an aspiration expressed in English-language schools in the concept “language across the curriculum.” If in the various subjects, be they history, physical education, mathematics, the arts, or science and technology, there is no effort to develop the proper oral skills, if there is no opportunity to write coherently or to read more than the basic textbooks required in English or French, this would ultimately contravene the goal of a higher linguistic competency and therefore one can only conclude that it is an unrealistic goal.

The competency “To construct his/her identity” is also an issue and appears as if it was a late addition to the Québec Education Program and that it was meant to balance the competency “To cooperate with others.” As has been noted above, themes pertaining to identity and vision of the world were temporarily linked to the broad areas of learning before finding their place as one of the key objectives of the entire Program. The uneasiness surrounding the cross-curricular competency

“To construct his/her identity” certainly stems from the fact that it is more of an end goal and that teachers cannot see in it a tangible connection to the learning approach.

Lastly, the particular reservation with regard to the competency “To use information and communication technologies” merits reiterating, particularly for elementary education. The efforts and issues in learning these technologies are well known. Some teachers fear that implementing this competency at the elementary level would lessen all the work already undertaken in this area.

3.2.3 A Call For Tools and Support

If we are to arrive at a common understanding of the issues related to the experience of cross-curricular competencies in elementary education, beyond the agreement in principle and the many initiatives and implementations already underway, and given some of reservations mentioned above, it is evident that there is a major call for practical reference tools. To be sure, one can understand why the Québec Education Program limits itself to providing a semantic explanation—albeit rigorous and detailed—of each of the cross-curricular competencies. This is done with the aim of leaving the pedagogical choices—methods, strategies, and approaches—to the discretion of teachers. This choice, however, is in sharp contrast compared to former curricula established in the early 1980s, which were very detailed and meant to be standards, but which relegated teachers to the role of actors.

Yet providing greater freedom of interpretation to the education community to implement the curriculum should not mean leaving the players on their own. As far back as 1998, the Conseil drew attention to the inherent risks of placing the entire onus of the implementation on the resourcefulness of the school community.⁴¹ However, it is not so much a question of imposing specific practices as much as providing courses of action and presenting the benefits and the realities.

The Conseil has observed that elsewhere, research, development and experiments have been initiated to identify tools that could provide benchmarks without, however, creating standards. An example of this can be found in England, where an addendum to the curriculum was introduced regarding mandatory approaches promoting skills similar to cross-curricular competencies. Still in England, the Department for Education and Skills has compiled “Schemes of Work” in collaboration with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). These schemes are pedagogical guides that illustrate how study programs can be turned into learning activities.⁴² Also worthy of mention are the initiatives of SCANS in the United States for establishing, experimenting and validating education strategies for teachers. These strategies would enable teachers to integrate broad competencies in programs and promote the development of learning activities in the classroom or in the workplace. Elsewhere, toolkits that provide benchmarks developed either by teachers or by public organizations are available for teachers on the Internet, as in the case of the French Community of Belgium.⁴³

⁴¹ Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (1998). *Pour un renouvellement prometteur des programmes à l'école*. Québec: Le Conseil. Examples of methods of taking ownership of broad areas of learning and cross-curricular competencies can be found in several issues of *Vie pédagogique*. See in particular the November-December 2003 issue on broad areas of learning, the April-May 2004 issue on communicating appropriately, the February-March 2006 issue on health and the September-October 2006 issue on media.

⁴² The Schemes of Work are defined on the National Curriculum in Action's web site at www.ncaction.org.uk.

⁴³ La Fédération de l'enseignement fondamental catholique has designed such a toolkit for teachers, available online at www.segec.be.

Do cross-curricular competencies, as they stand today in Québec, not also require a similar effort? Given that the difficulties seem to stem more from their implementation than their importance, the Conseil recognizes a temporary yet urgent need to diversify support. Is professional training available? For the Conseil, herein lies a fundamental stake. Can schools adjust their demand for pedagogical training or are all current resources for education consultants already taken up by given programs? Are school administrators as well as members of their teams currently harmonizing their efforts around a cycle so as to maximize the benefits of cross-curricular competencies in a given subject? Is it possible to foresee applied research that would test, through rigorous methodology, tools directly pertinent to the development of cross-curricular competencies? All concerned players in the education community have clearly indicated the need for well-designed tools that can be used as guides to better understand the stimulating and inspiring aspects of cross-curricular competencies.

Moreover, some very innovative practices in the field of implementing cross-curricular competencies have already been established, namely by school teams, and these practices should be disseminated. The magazines *Virages* and *Vie pédagogique* are two such examples of learning activities created by teachers which promote the development of subject-related competencies and cross-curricular competencies.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Bougé, Réjane and Marie-Michèle Giguère. "L'appropriation de la réforme : des pratiques renouvelées," in *Virage*, Vol.6, N°5 June 2004, pp.2–8; Lagacé, Lise. "La bibliothèque scolaire de l'école primaire Plein Soleil de la région de Québec : un lieu stratégique pour développer la compétence à communiquer : bilan des projets liés à la communication," in *Vie pédagogique*, N°131, April-May 2004, pp. 26–27.

3.3 Recommendations

Today the Ministère can undertake or develop initiatives which were not as feasible just a few years ago. A review of the implementation of the education reform over the past few years provides invaluable information to this effect. The initiatives recommended below are based on findings which the Conseil would like to reformulate, at the risk of being redundant.

First, a belief in the promising potential of cross-curricular competencies undoubtedly exists among elementary school teachers. Needs and requests have also been expressed, most of which concern the Ministère. In addition, one of the key questions rests on the difficulty of implementing the competencies “To construct his/her identity” (elementary) and “To realize his/her potential” (secondary), because these are more a part of the ultimate goals of education. Similarly, the competency “To communicate appropriately” calls for strengthening the mastery of the language of instruction.

Second, integrating and implementing cross-curricular competencies requires collaboration, and are dependant on the larger process of implementation of the education reform. They require a dedicated time and place for work in cycle teams.⁴⁵ If this type of work leads to adopting priorities in cross-curricular competencies, this can only be healthy and sound. According to the Education Act, this process is neither the responsibility of the individual teacher, nor the Minister, but lies within the competency of the school: its administration, staff, and governing board is responsible for the sensible allocation and establishment of priorities.

After having globally examined these issues as they stand today, the Conseil will now formulate its opinions, listed below.

All cross-curricular competencies included in Québec Education Program should be retained, with the exception of “To construct his/her identity” (elementary) and “To realize his/her potential” (secondary), which, in the Conseil's opinion, pertain more to the ultimate goals of education. The Conseil deems that they are not, in the true sense of the term, cross-curricular competencies.

Therefore, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 2) to retain the following cross-curricular competencies: “To use information,” “To solve problems,” “To exercise critical judgement,” “To use creativity,” “To adopt effective work methods,” “To use information and communications technologies,” “To cooperate with others,” and “To communicate appropriately.”

Moreover, the Conseil ascribes to the decidedly more language-related aspect of the competency “To communicate appropriately” as recommended in the report *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools*.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Interviewees in secondary education point out, and rightly so, that progressing by cycle is best suited for elementary and Secondary Cycle I, and that beyond that, a more regular school calendar takes over. Indeed, the most suitable working organization after Secondary Cycle I would have its own characteristics.

