



# INFO ADULT-ED

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NOW SHOWING

ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN  
FOR THE GOVERNMENT POLICY ON ADULT EDUCATION  
AND CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Vol. 2 TAKE 4 – JULY 2005

## FEATURE PRESENTATION

This issue contains:

- a large Flashback section that provides an overview of the recognition of prior learning and competencies here and elsewhere
- three panorama sections: Québec, Canadian and international
- a glimpse of Web sites to visit
- a reference work to consult
- a calendar of activities

## CLOSE-UP

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 7 PM

It's not really winter anymore, but not quite spring. In Montréal, at the corner of Sherbrooke and Mansfield streets, inside a conference centre, the banquet hall echoes with the buzz of conversations, the clinking of glasses as acquaintances are renewed, and the sound of microphones being tested. After a moment, the cacophony gives way to complete silence. For the next three hours, the participants will focus only on the topic for the day: **the recognition of prior learning and competencies.**

This was the scene at the Colloque national sur la reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences, organized by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport in collaboration with various partners. From 3 P.M., Wednesday, April 5 until Thursday, April 6 at 5 P.M., more than 500 individuals had an opportunity to attend lectures and workshops that confirmed the increasing prominence of the recognition of prior learning competencies in Québec, each one claiming to offer the most original and dynamic approach.

The conference opened by focusing on partnership in the area of adult education and continuing education and training. On the occasion of *Québec Adult Learners' Week*, the Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes, mandated by the government to coordinate this event, provided an opportunity for various individuals to describe their learning experiences. For the participants, it was an opportunity to hear enthusiastic, motivating personal accounts, which once again confirmed the presence of a culture of continuing education and training in Québec. Serge Ravet, an expert from France on the recognition of prior learning then took the floor to speak to the participants about European developments in this field.

Common standards of competence for learning, the ePortfolio, and accessibility to formal and informal learning were all themes common to Europe and Québec, and Mr. Ravet discussed these topics in his address.

This issue of *INFO ADULT-ED* deals mainly with the recognition of prior learning and competencies. The *Flashback* section contains the text of the opening address, a diversity of experiences with recognition of prior learning by the partners in the field in various activity sectors, and much, much more ... The *Québec Panorama* presents the experiences of various partners at the CEGEP level, while the *Canadian Panorama* provides information on the *Halifax Declaration* of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment. The *International Panorama* gives a summary of the work of the European Summer University for Research and Innovation in Life Long Learning held in 2004, the theme of which was the recognition of prior learning and competencies. Finally, suggestions for reading and activities are provided in the sections *On the Web*, *On the bookshelf*, and *On the agenda*.

This newsletter therefore paints a picture of the possibilities and perspectives for this very important issue for Québec adults.

On that note, have a great summer and enjoy your reading!

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# FLASH BACK

## THE VALIDATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Opening speech of the Colloque  
sur la reconnaissance des acquis  
et des compétences,  
given by Serge Ravet,  
director of the European Institute  
for E-Learning (EifEL)

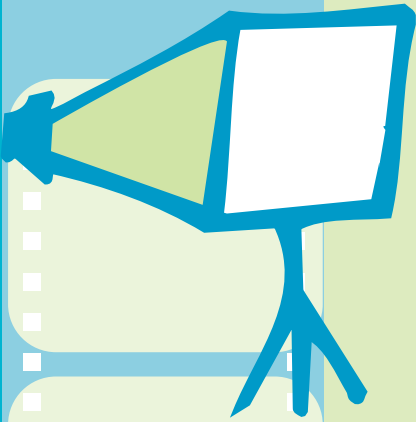
### INTRODUCTION

It is a great pleasure to be with you this evening in Montréal to launch this conference on a theme that is very dear to my heart: the recognition of prior learning and competencies. Being here this evening is especially significant to me because I will soon be celebrating a ten-year anniversary of sorts with the validation of prior learning and experience (VPLE). Nearly a decade ago in France I founded a consulting firm dedicated to what we called at the time RVA, the Reconnaissance et la validation des acquis (the recognition and validation of prior learning), and which had chosen to promote the system already successfully established by the British many years before: the National Vocational Qualifications, a mechanism that makes it possible every year for nearly 500,000 people in the UK to obtain qualifications through the validation of their professional experience.

The idea of setting up the consulting firm had come to me when I was taking part in the European Pannonia project, the objective of which was to provide support for Hungarian universities in the implementation of open, flexible training mechanisms. One evening in Hajdúszoboszló, a spa town east of Budapest, an English educator began talking to me about the English model for the validation of experiential learning. I must have liked what she said, because shortly after that, I left my employer, and the English woman joined me in Paris to preach the gospel to the world of education and training. I realize that there are certainly more romantic seduction techniques, but if you still had any doubts about the seductive power of VPLE, you should know you might find it where you least expect it. VPLE has certainly changed my life and the life of the woman who would become my wife.

This marriage (with VPLE) has gone through its ups and downs. Many battles had to be fought to take it from an interesting idea that was sometimes looked down on to a reality affecting millions of people in the world.

Among the high points was the conference organized in France in November 1996 by the Réseau en reconnaissance des acquis, called *Reconnaître et valider les acquis tout au long de la vie : Quels dialogues possibles?* [Recognizing and validating lifelong learning: What dialogues are possible?]