⁴⁶ Task Force On Curriculum Reform, *op. cit.* footnote 17.

Considering the value of having a command of the language of instruction, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 3) to promote the linguistic aspect of the competence "To communicate appropriately" in order to better marshal efforts in mastering the language.

Considering the implementation, integration and evaluation of the cross-curricular competencies by teachers demand specific professional competencies, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends

- to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:
 - 4) to ensure that training and support measures be implemented to promote the professional development of teachers in the area of cross-curricular competencies and to ensure that these measures are adopted and evaluated in collaboration with the school boards;
- to the school boards:
 - 5) to ensure that appropriate training and support measures necessary for the implementation of cross-curricular competencies be made available to teachers;
- to school administrations:
 - 6) to foster and promote the participation of teachers in a wide range of training and support activities by prioritizing those related to the implementation of the education reform.

Considering the difficulties related to the implementation of cross-curricular competencies in learning environments and the paucity of benchmarks provided by the Québec Education Program to facilitate their implementation by teachers, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 7) to lead curriculum research and development which would provide school communities with a range of strategies and practices that would enable teachers to take ownership of cross-curricular competencies and integrate them in their practice.

Considering that exciting innovations in the field of cross-curricular competencies have already been developed, notably by school teams, and that these practices should be disseminated, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 8) to promote and support the exchange of innovative approaches and practices among schools, school boards and universities.

CHAPTER 4 EVALUATING CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

The evaluation of cross-curricular competencies is one of the problem areas of the education reform. However, this evaluation cannot be wholly isolated from the more general questions surrounding the evaluation of learning itself. The evaluation context which relates in part to the reticence regarding the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies primarily involved the perception that grades are an end unto themselves—the ideal goal of learning—and the impact of regulations and methods of certification on the evaluation itself.

In the background are echoes of the old refrain: “Does this grade count?” The grade is seen almost as payment for a job done. It is all well to make a distinction between *formative evaluation*⁴⁷ and *summative evaluation*⁴⁸ to determine success or failure, but many still fear that unless the grade counts, the exercise is futile. Achieving a consensus based on better incentives is not an easy task. While still supporting formative evaluation, it is becoming increasingly evident that the summative aspect of an evaluation would often poorly compare the before and after of a learning exercise. Take two students who finish their school year having acquired exactly the same skills. One could pass and the other fail because of low grades during the first two semesters, yet it is the latter student who has achieved the greatest progress. The metrics for adding up individual results following predetermined ratios that serve as a symbol of objectivity can at times conceal a professional value judgement. In these circumstances, a *criteria evaluation*,⁴⁹ less comparative and more likely to support a certain differentiation in the challenges, could prove to be a promising tool.⁵⁰

Lastly, in the wider context of evaluation issues, the practice of certifying studies in Québec too casts its own shadow. Regulations deemed “provisional” for nearly two decades, the trial period for calculating credits for Secondary I to Secondary III for a *diplôme d'études secondaires* (DES)⁵¹ [secondary school leaving certificate] and the establishment of an enriched “DES+” in addition to the standard DES as a college entrance prerequisite, followed by frequent criticism of this duality: are all

⁴⁷ Renald Legendre, in *Dictionnaire actuel de l'éducation*, 3rd Ed. (2005), Montréal: Guérin, defines *formative evaluation* as: “A continuous evaluation process that ensures the development of each individual in his/her learning process so as to modify learning situations or pattern of this development and to carry out (where needed), improvements or appropriate modifications.” (p.643) [translation]

⁴⁸ *Summative evaluation* is defined as: “An evaluation carried out at the end of a cycle or study program or even at the end of an extracurricular activity in order to determine the degree of knowledge or skills acquired by the student so as to take decisions in areas of passing the grade, certification of studies, or validation of experiential learning.” (ibid., p.648) [translation]

⁴⁹ *Criteria evaluation* is defined as: “A method of evaluation where the performance of the individual in the accomplishing of a given task is evaluated in relation to a benchmark or criteria of success within a defined set of predetermined objective(s), independently of the performance of any other individual” (ibid., p.634) while *normative evaluation* is “a method of evaluation where the performance of an individual is compared to the average of the percentile or stanines, to that of other persons in a given reference group using the same instrument.” (ibid., p.646) [translation]

⁵⁰ In order to link evaluation and the concept of a more equitable education, there is perhaps a lot to be drawn from the studies of François Dubet. In fact, Dubet emphasizes that the fight against inequality in today's societies is not only a question of assets, but also a question of skills that students are able to acquire and develop. This requires at the very least, a minimum, without which there is a danger of social exclusion. Dubet, François (2004), *L'école des chances : qu'est-ce qu'une école juste?* Paris: Le Seuil.

⁵¹ This essentially consisted of acquiring 84 of 108 credits from Secondary I to Secondary III inclusive in order to enter Secondary IV.

indications that the current state of practices and evaluation standards of learning do not possess the required clarity and credibility. The risk of divorcing learning from its evaluation still remains, something which the education reform has helped to lessen, but has not wholly eliminated. There has been a gradual awareness in Québec, as elsewhere, that it is considerably more difficult to effectively differentiate what has more value in education from what is more trivial or more intangible.⁵² How should cross-curricular competencies be implemented in all of this? This indeed is one aspect of the problem—and the most pressing part of evaluation. Addressing this is a must, but it will not solve all the issues of evaluation.

In recent months, public attention on the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies has been particularly focused on report cards and parents' understanding of them. In the Fall of 2006, the Ministère initiated a debate on this issue and proposed measures to address some of the concerns. The Conseil will attempt below to review what has been accomplished regarding the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies and the elements still pending. The Conseil will first review the most common difficulties encountered, revealed to a certain extent in the work of the Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique. Then different aspects of issues related to the existing framework will be discussed, without, however, combining issues related to communications with parents with those of the evaluation itself. Lastly, the Conseil will examine the need for additional support for teachers, and then conclude with specific recommendations.

4.1 The Complexity of Evaluation In A Competency-Based Approach

The report of the Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique released in 2006 provides a number of informative findings on the state of the evaluation of competencies in general, and of cross-curricular competencies in particular.

Evaluating a competency seems to be an issue for many elementary teachers: 23% of them either agreed somewhat or fully agreed with the statement "It is easy to evaluate competencies;" 27% with the statement: "It is easy to evaluate the progress of the various areas of learning."⁵³ Moreover, only 29% of respondents in the survey included in a 2004 GAPE-CRIRES report⁵⁴ believed that the methods and criteria for evaluation were clear.

⁵² The tensions and dilemmas existing in the area of evaluation in Québec greatly mirror those experienced elsewhere. The 1993 summary brief by Jean-Marie de Ketele is still relevant. In it, Ketele compares and contrasts some of the evaluation "paradigms" centered on, for example, the reliability and "fairness" of the grade, the context of the school's effectiveness and institutional responsibilities, or in contrast, on aptitudes for providing proper guidance to the student: De Ketele, Jean-Marie "L'évaluation conjugquée en paradigmes," in *Revue française de pédagogie*, N°103, April 1993, pp.59–80.

⁵³ Ibid., p.147

⁵⁴ Deniger, Marc-André et. al. (2004). "Évaluation du nouveau programme de formation de l'école québécoise : la qualité de sa mise en oeuvre et ses effets perçus à ce jour - Enquête auprès des directions d'école, du personnel enseignant, des professionnels non enseignant et des parents des écoles primaires du Québec." GAPE-CRIRES: Québec.

The report of the Table de pilotage also reported a contradiction: 79% of teachers said they believed they were able to utilize the evaluation to help their students with their learning, however only 27% of the education counsellor believed that teachers were capable of doing so. This shows how the perception of each group differs even on the very nature of opinions which could be reinvested in helping students.

Moreover, according to the report of the Table de pilotage, a relatively high percentage of teachers is not very comfortable with using reference tools (evaluation criteria, end-of-cycle outcomes or competency scales) provided by the Ministère for the evaluation of competencies. For example, in elementary schools:

- 51% of regular classroom teachers are very much or fairly comfortable with the idea of preparing an **end of cycle progress report** that includes all information gathered;
- 47% of regular classroom teachers are very much or fairly comfortable with the idea of using **criteria evaluation** as defined in the Québec Education Program to assess student learning;
- 47% of regular classroom teachers are very much or fairly comfortable with the idea of using **end of cycle outcomes** as defined in the Québec Education Program to rank the student's learning;
- 32% of regular classroom teachers are very much or fairly comfortable with the idea of using **scales of competency levels** established by the Ministère to rank the student's learning.

Regarding the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies themselves, the report of the Table de pilotage noted that in general, it is easier for teachers to plan learning environments for developing cross-curricular competencies, observe their development, and give a review to the student than to have an opinion on the development of these competencies. Thus identifying a weakness is one thing, but accurately assessing a pattern of progression—which is indeed a slower process—appears more difficult.

There are, however, three cross-curricular competencies that appear much easier for teachers to evaluate and these correspond to the ones teachers use most often: “To cooperate with others” (81%), “To adopt effective work methods” (82%), and “To communicate appropriately” (78%). The two competencies most difficult to evaluate are: “To exercise his/her critical judgement” (82%) and “To construct his/her identity” (32%). The latter competency has already been the object of a recommendation in the previous chapter, where both the meaning and the data cited above were considered.

4.2 Evaluating Cross-Curricular Competencies: Issues and Concerns

The report of Table de pilotage provides, then, an indication of the degree of difficulty experienced by teachers in the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies. Consultations carried out by the Conseil—primarily among a large group of teachers—provides data on the nature of the difficulties encountered in this area.

4.2.1 Issues Linked to Feasibility

The evaluation of cross-curricular competencies indeed presupposes that these competencies had been the object of particular focus prior to the establishment of learning environments. Herein lays the first problem. However, according to experts consulted by the Conseil on how to ensure support for teachers in the development of cross-curricular competencies, support for this task is lacking. According to the report of the Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique, three cross-curricular competencies are currently being implemented by teachers: “To adopt effective work methods,” “To cooperate with others,” and “To communicate appropriately.” Four competencies are proving more to be difficult: “To use creativity,” “To exercise critical judgement,” “To construct his/her identity,” and “To use information and communications technologies.” It is important to note that these data were taken from a 2006 survey conducted by the Ministère that collected teachers’ opinions via questionnaire. As the analysis of the questionnaire clearly reveals, this is indeed more a case of perception and not duly verifiable fact. For example, education counsellors and school administrators poorly view the ability of teachers to integrate cross-curricular competencies in their teaching.

The report of the Table de pilotage also revealed that many teachers are having problems using reference materials supplied by the Ministère. In elementary schools, for example, teachers have to foster the development of cross-curricular competencies and evaluate their progress by using a competency level scale of one to four. There are no competency level scales for secondary education. In fact, the descriptions contained in the scales for the various subjects take the cross-curricular competencies into account, since their development is closely linked to that of the subject-specific competencies. However, potential links between each of these scales and the cross-curricular competencies are not clearly specified in the scales of the different subject areas.

Taking ownership of cross-curricular competencies in order to integrate them into teaching practices seems, then, to be an ongoing issue. Is it a problem linked to their nature, integrating tools available to teachers, or the creation of theoretical models required for the development of applicable tools? Researchers such as Jacques Tardif⁵⁵ claim that evaluating competencies (whether subject-related or cross-curricular) is difficult because as of yet there are no cognitive models of learning for these competencies that would permit such an evaluation: “A cognitive model of learning is based on valid scientific data, which beginning from critical learning delineates the stages of the development of a competency.”⁵⁶ [translation] According to Tardif, then, cognitive learning models should primarily define the path, or the exact stages, of a competency’s development. These stages should also be able to provide information on cognitive reorganizations, such as the qualitative changes in the student. In addition, cognitive models should help to differentiate the stages of a competency’s development to facilitate development depending on the competency’s most atypical paths. These cognitive models would be useful for teachers both to establish learning environments favourable to developing competencies, but also to make it easier for them to evaluate the progress of students.⁵⁷

Accordingly, the question of knowing whether current tools available to teaching professionals are adequate enough to enable them to foster the development of cross-curricular competencies and evaluate their progress is indeed a legitimate one.

⁵⁵ Tardif, Jacques (2006). *L'évaluation des compétences : documenter le parcours de développement*. Montréal: Chenelière-Éducation, p.55.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Another issue linked to feasibility is related more to constraints found in day-to-day teaching practices. Gathering information on the development of cross-curricular competencies for each student requires additional time to be allocated (for observation, grading, etc.). It is clear that this task requires both establishing learning environments and managing the class to give teachers more time to carry out one of their main roles, and observe their students in situations where the latter demonstrate their competencies. This presupposes a certain independence on the part of the students which may not be the case, for example, with Elementary Cycle One students; it also requires that teachers adopt new classroom management approaches and learning environments.

The time needed for collaboration also constitutes a problem, an issue on which the Conseil has been advised repeatedly, particularly for secondary schools. According to the *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning*, teachers must consult each other at the end of a cycle on the development of cross-curricular competencies of their students.⁵⁸ During a given cycle, teachers collaborate if they have agreed to formulate general comments on the development of cross-curricular competencies and not just on subjects only.⁵⁹ The number of cross-curricular competencies to be evaluated and how often will obviously determine the time needed for collaboration between the teachers, and this is a matter of some concern for many of them.

⁵⁸ Ministère de l'Éducation (2003). *Policy On the Evaluation Of Learning: General Education in the Youth Sector, General Education in the Adult Sector, Vocational Training: Evaluation For Better Learning*. Québec, Le Ministère, p.36.

⁵⁹ Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (2006). *Evaluation of Cross-Curricular Competencies: Questions and Answers: Main References in Ministerial Frameworks*. Québec: Le Ministère, p.5. This document is accessible online at: www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DGFJ/pdf/cpea_evaluation1_eng.pdf.

The French Community of Belgium: A Case Study

Below are the recommended cross-curricular competencies in the French Community of Belgium, and how they are evaluated:

“The recommended cross-curricular competencies in the French Community of Belgium are grouped in three categories: relational competencies, instrumental competencies, and competencies related to the awareness of how one functions.

- The relational competencies are as follows: to know oneself; to have confidence in oneself (identity); awareness of others and their differences (relationship); participating in social life (engagement).