It was during that conference that I had the pleasure of meeting Ginette Robin, one of the pioneers in the field in Québec, who had just introduced us to the recognition of prior learning in Québec. That was 9 years ago! Since then, I also had the opportunity to meet another Canadian, Dr. Kathryn Chang Barker from the *Learning Innovations Forum / Forum d'innovations d'apprentissage* (LifIA), with whom we organized the ePortfolio for Everyone campaign, with the objective that by 2010, every citizen would have an ePortfolio for the validation and recognition of their competencies. At the end of my presentation, I'll return to what an ePortfolio is, but you should know that if this objective of an ePortfolio for Everyone seems overly ambitious to you, Wales has already offered ePortfolios for all of its three million citizens.

And then, more recently, I met Guy Fortier, who was kind enough – or reckless enough – to invite me to talk to you about my experience, and experiences in general in Europe in the area of the validation and recognition of prior learning and competencies. When he approached me to talk to you about Europe, I suspect he had in mind what Madeleine Albright once said:

"To understand Europe, you have to be a genius – or French."

Not having a genius available, he had to settle for a Frenchman.

I don't think there could have been a better place than Montréal to hold a conference on the recognition of prior learning and competencies. Québec has always been able to combine a remarkable ability to innovate with a concern for the quality of education and training. The development of the validation of experiential learning, which is currently becoming one of the key elements in lifelong learning policies, is a new opportunity to demonstrate this capacity for innovation and to imagine new approaches to quality in education and training.

### **Summary of the Presentation**

During the next few minutes, I will try to answer a certain number of questions: Why is **the recognition of prior learning and competencies** an important subject and why now in particular? What is its impact on the **organization of education systems** and on the processes for granting diplomas? What is its impact on the relationships among the **social partners**? What are the possible procedures for **implementation**? Where are the main **obstacles** and risks? How can **technologies** contribute to its development?

### **ElfEL**

But first of all, a few words on ElfEL, the organization that I have the pleasure of representing this evening. ElfEL – *European Institute for E-Learning* – is a European professional association, created in 2001, dedicated to the support of the continuing professional development of education, learning, and human resources development professionals.

The originality of ElfEL as a professional association is its vision of learning, in particular, its vision of the organic link between different levels of learning: **individual**, **organizational** (learning organizations), **community** (learning communities) and **territorial** (learning cities and regions).

Understanding that there is a link between these different levels of learning seems to us to be indispensable to the development of policies on education and learning that are adapted to the requirements of a knowledge-based economy and a learning society. This has very concrete consequences for the type of competencies that are expected of the actors in the world of education and training, but also for the mechanisms of education and training and for the quality assurance systems, in particular for the validation of experiential learning.

ElfEL is engaged in a series of projects, conferences, and seminars around these questions. In 2005, we will organize the third conference on learning cities and regions and the third international conference on the ePortfolio. We have also just held the first meeting of our steering committee for the organization of the first French-language conference on the ePortfolio, scheduled to take place in Québec City in the spring of 2006. A key topic of this conference will be the issues of validation of experience and competencies.

In more operational terms, we are working on projects such as: the validation of core competencies, the validation of informal and non-formal learning, on the training and certification of teachers and educators, on the development of open learning sites, on quality assurance for learning systems.

ElfEL has also originated two European consortia that bring together key actors on education and training in Europe: Europortfolio and the European Foundation for Quality in eLearning (EFQEL). The ePortfolio and quality, which, in our opinion, are key elements in the implementation of VPLE mechanisms, should be based on a European strategy; this is the *raison d'être* of these consortia.

Although it is still modest in size, EifEL is now an organization that counts in Europe; through our ePortfolio for Everyone campaign, we hope to succeed in promoting the idea that every citizen should have the means to have their competencies recognized at any time in their life.

## Europe

On May 1, 2004, ten more countries joined the European Union<sup>1</sup>. There are now 25 countries (20 official languages<sup>2</sup>) which share the same destiny, which soon should be embodied in a European Constitution – except if the polls of French voters, which currently show a majority opposing the constitution, are proven correct.

**It is in this new environment that the strategy defined** by the heads of state and government who met in the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000 will have to be implemented by the year 2010, making the European Union "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion."

Education and training, research, as well as employment policy are at the heart of this strategy.

But before going into more detail on the strategy, I would like to quickly examine the state of lifelong learning sites in Europe.

## Lifelong learning

The European context is characterized by a very wide diversity in educational systems, qualifications, and relationships among social partners. On the question of lifelong learning, if we examine the annual survey done by Eurostats, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, on the adults involved in an education or training activity during the four weeks prior to the survey, we can see extreme differences between the countries of the south such as Greece and Portugal, and the northern countries. Unlike France, which was saved from bringing up the rear by the arrival of the ten new members, Greece and Portugal did not change their ranking in this last survey.

However, the question of participation in learning activities, either formal or informal, is a key issue in the field of validation of learning: What would be the usefulness of a system of

validation of learning in a country in which only a small number of citizens participate in lifelong learning activities? What would be the usefulness of validation that would not be followed up with any updating, any continuing professional development, once past experience has been recognized?

One of the elements of this policy on lifelong learning is the organization of job-related professional development education, and on that question, I would like to briefly turn the spotlight on France.

## Who benefits from job-related continuing education and training?

The European governments have policies on continuing education and training, the organizational and legal framework of which was developed during the 1970s. In France, in 1971, a law was passed on continuing education and training that established a certain number of obligations for employers, in particular with respect to funding.