- The instrumental competencies are as follows: to act and react; to be curious and ask questions; to adopt research strategies; to research information; to process information; to communicate; and to execute.

- The competencies related to awareness of how one functions are as follows: competencies related to awareness of one's being; competencies related to the analysis of one's methods. [...]

The cross-curricular competencies included in the evaluations—both those recommended by the Commission des outils d'évaluation and those recommended for external evaluations—are those related to intellectual reasoning and work methods. In addition, the evaluation of these competencies is often done in an implicit fashion, with students having to marshal them in order to accomplish the tasks assigned. Moreover, students may be required to provide proof of their methods (search words or clues, organization of ideas, and the establishment of a plan) that led to accomplishing the assigned task. In other words, the command of cross-curricular competencies is not measured through tests as it is for subject-related competencies but rather through regular observation of student aptitudes and behaviours throughout the various learning activities.”⁶⁰ [translation]

4.2.2 Issues Linked to Communicating Results to Parents

First, evaluation in a competency-based approach demands that teachers rely more on their professional judgement. This in itself constitutes a major issue,⁶¹ both for subject-related and cross-curricular competency evaluations. The value attached to grades in report cards indeed reflects a certain apprehension in exercising professional judgement, as well as evaluating in general in a competency-based approach. According to the report of the Table de pilotage du nouveau pédagogique, for example, 63% of classroom teachers reported that they were fairly or very comfortable writing in the report card that they had exercised their professional judgement on the development of each competency.⁶² In other words, more than one-third of teachers interviewed

⁶⁰ Desaulniers, Annie. *op. cit.* footnote 4, pp.5 and 10.

⁶¹ The Comité sur la Politique d'évaluation des apprentissages has produced a pamphlet on this subject, which reveals some misgivings in this area: Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (2006d). *Value Assigned To the Professional Judgment of Teachers: Questions and Answers. Main References in Ministerial Frameworks*. Québec: Le Ministère. This document is accessible online at: www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DGFJ/pdf/cpea_evaluation2_eng.pdf.

⁶² Table de pilotage du nouveau pédagogique, *op. cit.* footnote 2, p.66.

were not comfortable with this aspect of the evaluation. More precisely, if teachers themselves have a problem understanding the nature and the progress of the development of cross-curricular competencies, clearly they will not be comfortable in having to justify an evaluation of these competencies to the parents.

Second, difficulties in understanding the different tools available for communicating results to the parents can also be an area of concern for teachers. The “learned” language of cross-curricular competencies and understanding their place in an integrated curriculum can be a major challenge for many parents. As a result, teachers are placed in a position where they must explain and justify the nature and the language of the competencies. Do parents need to have the same in-depth understanding of the curriculum as the teachers themselves? Should the language in communications to parents be identical to that found in the Québec Education Program?

Ontario: A Case Study

“Learning skills to be developed at elementary and secondary education are included in the Ontario curriculum. They have obvious affinities with cross-curricular competencies in Québec. Designed for French-language elementary education in Ontario, these competencies are: Use of Spoken French; Use of Information; Cooperation With Others; Class Participation; Conflict Resolution; Independent Work; Homework Completion; Problem Solving; Initiative; Goal Setting To Improve Work. For secondary education the competencies are: Use of Spoken French; Works Independently; Teamwork; Organization; Work Habits/Homework; Initiative. It is useful to see how they are both evaluated and presented in report cards:

The Ontario report card emphasizes two distinct aspects of a student’s performance: meeting provincial curricular expectations, which consists in knowledge and abilities acquired for each subject, and acquiring competencies called ‘learning skills.’ The report card also includes a section for reporting the student’s performance with regard to curricular expectations for each subject and another to report the performance of the student on the acquisition of learning skills. In elementary education, the evaluation of the development of these skills is included at the bottom of the report card, while at the secondary level, it is written next to the results of each subject. Thus, in secondary school report cards, there are as many grades for skills to be developed as there are different subjects. While the expectations of the curriculum to be met are reported in the form of grades (A-B-C-D) and percentages, the overall performance of the student with regard to skills is indicated by a letter (‘E’ for Excellent; ‘G’ for Good; ‘S’ for Satisfactory; or ‘N’ for Needs Improvement).⁶³ [translation]

⁶³ Desaulniers, Annie. *op. cit.* footnote 4, p.17.

4.3 The Brochure *Evaluation of Cross-Curricular Competencies*: Essential But Insufficient

The report of the Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique clearly acknowledged the difficulties arising from integrating the principles of evaluation in a competency-based approach. For its part, the Comité sur la Politique d'évaluation des apprentissages was established in order to examine the *Policy On The Evaluation of Learning* and to recommend courses of action to ensure its implementation. This committee has thus far prepared several informational brochures designed to answer the most commonly asked questions from teachers, administrators, parents and school communities. One of these documents is an information brochure on evaluating cross-curricular competencies,⁶⁴ which reveals a clear need for solution in this area.

This information brochure provides several benchmarks to help simplify the teaching practice. It specifies, for example, that teachers can recommend to school administrators how many and which competencies and their evaluations would be included in reports, as well as how often and the manner in which they are communicated to parents. In addition, the brochure mentions that “under the Basic School Regulation, as of July 2007, the end-of-cycle or end-of-year competency report must inform parents of students learning in at least one of the cross-curricular competencies.”⁶⁵ In other words, including the assessment of all nine cross-curricular competencies in each report card is not obligatory, but that at least one of the competencies should be evaluated when preparing an end-of-cycle competency report. Moreover, the brochure also specifies “it is appropriate to use formative comments to assess learning related to cross-curricular competencies.”⁶⁶ Teachers should, however, refer to the evaluation criteria (observable indicators) included in the Québec Education Program.

The information brochure, then, specifies the responsibilities of teacher in the area of evaluation, but does not provide them with additional tools to enable them to integrate cross-curricular competencies more easily into their learning environments and evaluations.

4.4 Approaches and Recommendations

Do cross-curricular competencies need to be evaluated? Should they be evaluated during learning? Is a “certification” necessary in the evaluation? Should all competencies be evaluated? Should the evaluation of these competencies be reported to the parents? In essence, these are the questions the Conseil will now address.

4.4.1 Evaluating Cross-Curricular Competencies: An Essential Learning Aid

One of the functions of evaluation, as defined in the *Policy On the Evaluation of Learning*, is that it can be used as a learning aid. Consequently, an evaluation can provide both students and teachers with a continuous review, which could moreover be reinvested in other learning contexts. This is not an entirely new practice; it is closely related to what was called “formative evaluation” in the 1980s. Because evaluation is closely linked with learning itself, the Conseil deems that just as it is important

⁶⁴ Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (2006b). *The Evaluation of Cross-Curricular Competencies: Questions and Answers. Main References In Ministerial Frameworks*. Québec: Le Ministère. This document is accessible online at: www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DGFJ/pdf/cpea_evaluation1_eng.pdf.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.3.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

to promote the development of cross-curricular competencies, they must also be the object of a more rigorous evaluation than the intuitive kind currently being done by many teachers. In the opinion of the Conseil, the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies as a learning aid should consequently be done in a more systematic manner for all students.