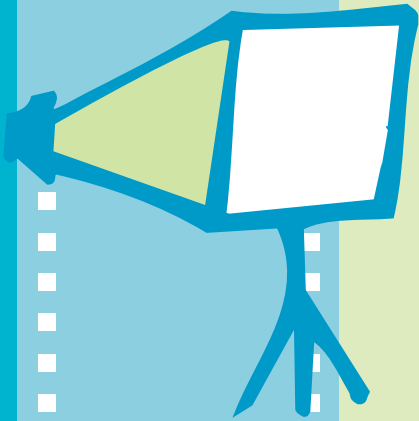
However, we now have a system of continuing education and training that, far from correcting social inequalities, increases them. As unequivocally shown by the official statistics of the Centre d'études et de recherches sur l'emploi et les qualifications (CEREQ), those who take part the most in training programs are people with more education, men more than women, and employees of large companies more than those of SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises).

The funding of continuing education and training is provided in France through a tax equal to 1.6% of the payroll, but companies spend 3% on average. It is interesting to note that in the 1990s, the Australians had tried to copy the French tax model and then abandoned it shortly after, having realized that this system of funding tended to increase gaps rather than reduce them.

An attempt to correct this sharp inequality was made in December 2004 in the form of a law creating the Droit individuel à la formation (DIF) [the individual right to training]. Every employee now has a credit of 20 hours of training per year that he or she can take on his/her own initiative, during work hours or outside work hours, according to the provisions of agreements in the sector or company. Currently, each employee is also entitled to a leave of absence of 24 work hours, consecutive or not, for the validation of his or her prior learning. This is called leave for validation of experiential learning.

1. Cyprus, Malta, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

2. Bringing the translation and interpretation budget of the European Commission to 1.1 billion Euros – approximately 1% of the total administrative budget, or 2.55 Euros per citizen.



The French example clearly illustrates the issue Europe is facing: how to ensure access for all to lifelong learning. It certainly takes more than making funding available.

## The issues for Europe

I do not believe that the issues regarding education and training policies for Europe are very different from yours here:

- ensure that every citizen masters **core competencies**
- raise the **qualification** levels of everyone
- ensure the **transparency** of qualifications
- ensure **accessibility** and equality of opportunity
- develop the **competency-based approach**
- encourage **workforce mobility**
- integrate **migrant** workers
- implement **quality assurance** processes for education and training
- recognize **non-formal** and **informal** learning

What perhaps distinguishes us are the specific conditions under which we foresee coordinating actions at the European level.

The policy of the European Community is based on the principle of subsidiarity: it intervenes only when it is indisputable that its action appears more effective than action carried out in isolation by one or two countries. While the principle of subsidiarity does not apply to competencies exclusive to the Community, such as the common market or economic and monetary policy, there is one area in which the member states have long wanted to maintain the principle of **subsidiarity**, and that is **education and training**.

Lacking, initially, the ability to coordinate actions in the area of education and training, the European Commission has long limited itself to suggesting community programs such as SOCRATES, the objective of which, through the joint financing of projects, is to improve the quality of education and initial and ongoing training and to develop cooperation among organizations at the European level<sup>3</sup>.

In order to make European education policy more coherent, the European Council in Lisbon, in 2000, recommended that the Union define broad guidelines in order to provide a general framework for the short-, medium- and long-term objectives set by the member states. The European Community also established criteria evaluation in order to measure and compare outcomes and to identify best practices.

3. The SOCRATES program includes the following initiatives: COMENIUS (school education), ERASMUS (higher education), GRUNDTVIG (adult education), LINGUA (languages) and MINERVA (open and distance education). The Education and Culture Directorate also has an eLearning program. The European Social Fund is another source of funding for training initiatives in Europe.

4. The ENIC (European Network of Information Centres) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) networks work in Europe to achieve transparency of qualifications.

## The European initiatives

Building on this new desire to coordinate educational policies, a growing number of initiatives have been developed, both at the national and European levels.

For example, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDFOP), which is the agency of the European Commission for vocational training, has proposed several instruments collectively called Europass.

These are:

- The Europass curriculum vitae: the European curriculum vitae
- Europass Mobility: a kind of portfolio describing a person's competencies
- Europass Diploma Supplement: Every university must, in 2005, be able to offer a diploma supplement describing in detail the learning achieved in a format that makes it readable by all stakeholders.
- Europass Certificate Supplement: This is equivalent to the diploma supplement, but for vocational education.
- Europass Language Portfolio

Other networks<sup>4</sup> are carrying out initiatives aimed at harmonizing the different levels of education (Licence Maîtrise Doctorat – LMD) or credit transfer systems (*European Credit Transfer System – ECTS*).