Above, the Conseil illustrated the value of cross-curricular competencies variably as an ultimate goal of education, as indicators of curriculum quality, and as motivators for higher-skilled competencies. In this light, cross-curricular competencies must be at the heart of student learning, and the information gathered by continuous review on the progress of their development in students is essential.

With regard to the relevance of including an official evaluation of cross-curricular competencies in end-of-cycle reports, the Conseil expresses strong reservations, particularly in the area of certification of studies. While there are reasons to report the level of development of cross-curricular competencies to students and their parents, there is no relevant pedagogical rationale, however, to make it a requirement for promotion from one cycle to the next.

Moreover, the tools available to teachers (such as scales that are not well-defined for elementary education and almost non-existent in secondary) would not allow for the required accuracy in an official evaluation approach. There is no likelihood of standardization of the criteria used and even less for their interpretation. The barriers to overcome to arrive at equitable assessments of student progress are therefore considerable.

Consequently, the Conseil expresses two reservations with regard to the “certification” of end-of-cycle evaluations: First, it deems that the evaluation of some cross-curricular competencies is difficult to consider, for example, “To use his/her creativity” and “To use critical judgement.” These are the competencies for which currently there seems to be the least amount of consensus among teachers. Second, the Conseil is not certain that tools are available to allow teachers to undertake an accurate and fair evaluation of all students. The competencies “To construct his/her identity” and “To realize his/her potential” also present a problem, but as the Conseil has recommended that they not be retained, there is no need to further their discussion.

This does not, however, diminish to any extent the Conseil's confidence in the professional judgement of teachers, nor in their ability to assess and adapt their practice, planning and teaching activities, or to advise students, other school players and parents.

As for the issue of establishing whether all cross-curricular competencies should be evaluated, the Conseil answers in the affirmative, but only where this evaluation acts as a learning aid and not as a certification of studies. Gathering information and observations pertaining to the development of cross-curricular competencies in order to reinvest them in learning environments should, then be integrated in the daily practice of teachers. However, this is valid only if there is a foreseeable consensus for defining priorities in cross-curricular competencies within the manoeuvrability of the school team, supported by the school and the school board.

4.4.2 Communications To Parents: Clear and Essential Information

The evaluation and communication of results are two distinct practices. As a learning aid, evaluation is a practice that enables teachers to reassess and adapt learning environments to meet the needs of the students. It also enables students to review their own learning strategies and to adapt them or create new ones. Seen as a tool for the recognition of the “certification” of competencies, evaluation can be used to determine whether students have met the requirements at the end of their studies. It should be noted that regardless of whether used as learning aid or a certification of study, evaluation is a professional activity performed by a teacher that requires a methodological approach and an application of complex concepts. As for communications to parents, this consists of methods by which teachers convey the evaluation results to parents. Often, this is done either through a standard report card or an end-of-a-cycle competency report.

As cross-curricular competencies are an integral part of the curriculum, the Conseil deems that communicating the results of the progress of their development to the parents is justified. However, while there is a perceived need to provide parents with all necessary information, perhaps only the essential information they need to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of their child should be communicated. Thus the choice of information conveyed as well as the form in which it is communicated must be taken into consideration. Two questions beg to be asked: which information and why? And what is the most appropriate and effective method of conveying the information? The Conseil also believes that if the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies as a learning aid is essential, this does not mean, however, that teachers must officially convey all information in every communication with the parents.

It's easy to understand the usefulness of having access to cross-curricular competencies at the end of the elementary cycle and Secondary Cycle I. Among other things, they are a message sent to the next cycle team so that they may more readily help students in a number of ways depending on their strengths and weaknesses. At the secondary level, this is obviously dependant on a sharing of observations. A similar aspect of the end-of-cycle report that has now become annual for Secondary Cycle II raises further questions. Is it better to make this the responsibility of one teacher who is directly in charge of a group of students or a team of teachers? It is evident that certifications of study and obtaining a secondary leaving diploma makes Secondary Cycle II different than the other cycles by having in place the necessary mechanisms for promotion by subject and certification by the number of credits. The best approach for communication on the acquisition of cross-curricular competencies at the end of Secondary III, IV and V has yet to be explored.

4.4.3 Expanding the Teaching Practice

The Conseil has endeavoured to find realistic and innovative avenues in education within a complex system marked by tradition, influences and a still incomplete knowledge of cross-curricular competencies. Notwithstanding this, the Conseil upholds the opinion that cross-curricular competencies are an integral component of the elementary education curriculum, if not more so for secondary education. Despite issues pertaining to implementing the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies, the Conseil deems that we must stay the course and retain high expectations with regard to their integration and implementation.

Therefore, the cross-curricular competencies that the Conseil recommends be retained—"To use information," "To solve problems," "To exercise critical judgement," "To use creativity," "To adopt effective work methods," "To use information and communications technologies," "To cooperate with others," "To communicate appropriately"—must be at the heart of the student's learning. Consequently, teachers should support and observe their development, adapt the learning environments to student needs and provide a review to all students so that the latter may adapt their own learning strategies or create new ones. This is what is meant by evaluation with the aim of assisting learning, and it should be part of teachers' daily practice.

As a learning aid, the Conseil believes that all recommended cross-curricular competencies should be evaluated. It is not new for teachers to work with students to develop such competencies; the novelty lies in the fact that teachers must now provide an evaluation.

The Conseil is aware of the time required for to integrate the evaluation of the development of these eight competencies in the competency report. In this respect, the Conseil believes that it is possible to stay the course set by the Minister and to be able to provide an evaluation on the development of one cross-curricular competency by 2008. The Conseil deems, however, that there is no need to add a certification value to this evaluation.

Considering the overall difficulty of implementing the evaluation process in a competency-based approach, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 9) to increase the effort in the implementation of the *Policy of Evaluation of Learning* so as to facilitate the integration by teachers of the evaluation process in a competency-based approach.

Moreover, to be able to assess the development of competencies, teachers should not only be able to plan activities that elicit the competencies in question, but they should also be equipped with reference tools (evaluation criteria and competency level scales). Given that there are no competency level scales for secondary education and that there is a need to simplify reference tools for elementary education, the Conseil believes that in order to reach the objectives of the Québec Education Program for cross-curricular competencies, as well as to be able to include the evaluation of at least one of the cross-curricular competencies in the competency report by June 2008, these needs must be quickly addressed. Therefore, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 10) to ensure that elementary and secondary school teachers are provided with sufficient reference tools (evaluation criteria, competency level scales) that enable them to understand the stages of development for each of the cross-curricular competencies in the Québec Education Program.

This requires a specification of the evaluation criteria and competency level scales for elementary education and a specification of the evaluation criteria and the establishment of competency level scales for cross-curricular competencies for secondary education.

4.4.4 Improving A Communication Tool For Parents

The Conseil makes a distinction between the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies and communication to parents. An evaluation is a professional activity carried out by teachers which implies a methodological approach. Communications to parents, for their part, are methods by which teachers advise parents on the progress of the development of cross-curricular competencies by their child. As a learning aid, the Conseil believes that providing information to parents on this progress is essential so that parents may support their child. The report card has always been the traditionally preferred method of conveying the results of subject-related learning. The challenge, then, will be in finding a framework of communication tools that would enable teachers to provide both comprehensive information at the end of a given cycle and useful observations during the cycle so that parents may play a support role in the education program.