These instruments and networks provide support for a certain number of processes for the coordination of educational policies in the European Union, in particular:

- the **Bologna** Process for higher education, which is aimed at the creation of a "European Higher Education Area" by strengthening cooperation among the institutions of member states
- the **Copenhagen** Process, which strengthens cooperation in the area of education and vocational education

More recently, in **Maastricht**, in December 2004, the ministers responsible for vocational education from 32 countries, the social partners, and the European Commission published a common declaration on "the future priorities of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training," of which I will read you an excerpt:

PIIn order to develop transparency, quality, and mutual trust [...], priority should be given to "the development of an open and flexible European qualifications framework, founded on transpar-

ency and mutual trust. The framework will provide a common reference to facilitate the recognition and transferability of qualifications covering both VET and general (secondary and higher) education, based mainly on competences and learning outcomes. It will improve permeability within education and training systems, provide a reference for the validation of informally acquired competences [...]. The framework should be underpinned by a set of common reference levels. It should be supported by instruments agreed at the European level, particularly quality assurance mechanisms to create the necessary mutual trust.<sup>5</sup>

This declaration is especially important, since it provides a framework for the development of a common vision of education, training, and recognition of qualifications, and in particular the validation of experiential learning, the subject that brings us all here this evening.

## Why VPLE?

Why the Validation of Prior Learning and Experience (VPLE) and why now? The idea of VPLE is not a new thing. As I noted at the beginning of my presentation, nearly nine years ago a conference had already taken place in Paris at which Ginette Robin presented us with the results on the recognition of prior learning in Québec. For some even, it has been thirty years since this question was first raised and since we have been searching for an answer.

Is there a particular reason why this topic has come to the fore in 2005? What has changed that would permit us to hope that this time we can go beyond the isolated experiments that have been implemented from time to time until now? What are the chances that VPLE can become a systematic practice?

In my opinion, there are several reasons, namely the need to:

- structure and equip **lifelong learning**, to transform a vision into a number of concrete mechanisms that go beyond continuing education and training.
- encourage **permeability** between the vocational education and university communities.
- increase **employability levels** by equipping every employee with instruments that will allow him or her at any time to **situate his or her competencies** in relationship to job requirements.

- facilitate the **mobility** of employees during their careers by validating experience acquired on the job but also and perhaps especially by supporting transfers and changes in positions, to transform the view of salaried employment by giving value to learning experiences: "I work therefore I learn."
- improve the quality of training, for example by facilitating the individualization of learning paths, and the development of a more experiential approach that encourages the competency-based approach.
- improve the quality of evaluation, in particular by ensuring transparency of qualifications for employers, but also for applicants.

Of course, this list is far from exhaustive, but we will attempt to examine how the *validation of experiential learning* proposes instruments and methods to respond to these issues.

## Validation or dispensation?

It seems useful at this stage in our reflections to define what we mean by validation of competencies and skills and what are the different forms it can take.

I am proposing a definition that includes the various components of a validation system:

*The validation of competencies and skills is the process by which an applicant obtains **formal recognition**, in the form of a certificate or diploma, of **formal, informal or non-formal learning** acquired in a professional or social situation, for which **evidence** can be produced to satisfy the **requirements** of the recognized activity. One of the ways of formalizing the requirements of an activity is by establishing a standard of competence.*

On the basis of this definition or similar definitions, the organizations in charge of validation policies and their implementation have a choice between two main types of strategies: *assimilation* and *accommodation*.

- With an **assimilation** strategy, the education and training mechanisms integrate validation as a new constraint, without seeking to fundamentally modify their mission or their approach. These are mechanisms oriented instead towards dispensation and of which the issue would be mainly how to exempt applicants for a diploma from a certain number of courses or tests. Dispensation systems have existed practically forever and everywhere. The important thing is to make them more systematic.

5. Maastricht Communiqué, *Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET)*, [On-line], 2004, <[www.vetconference-maastricht2004.nl/pdf/Maastricht\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.vetconference-maastricht2004.nl/pdf/Maastricht_Communique.pdf)>.



With an **accommodation** strategy, the education and training mechanisms integrate validation as an opportunity to redefine their mission and their approach in accordance with the new goal of validation. The question is not so much one of rationalizing the organization of studies by establishing a system of dispensation, as it is examining all possible consequences of such an approach: political and social (be willing to call into question established positions), organizational (implement a system of quality assurance for validation independent of that for training) and human (develop the competencies of education and training professionals).

The study of the different mechanisms existing in Europe shows that there is a rather broad spectrum of validation practices, from simple dispensation systems to systems that have profoundly transformed the educational landscape of an entire country, and with all the other possibilities in between.

In Switzerland, for example, this is how the Département de la Formation et de la Jeunesse [Department of Education and Youth] explains it:

The Direction de la formation professionnelle grants a reduction of learning requirements upon written request from the apprenticeship supervisor if prior studies or training of the learner justify it. Holders of a CFC [*Certificat fédéral de capacité*, leading to employment], a diploma from a diploma school [leading to higher level vocational training or employment] or a *maturité gymnasiale* [leading to university studies] can also, as the case may be, obtain a dispensation from teaching and the final examination in the spheres of general culture. After the completion of secondary school (diploma or *maturité*), it is also possible, in certain trades, to take training in school or in the workplace with the duration reduced by half. This is called *formation professionnelle accélérée* (FPA) [accelerated vocational education].

In this example of Switzerland, we clearly have a dispensation mechanism based on recognition of previous studies. The system is rather insubstantial, since it requires only a letter from an apprenticeship supervisor to obtain dispensation for a part of the program. The accelerated pursuit of studies is the main objective.<sup>6</sup>

6. DÉPARTEMENT DE LA FORMATION ET DE LA JEUNESSE, Orientation scolaire et professionnelle, [On-line], 2005, <[www.orientation.vd.ch/content/faq.htm#reduc](http://www.orientation.vd.ch/content/faq.htm#reduc)>.