With regard to communicating the progress of the development of cross-curricular competencies, the Conseil deems that given the importance of these competencies in the curriculum, it justifies that the eight recommended cross-curricular competencies be included in the report card, and that space be allotted to permit where needed the inclusion of observations on specific issues, whether positive or regarding areas for improvement. Moreover, the Conseil is of the opinion that it is the teacher's responsibility to determine which specific aspects of one or more competencies need to be reported to the parents. In the context of a gradual integration of compulsory evaluation of the development of cross-curricular competencies, the Conseil believes that the recommended competencies for the end-of-the cycle competency report be clearly specified.

Therefore, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation proposes to the various players involved in the communication of school results to parents through report cards:

That the eight cross-curricular competencies be included in the report card and that specific observations on the students' progress on the development of the competencies be reported to them where needed during a given cycle.

CHAPTER 5 REVIEW, RECOMMENDATIONS AND ONE GENERAL RECOMMENDATION

In this chapter the Conseil will review the recommendations and their foundations outlined in the previous chapters. The Conseil will also include one final general recommendation for creating favourable conditions needed conditions to promote the integration of broad areas of learning and the implementation and evaluation of cross-curricular competencies.

5.1 The Relevance and Applicability of Broad Areas of Learning

5.1.1 Relevance

Firstly, the Conseil acknowledges the relevance of broad areas of learning, for they embrace key issues in today's society. The choice of addressing areas targeted by education by adopting an interdisciplinary approach rather than parallel learning is deemed eminently justifiable and legitimate. Broad areas of learning are, moreover, bearers of common aims for educational players to develop the aptitudes and competencies required for students to fulfil their roles as adults and citizens. Moreover, as the subjects taught in broad areas of learning require a different approach than in subject areas, they enable students to make links between school learning and life situations. Thus broad areas of learning constitute a major tool to motivate students.

5.1.2 Applicability

Secondly, the choice of shared ownership of students' educational goals must be supported by approaches and content that promote the integration of broad areas of learning in the curriculum and the subject areas. The approaches provided would tap the educational potential of broad areas of learning. Indeed, the Conseil notes that the Québec Education Program provides few guidelines to foster the applicability of broad areas of learning. The methods of their integration are left up to the education community, as is the value placed on each of these areas and the manner they are implemented according to their respective cycle.

The Conseil also notes the Québec Education Program provides very few links between the subject areas and broad areas of learning. The responsibility to integrate broad areas of learning is thus left to the discretion of the school teams, and this requires collaboration on the part of the entire school staff to ensure cohesion between individual approaches. In the absence of benchmarks, the integration of broad areas of learning is often limited to their motivational aspect; however, broad areas of learning include knowledge and not just aptitudes and skills. If they are implemented simply as elements of a framework, the Conseil fears that major areas of student development will not be sufficiently addressed, and possibly result in an impoverished curriculum.

Considering that the educational aims pursued in the integration of broad areas of learning are not sufficiently supported in the Québec Education Program—hence the risk of an impoverished curriculum—and considering as well the difficulties arising from taking ownership of broad areas of learning by school teams and their implementation depending on the cycle, the Conseil deems it imperative that a non-regulatory reference guide be created that would provide education players with a range of potential links with the subject areas while still leaving sufficient manoeuvrability needed for integration at the local level.

Therefore, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 1) to provide schools, as a complement to the Québec Education Program, with a reference guide containing potential links between broad areas of learning and programs of study, including possible methods of implementation of broad areas of learning depending on the cycle.

5.2 Implementation of Cross-Curricular Competencies

5.2.1 Competencies To Be Retained in the Québec Education Program

The Conseil acknowledges the value of cross-curricular competencies, both as an educational goal, as indicators of curriculum quality and for developing of higher-skill competencies. Their inclusion in the Québec Education Program is the culmination of a pedagogical evolution both in Québec and elsewhere. Thus they have acquired their own legitimacy as programs of study and should be placed at the heart of student learning.

Consequently, according to the Conseil, all cross-curricular competencies included in the Québec Education Program should be retained, with the exception of “To construct his/her identity” (elementary) and “To realize his/her potential” (secondary) which, in the Conseil’s opinion, pertain more to the end goals of education. The Conseil deems that they are not, in the true sense of the term, cross-curricular competencies.

Therefore, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 2) to retain the following cross-curricular competencies: “To use information,” “To solve problems,” “To exercise critical judgement,” “To use creativity,” “To adopt effective work methods,” “To use information and communications technologies,” “To cooperate with others,” and “To communicate appropriately.”

Moreover, the Conseil ascribes to the decidedly more language-related aspect of the competency “To communicate appropriately” recommended in the report *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools*.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Task Force on Curriculum Reform, *op. cit.* footnote 17.

Considering the value of having a command of the language of instruction, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 3) to promote the linguistic aspect of the competence "To communicate appropriately" in order to better marshal efforts in mastering the language.

5.2.2 New Professional Competencies For School Teams

On the one hand, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation is aware that the integration of cross-curricular competencies modifies the teaching practice by requiring greater collaboration by teachers, and to this end requires the implementation of conditions that promote teamwork. On the other hand, the integration of these competencies, similar to the competency-based approach in subject areas, demands the acquisition of new professional competencies.

Many training sessions on the various elements of the education reform have been and continue to be provided to teachers. However, given how change always impacts the teaching practice, there is a continual need for upgrading and support for teachers in this area. Indeed, developing new professional competencies needed for the implementation of cross-curricular competencies obviously requires time and presupposes a gradual implementation on the part of teachers, supported not only by training but also by guidance.

In addition to these upgrading activities, favourable conditions for the support of professional development of teachers are needed for them to become familiar with the new practices required for the implementation of cross-curricular competencies. Among these conditions, for example, are professional training, sufficient support from education consultants and activities that promote dialogue between teachers.

Considering the implementation, integration and evaluation of the cross-curricular competencies by teachers demand specific professional competencies, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends

- to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:
 - 4) to ensure that training and support measures be implemented to promote the professional development of teachers in the area of cross-curricular competencies and to ensure that these measures are adopted and evaluated in collaboration with the school boards;

- to the school boards:
 - 5) to ensure that appropriate training and support measures necessary for the implementation of cross-curricular competencies be made available to teachers;
- to the school administrations:
 - 6) to foster and promote the participation of teachers in a wide range of training and support activities by prioritizing those related to the implementation of the education reform.

5.2.3 Skills to Be Developed and Practices to Be Shared

Considering the difficulties related to the implementation of cross-curricular competencies in learning environments and the paucity of benchmarks provided by the Québec Education Program to facilitate their implementation by teachers, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 7) to lead curriculum research and development which would provide school communities with a range of strategies and practices that would enable teachers to take ownership of cross-curricular competencies and integrate them in their practice.

Considering that exciting innovations in the field of cross-curricular competencies have already been developed, notably by school teams, and that these practices should be disseminated, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 8) to promote and support the exchange of innovative approaches and practices among schools, school boards and universities.

5.3 Evaluating Cross-Curricular Competencies

5.3.1 A Pedagogical Practice to Be Developed

The Conseil believes that the group of cross-curricular competencies to be retained—"To use information," "To solve problems," "To exercise critical judgement," "To use creativity," "To adopt effective work methods," "To uses information and communications technologies," "To cooperate with others," and "To communicate appropriately"—must be at the heart of student learning. Consequently, teachers must support and observe their development, adapt learning environments to student needs, and provide a review to all students so that they may adapt their own learning strategies or to create new ones. This is what is referred to as evaluation with the aim of assisting learning, and it should be part of teachers' daily practice.

As a learning aid, the Conseil believes that all recommended cross-curricular competencies should be evaluated. It is not new for teachers to work with students to develop these competencies; the novelty lies in the fact that teachers must now provide an evaluation.

The Conseil is aware of the time required for integrating the evaluation of the development of these eight competencies in the competency report. In this respect, it believes that it is possible to stay the course set by the Minister and be able to provide an evaluation on the development of a one cross-curricular competency by 2008. The Conseil deems, however, following the *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning*, there is no need to add a certification to this evaluation.

Considering the overall difficulty of implementing the evaluation process in a competency-based approach, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 9) to increase the effort in the implementation of the *Policy of Evaluation of Learning* so as to facilitate the integration by teachers of the evaluation process in a competency-based approach.

Moreover, to be able to assess the development of competencies, teachers should not only be able to plan activities that elicit the competencies in question, but they should also have the necessary reference tools (evaluation criteria and competency level scales). Given that there are no competency level scales for secondary education and that there is a need to clarify those for elementary education, the Conseil believes that in order to reach the objectives of the Québec Education Program for cross-curricular competencies, as well as to be able to include the evaluation of at least one cross-curricular competency in the competency report by June 2008, we must quickly act on these needs.

Therefore, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:

- 10) to ensure that elementary and secondary school teachers are provided with sufficient reference tools (evaluation criteria, competency level scales) that enable them to understand the stages of development for each of the cross-curricular competencies in the Québec Education Program.

5.3.2 Improving A Communication Tool For Parents

The Conseil makes a distinction between the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies and their communication to parents. An evaluation is a professional activity carried out by a teacher which implies a methodological approach. Communications to parents, for their part, are methods by which teachers advise parents on the progress of the development of cross-curricular competencies by their child. As a learning aid, the Conseil believes that providing information to parents on this progress is essential so that parents may support their child. The report card has always been the traditionally preferred method of conveying the results of subject-related learning. The challenge, then, will be in finding a framework of communication tools that would allow to provide both comprehensive information at the end of a given cycle and useful observations during the cycle so that parents may play a support role in the education program.

With regard to communicating the progress of the development of cross-curricular competencies, the Conseil deems that given the importance of these competencies in the curriculum, it justifies that the eight recommended cross-curricular competencies be included in the report card, and that space be

allotted to permit where needed the inclusion of observations on specific issues, whether positive or regarding areas for improvement. Moreover, the Conseil is of the opinion that it is the teacher's responsibility to determine which specific aspects of one or more competencies need to be reported to the parents. In the context of a gradual integration of compulsory evaluation of the development of cross-curricular competencies, the Conseil believes that the recommended competencies for the end-of-the cycle competency report be clearly specified.

Therefore, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation proposes to the various players involved in the communication of school results to the parents through report cards:

That the eight cross-curricular competencies be mentioned in the report card and that specific observations on the student's progress on the development of the competencies be relayed to them where needed during the teaching cycle.

5.4 A General Recommendation For Creating Favourable Conditions

With regard to favourable conditions that would permit teachers to implement and evaluate cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning in their teaching practices, the Conseil deems that there is reason to examine in a rigorous manner the limitations linked to the establishment of veritable cycle teams. In its briefs published in 2002 and 2003 the Conseil had already strongly emphasized the importance of collaboration among teachers of the same cycle. This collaboration is not only essential for implementing cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning, but also for the gradual and harmonized implementation of the education reform.

Considering the importance of collaboration among members of cycle teams for taking ownership of cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning, and considering the unique characteristics of Secondary Cycle II, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends to the school boards and schools:

- 11) to create the favourable conditions needed for the establishment of veritable cycle teams, and to promote where necessary for Secondary Cycle II other methods of collaboration, in order to support initiatives for a more flexible school organization required for the integration of broad areas of learning as well as the implementation and evaluation of cross-curricular competencies.

CONCLUSION

Supporting the implementation of cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning is, in essence, the message that the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation wishes to deliver in the present Brief. For the Conseil, both the integration of broad areas of learning into the Québec Education Program and the implementation of cross-curricular competencies are part of an approach of taking ownership which, by definition, necessitates an investment of time and the provision of necessary support for teachers.

In its present Brief, the Conseil upholds the relevance and applicability of broad areas of learning. It notes, however, that their tangible integration is dependant on a better identification of potential links to the subject areas. Without such support, the Conseil fears that these areas will not be fully developed, and, in doing so, that major aspects of student development will be woefully neglected.

With regard to the issue of implementing cross-curricular competencies, the Conseil notes that an integration approach has already begun throughout the education community, with the exception of some competencies that pose specific difficulties. It is the opinion of the Conseil that all cross-curricular competencies in the Québec Education Program should be retained, excluding “To construct his/her identity” (elementary) and “To realize his/her potential (secondary), which pertain more to the end goals of education. The Conseil also believes there is a need to foster the linguistic aspect of the competence “To communicate appropriately” in order to further marshal efforts in mastering language.

Moreover, the Conseil is cognizant of the difficulties and questions related to the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies. For this reason, in the present Brief the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies—either as a learning aid or as an account of their development in the competency report—was addressed separately from communications sent to parents in this regard. Insofar as evaluation is a learning aid, the Conseil deems that all cross-curricular competencies should be evaluated in the classroom without, however, giving them a certification value, and that essential information on the progress of their development be conveyed to parents so they may help their child. The Conseil is aware, however, of the integration period needed prior to including the development of these eight competencies in the competency report, and believes it is still feasible to stay the course set by the Minister and to provide an account on the development of at least one of the cross-curricular competencies by 2008.

In conclusion, the Conseil deems that the implementation and evaluation of cross-curricular competencies by teachers necessitates specific professional competencies, and calls for a concerted effort on the part of the Minister, the school boards and school administrations to ensure that teachers receive all the necessary support for implementing cross-curricular competencies to the benefit of all students.

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APPENDIX 1



Gouvernement du Québec
Le ministre de l'Éducation,
du Loisir et du Sport

Québec, le 15 septembre 2006

Monsieur Jean-Pierre Proulx
Président
Conseil supérieur de l'éducation
1175, avenue Lavigerie, bureau 180
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Monsieur le Président,

Conformément à l'article 9 de la Loi sur le Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, je sou mets à votre examen la question de la prise en compte et de l'évaluation des compétences transversales ainsi que la question de la pertinence et de l'applicabilité des domaines généraux de formation à l'école primaire.

Ces questions sur les apprentissages transversaux du Programme de formation de l'école québécoise ont été soulevées par la Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique dans son récent rapport intitulé *Évaluation de l'application du programme de formation de l'école québécoise – enseignement primaire* dont copie est jointe à la présente. J'ai demandé que les recommandations de ce rapport soient appliquées immédiatement. La demande que je vous adresse aujourd'hui s'inscrit dans la ligne de la première recommandation.