7. VALIDA. Donner une valeur à l'expérience [Valuing experience], [On-line], 2005, <[www.valida.ch](http://www.valida.ch)> [Translator's note: free translation].

Of course, the Swiss have also established a system for the validation of learning in the wake of a law passed in 2003, but the application of that law met with certain difficulties. Under section 33 of the law, it is stated that "The occupational qualifications are attested through a comprehensive examination, through a combination of partial examinations or through **other qualification procedures recognized** by the office." In the edict enacting the law, we read, in paragraph 3: "the diplomas certifying vocational education presuppose a **final examination** of the required qualifications."<sup>7</sup> The difference between the position of the law on the vocational education and that in the edict illustrates the tension between the implementation of a system of validation open to other qualification procedures and a system of dispensation in which it is possible to be exempted from certain courses, but not from final examinations.

This tension between *validation* and *dispensation* is something we could find in many of the initiatives that are now being developed in Europe. Establishing a system of validation that goes beyond simple assimilation probably requires accepting the calling into question of a certain number of established positions and practices. This tension is the same that exists between conformism and innovation: **dispensation does not require reexamining traditional mechanisms of evaluation, validation does.**

Not all European countries are prepared for this to the same degree.

If we take the case of the United Kingdom, we find a mechanism for the validation of competencies that I would define as a system of canonical validation, for two reasons. Instituted at the beginning of the 1990s, the system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) has already reached a canonical age in comparison with other systems which began to be developed only in the 2000s.

It can also be said that this model of validation could be considered the canonical form of any system for the validation of experience, because, in my opinion, a system of validation should be based on:

- a **specific description of the performance** of a person in relation to the needs of a sector or a professional field over a period of 3 to 5 years (standards of competence)

- a **system of quality assurance** guaranteeing that decisions are made: on the basis of statements supported by evidence; by persons competent to judge the competencies of a person; independently of the site or the organization in charge of the validation

A system of dispensation, on the other hand, can perfectly well be based on:

- a **superficial description of activities** on the basis of which it is possible to infer the knowledge a person possesses, for example "three years of experience in a position of secretary"
- a **system of quality assurance** that accommodates:
  - standards with few details
  - professionals without specific qualifications to make judgments
  - disparities in the decisions made by different centres

*Systems of dispensation* are systems that usually accommodate institutions as they are and do not encourage innovation. They:

- accommodate the absence or weakness of quality assurance mechanisms
- continue to emphasize the participation of formal training
- are uncomfortable with the idea that knowledge can be inferred on the basis of evidence of performance ("if you did this, competently and systematically, I deduce that you have the necessary underlying knowledge"), and therefore, maintains the examination as the preferred method of verifying knowledge

Of course, according to the mechanism, the cursor may be more or less on the side of *dispensation-assimilation* or *validation-accommodation*. We can thus find systems of dispensation that have made it possible for an institution to review its organization, or to implement a system of quality assurance. However, this distinction between *dispensation-assimilation* and *validation-accommodation* does not seem useful to me for the understanding of the values underlying these mechanisms, as well as the mechanisms implemented, in particular quality assurance mechanisms.

If the not-insignificant advantage of a simple system of dispensation is that it requires less of a financial, organizational, social, and human investment, we have to ask ourselves if it is the one that will bring the best return on investment.

**To identify the position of a system of validation in relation to a simple system of dispensation, I suggest a series of six proposals:**

## 1 POINT OF DEPARTURE

My first proposal is:

- **The Validation of Experiential Learning should not be seen as an arrival point, but as a point of departure, a reference, marking the beginning of the next stage in one's experience of lifelong learning.**

I propose, before going into more detail on the mechanisms of the VPLE, to ask the following with respect to the different stages of lifelong learning. Does the VPLE mark the end of an episode or the beginning of a new one? Choosing one position or the other will probably have significant consequences on the type of mechanism established, but also on the attitude of the actors, whether these are institutions or simple applicants.

The link between work and learning has been transformed many times since the end of the Second World War. While until the 1950s diplomas seemed to have a lifetime value, the 1970s saw the development of legislation on continuing education and training for the upgrading of qualifications, then, beginning in the 1990s, on the validation of professional learning and the development of competency approaches.

We therefore seem to have gone from a world where one learns **in order to work**, to one where one learns **during work**, and **through work**. In the twenty-first century, it is no longer enough to simply learn for, during or through work. There is now definitely a more organic link between work and learning. Any work includes a more or less significant portion of informal learning.

Paraphrasing Descartes, we might say: "I work therefore I learn." And didn't John Dewey say that "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself"?

My question is this: What does an applicant do once his or her competencies have been validated? In today's world, it's clear that he or she should very likely continue to upgrade his or her competencies in order to maintain them at the same level or develop them further. Take the case of computer experts. If they do not regularly read trade journals and subscribe to discussion lists, their level of competency will diminish exponentially over the years. Even though the rate of obsolescence is not as great in all occupational sectors, a nurse's aide or travel agent also has to continue to learn, if only to maintain his/her competencies or simply keep his/her job.



On the basis of this observation, it seems reasonable to me to expect a **process for the validation of learning to be not only a validation of the past but also and especially to be a kind of validation of the future**, to expect the process to show the person's ability to learn from occupational experience, **to make his/her professional experience a learning experience**. Isn't this what employers are looking for: an indicator of the capacity to do a job now, but also the ability to adapt to future developments? The VPLE should be an indicator that makes this prognosis possible.

If we are moving from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy, it is legitimate to ask if VPLE mechanisms properly reflect the requirements of such an economy or whether they are still copied from the requirements and models of the industrial age. Are we, in fact, in the process of establishing a VPLE for the twenty-first century or are we stuck in patterns that were valid in the twentieth century?

The case of Wales is very interesting from this point of view. First of all, Wales defined itself as a *Learning Country*. It has also just established a national infrastructure that makes it possible for each of its three million citizens to have an ePortfolio in order to have access, among other things, to a flexible mechanism of validation for their competencies. By establishing such a national system, Welsh leaders have sent a very clear signal to all their citizens: one learns throughout one's life; the validation of competencies is the starting point for the next stage in this voyage.

## 2 ACCESSIBILITY

The VPLE should be accessible to everyone, regardless of

- resources, prior training, or pursuit of studies.

This proposal, in fact, combines two proposals: one concerning the costs of the VPLE, and the other, the link between VPLE and training. If the objective of the VPLE is to improve economic performance in a territory, to permit all its citizens to develop their talents and contribute to economic and social life, it is therefore an essential priority to be able to reach the majority of salaried employees, including the unskilled or low-skilled persons, working in SMEs, in very small enterprises, or even from

home. The aim must be to eliminate all potential barriers from the path leading to the recognition of competencies, whether they be financial or organizational.

The VPLE has a cost, and this cost must be accommodated, whether by the applicant, employer, or community, that is, through our taxes.

In France, the combination of the Droit individuel à la formation (DIF) and the VPLE (established by the social modernization law of January 2002) offers citizens new possibilities for taking control of their lives. This, for example, is the case for the 300,000 potential applicants for qualification as nurse's aides: at the end of October, during their last meeting, the members of the advisory working group, which includes all the interested parties,<sup>8</sup> agreed on the definition of the occupation of nurse's aide and on the competencies required to practise it.<sup>9</sup>

While we might think that everything is now in place (except for the signature of the minister of health), and while, according to the law, the VPLE should make it possible to obtain a diploma after three years of professional practice, without necessarily having to take training, the proponents of diplomas stood firm; at one time, there was even talk of an eight-month training program, and of requiring that applicants have eight years of professional practice.

Finally, the training organizations, which are controlled by the employers, have succeeded in imposing a hybrid formula, including a mandatory training module, lasting about fifteen days. They also obtained a seat on the jury that validates the files presented. "They are the judges and the judged. Given their misgivings about the VPLE, we fear the worst," a union representative complained.<sup>10</sup>

Why such reluctance on the part of the employers to separate training from validation? It is likely due to lack of confidence on their part in a mechanism in which the points of reference have been profoundly modified compared to those they were used to. Cutting the umbilical cord between training and validation probably sounds like something profoundly unnatural for those for whom it is their very reason for existence.

If, as in the case of French nurse's aides, a detailed standard of competence exists, nothing should prevent an independent

8. Representatives of the Hospital Directorate, health-care organizations, the General Health Directorate, the employers' unions, the employees, nurse's aides associations, and training organizations.

9. The activity set comprises eight units that detail all activities of a nurse's aide and the standard of competence also comprises eight units directly related to the set of activities.

10. DROIT INDIVIDUEL À LA FORMATION, « LA VEL des aidantes-soignantes n'attend plus que l'arrêt de Phillippe Douste Blazy » [On-line], 2005, <[www.droit-individuel-formation.fr/article.php3?id\\_article=112](http://www.droit-individuel-formation.fr/article.php3?id_article=112)>

organization from issuing a certificate. The mechanisms for the validation of competencies contain the seeds of a potential opening up of the market that will transform the way in which certifications are issued, the position of training organizations, and the competencies of actors. This is an opportunity for greater accessibility to the validation being offered.

Let us hope that the French nurse's aides will be able to quickly join the hundreds of thousands of British nurse's aides who, since the 1990s, have been able to obtain validation for their experience and their competencies.

### 3 TRANSPARENCY

- The VPLE must be based on transparent standards,
- known to all parties and formulated in a language
- understandable to everyone, in particular persons
- who are less qualified.

While the system I knew during my school years was formulated in a very understandable way – you needed an average of over 10 to get your baccalauréat – on the other hand it was far from transparent. I don't remember anyone presenting me with an educational standard or anyone encouraging me to think about how I would be able to translate the requirements of the standard into a program of learning activities. Others took care of that for me. All I had to do was learn what I was told to learn, no more, no less. How many times did I hear, in response to a question: "It's not in the program, you'll do that later."

In the world of adult learning, things cannot work in the same way as they do in school – assuming even that the *traditional* academic approach is still suited to our world. Adults need to situate themselves in relation to the professional practice in their sectors, or the sectors they wish to move into. The adults must be in the driver's seat of their validation and for this to be possible, they have to be given the means.

They have to be given access to a standard of competence describing:

- the **activities** in which a person must be competent in order to obtain the title or the certificate
- the **indicators** that will make it possible to say if the outcomes of that activity are in keeping with the requirements
- examples of **evidence** that a person could provide to show that he or she has the competencies required

There is a certain tension between the precision required in a standard of competence and its readability by applicants for validation: a greater readability can lead to a loss of precision when terms are used that are simpler, but perhaps more ambiguous; a good compromise in level of language must be found between a precise description that is useful for the assessment specialist and a readable description, accessible to the applicant.