Je vous réfère à ce rapport afin que vous preniez connaissance du contexte précis des questions que je vous sou mets. Vous y trouverez notamment des renseignements sur les différences que font les enseignantes et les enseignants entre les compétences transversales et entre les domaines généraux de formation quant au degré de difficulté de leur application. Même si le rapport de la Table de pilotage porte sur le primaire, il serait utile que l'avis du Conseil tienne compte des récentes précisions apportées aux compétences transversales et aux domaines généraux dans le Programme de formation du 1^{er} cycle du secondaire et dans celui du 2^e cycle.

Je vous saurais gré de me transmettre l'avis du Conseil sur ces questions d'ici la mi-janvier 2007.

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur le Président, l'expression de mes sentiments les meilleurs.

JEAN-MARC FOURNIER

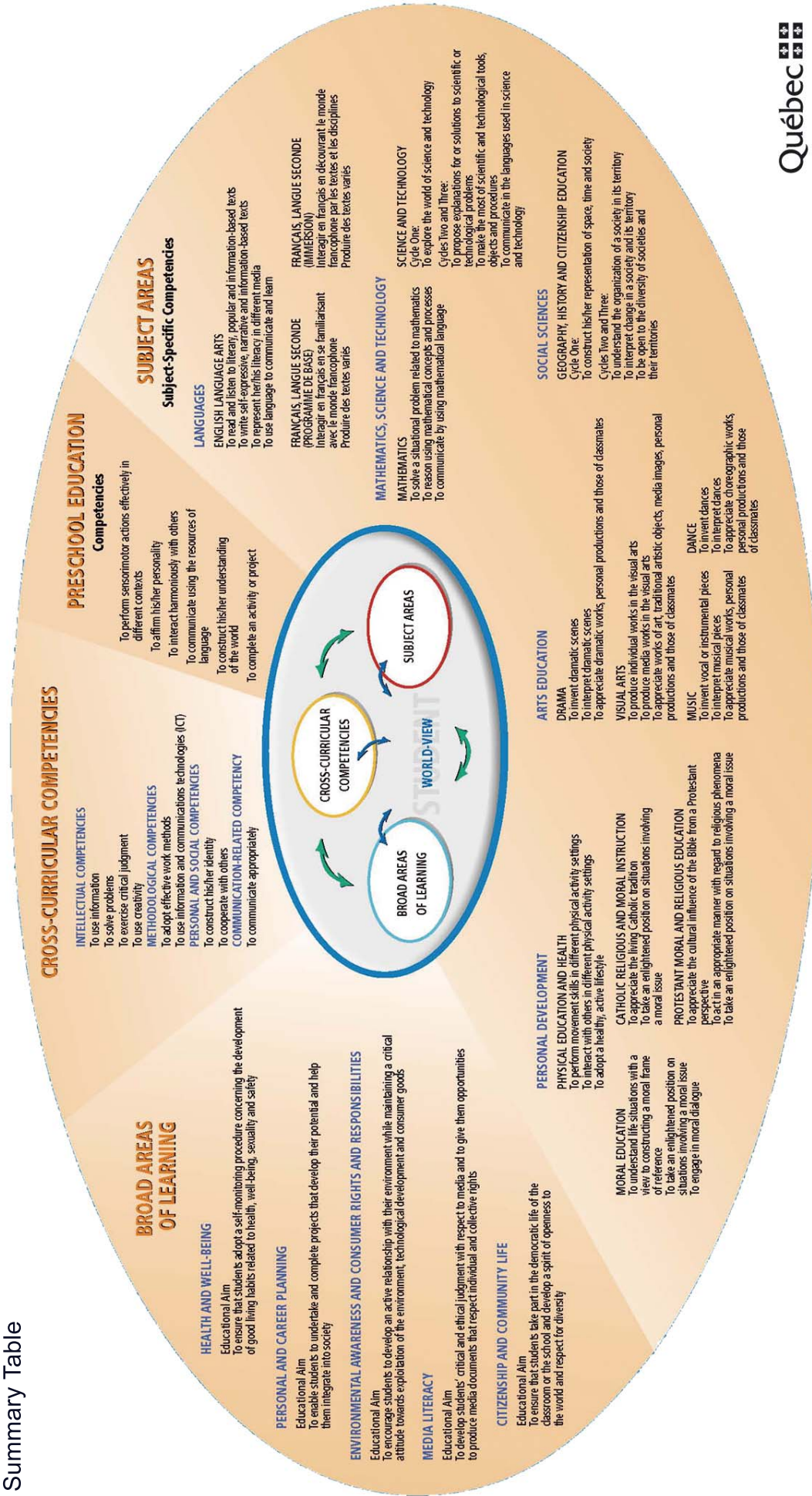
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THE QUÉBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM - PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Summary Table



The curriculum for Basic General Education for the adult education sector is currently at a very advanced stage of development. Already, similarities and differences can be identified with regard to the Basic School Regulation and the corresponding Québec Education Program.

In the adult education sector, there are also four broad areas of learning (as almost as many as in elementary and secondary schools): citizenship; health and well-being; environmental awareness and consumer rights and responsibilities; the world of work. There is also an analogue to cross-curricular competencies known as “transferable competencies”: to communicate, to adopt work methods, to use creativity, to use logic, to use critical and ethical judgement, and to cooperate with others. The other cross-curricular competencies can be found to a certain extent in one or more subject areas.

The reason the curriculum for adult education differs more than the curriculum for continuous elementary and secondary education is due to the nature of the subject areas. Whereas the five broad areas of learning in the Québec Education Program are unquestionably grouped by affinity, this is generally not the case for the five areas in adult education: social sciences; personal development; language arts, mathematics, science and technology; and career development. In most cases—with the exception of mathematics and information technologies—the subject areas of the curriculum for the adult sector refer primarily to a set of learning environments grouped by affinities amongst each other in a given area, and subjects in the traditional sense act more as a resource to carry out the targeted competencies in a learning environment. Literature on this subject suggests that support for a notion of restructured knowledge and learning varies greatly between a curriculum established for youths and that for adults. For the former, the restructured approach complements the establishment and clarifies understanding without being mutually exclusive. In the latter, the constructivist perspective seems to be both more advanced and more imperative, which places the choice of transferable competencies before to subject-related competencies rather than within the various disciplines as in the curriculum for youths.

APPENDIX 4 PERSONS CONSULTED IN THE PREPARATION OF THE PRESENT BRIEF

Guest speakers invited by an ad hoc committee on cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning:

Jean Archambault and Chantale Richer
Co-authors, *Une école pour apprendre*

Monique Boucher
Former Editor, *Vie pédagogique* magazine

Madeleine Piché
Principal
École primaire Notre-Dame-du-Canada
Commission scolaire de la Capitale

Réginald Grégoire
Consultant

Persons consulted by the research team of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation:

The Conseil consulted with about 70 education players involved in the education reform, namely Elementary and Secondary Cycle I teachers, administration staff and educational advisors.

A special thank you is addressed to all those who have so generously given their time in sharing their professional experience and expertise with the Conseil.

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JOINT SECRETARIES

Louise de la Sablonnière
Josée Turcotte

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