But the accessibility of the standard of competence is not only a question of readability. It is also a matter of structure. In fact, standards of competence are usually formulated following a functional analysis that results in a presentation in the form of a series of discrete elements: domains / units / elements / criteria / required knowledge. If we take the example of key competencies, such as working with others and communicating, these two competencies are not unrelated: if one is working with other persons, it is more than likely that one does it by communicating with them. It might therefore be useful, in particular for the lower levels of qualification, to present the standards in a form other than as unconnected elements. This is usually the work done by the supervisor for the validation process, but it would be useful to have presentations available for standards other than the analytical presentation usually proposed, which can be off-putting to the non-specialist.

Another question related to readability is the use of a common framework to structure all standards so that going from a standard for baking to one for supervising or to key competencies does not become a puzzle, since every professional sector would have its own terminology. This common terminology is also an indispensable element to ensure that qualifications are readable from one country to another.

It should be recognized that, until now, we are in a situation similar to that of a person who, in order to organize a trip, has to use different road maps, with different scales, and on which the blue lines on one map are highways, and on another are dirt roads.

This, among other things, is what Europe should work on, along with the implementation of a common reference framework for qualifications.



## 4 TRANSFORMATION

- The standards used for the VPLE should reflect the future needs of society and contribute to its transformation.

There are several possible approaches for the production of standards: the first one, recognized by the International Labour Organization (ILO), is functional analysis based on the definition of the purpose of a sector, then by feedback between a top-down analysis of the purpose and the definition of performance criteria, using definitions of the major areas of activities, the units and elements of competency. For example, for the area of human resource management, a standard of competence could have the purpose: "to value human capital to ensure individual and organizational development," which would be expressed through a number of activities such as staff management, training, etc.

The other analysis, usually done by the educators when they find themselves in a sector without an available standard of competence, is task analysis, which, instead of being done at the level of an entire sector, is usually done at the level of the work station. I will not go into more detail on the analysis of the two approaches except to say that one is quite relevant for the VPLE, and the other much less.

The idea that it is possible to write a standard of competence on the corner of the kitchen table is more widespread than one might think. But the question of whether or not this is possible is not of great interest from the point of view of the VPLE, because for a standard of competence to lead to **recognition** nationally or internationally, it has to be the result of work that includes the different stakeholders in an economic sector: these are the branches professionnelles in France, the National Sector Skills Councils in the United Kingdom, and the sector-based manpower committees in Québec. Without a national, European, Québec, Canadian, or international standard of competence, recognition will remain limited to a local circle.

But this is another point that it seems to me very important to take into account: "What is the primary function of a standard of competence for an economic sector?" **Certainly not the VPLE!** The standards should have an autonomous existence, independent of the VPLE.

The possible uses for standards are to:

- define a job
- choose an applicant
- build a training program
- organize annual performance maintenance
- plan job rotation
- support job rotation
- **develop an economic sector**

I could give you a list of 80 different uses for standards of competence, which include the VPLE, but also and, perhaps especially, the need to **develop an economic sector**.

A standard of competence should describe, within a 4- or 5- year period, the competencies expected in a sector in order to help the enterprises in that sector to develop the competencies of their employees. The standard of competence is a tool for the transformation of organizations, not just a simple description of what they did yesterday or are doing today. The VPLE is one of the ways of using these standards to mobilize the social actors, employers, employees, and territorial communities around a single objective: the development of human and social capital.

One of the errors commonly made is to confuse **standard of competence** and **assessment standard**. Even though they can be practically identical in content – the same functional description – a standard of competence can exist quite independently of the VPLE, while the reverse is not necessarily possible or relevant. I would tend to say that a standard of competence that would be useful only for the VPLE would be of little interest, even from the point of view of the VPLE.

In a system of dispensation, it is quite conceivable to go without a standard of competence or for everyone to cobble together his or her own standard of competence, since the objective is not so much to contribute to the transformation of an economic sector, as it is to rationalize access to a diploma defined by a national curriculum.

## 5 QUALITY ASSURANCE

- The VPLE should be guaranteed by a mechanism of quality assurance for the assessment process that ensures transparency and identical outcomes, regardless of the site or institution that implements it.

I believe that **quality assurance** is probably the most distinguishing difference between a VPLE system and a system of dispensation. How can we guarantee that a people who applied for validation of their experience in Poitiers, in Laval, in Chisasibi, in Trois-Rivières, or in Rome obtain the same results, all else being equal? This is possible only if a network independent of the training is in charge of the quality assurance for the validation. A system of dispensation can, on the other hand, perfectly well permit itself disparities in validation outcomes.

It is clear that the establishment of such a system of quality assurance has financial, organizational, and human costs: resources

have to be allocated to follow up, check, verify, accredit, certify, etc. It is also necessary to ask actors to review their patterns of thought and work.

Faced with this financial, organizational, and human challenge, it is tempting to set up a dispensation mechanism, even if it means labelling it validation. This is particularly true in the academic world where dispensation has always been practised to one degree or another, so that VPLE is experienced as a systematization and rationalization of old practices.

The example of the United Kingdom is quite interesting, with to date more than 5 million qualifications issued through the validation of competencies acquired in occupational settings. In that country, independent certification organizations (awarding bodies) accredit centres, which have assessors qualified to guide the applicants for the VPLE in putting together their portfolio of evidence and to validate their competencies by verifying that the pieces of evidence contained in the portfolio correspond properly to the requirements of standards of competence established by the social partners. Other countries seem to have gone the same direction, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Malta, and Norway.

France, on the other hand, has chosen a different route by giving training and education organizations control over the VPLE, without establishing independent control of the quality assurance of validation. The approval of validation files is done by juries that include directors of training organizations and persons considered qualified, that is, professionals in the sector. No guarantee is given to applicants or employers that the validation will take place according to the same conditions in Marseilles or in Lille.

The ePortfolio opened for us new areas for research and experimentation, the scope of which we have only begun to discover. That could be the continuation of my speech this evening, but I do not think that you are ready to listen to me for another hour, so I suggest you take part tomorrow in the workshop led by Martine Cloutier, Samantha Slade, and Guy Fortier.

## 6 TECHNOLOGIES

- The VPLE should make the best possible use of
- technologies of information, knowledge, and learning –
- ePortfolio.

To have his or her prior learning validated, an applicant usually presents a file containing the evidence attesting the declared competencies: the portfolio. Through the introduction of technologies, the portfolio becomes the ePortfolio.

### Considerable advantages

First of all, when I did my portfolio to be accredited as an assessor in 1996, almost all my documents were produced on computer, then printed and placed in a binder. Then, to organize my evidence of competence, I had to carry out a procedure, called *cross-referencing*, that is, for each of the competencies that I wanted to have validated, I had to indicate what the corresponding proofs were, and vice versa, for each piece of evidence, I had to indicate what performance criteria they covered. At that time, in 1996, I was imagining computers could transform this tedious work into an almost playful activity.

With *electronic* evidence, it is possible for the portfolio to be on-line and thus to be read, commented on, and assessed by a person in another location some distance away. This is a way for the assessor to follow in real time the building of the portfolio and be alerted if things are not going according to plan. In particular, in a mechanism for the quality assurance of the assessment, it also provides the possibility for an external auditor to sample the portfolios of applicants much more systematically. It is even possible to contemplate the use of anti-plagiarism software that would make it possible to prevent the phenomenon of the cloning of ePortfolios, which is an obvious risk, but one we also faced with paper portfolios. It is also a way to include various types of evidence: visual and sound, and to use mobile telephones to add to one's on-line portfolio.

Of course, the reader of an ePortfolio will raise the question of the authenticity of the declarations being made: diplomas, competencies, experience. The digital, connected nature of the ePortfolio means it just takes a click of the mouse (or a call to agent software) to verify that the diploma or stated qualification is actually real, since the server in the institution or that of a third party where the certificates are hosted can provide confirmation.

Other declarations such as "I love to work in a team" can be confirmed by testimony from a third party (testimony placed in the ePortfolio of the applicant or the witness).



One of the other big advantages of the ePortfolio in comparison with the paper portfolio is its useful life. For example, the portfolio I did to become an assessor is now gathering dust on a shelf in my office. The ePortfolio, on the other hand, is still accessible to be updated naturally in the course of my professional activities. It becomes the medium for my continuing professional development.

To date, EIfEL has been involved in several projects using the ePortfolio to support the development of competencies and the validation of experiential learning.

For example, the Key-Pal project is aimed at using the ePortfolio for the validation of key competencies, and one of the aspects that interests us especially is exploring how the construction of an ePortfolio makes it possible to acquire and validate key competencies, naturally, without explicitly working on those competencies. For example, the construction of a languages ePortfolio shows a certain number of computer skills, but also working with others (research the feedback of his or her peers), written and oral communication (presentation of his or her portfolio to a tutor or assessor), information management (collection of evidence of competence), etc.

More generally, we wish to explore how the ePortfolio makes it possible to integrate more organically the assessment into the training process, but also formative and summative evaluation, and also capture the social dimension of learning, in particular through the potential of interconnection technology among the portfolios of a learning or professional community. This is not science fiction, it is called social software. Furthermore, certain social ePortfolios are already operational.

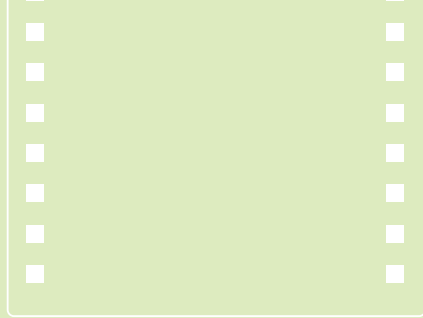
## CONCLUSION

To conclude my speech, I have chosen to quote Sir Winston Churchill who said: "America will always do the right thing – after having exhausted all other possibilities." I believe that this quotation applies marvellously well to the world of the VPLE: it has been years now since the question of validation of learning and competencies was raised and each of us has been trying to provide their own answer.

We have probably reached the stage where we have already made most of the mistakes we could make – and that we probably should have made. The time has certainly come now to draw lessons in order to be able to succeed together in constructing a more open society, in which all individuals will have the means to have their competencies recognized and acknowledged, throughout their life.

## INITIATIVES RELATED TO THE VPLE IN EUROPE

- The **Czech Republic**: a bill on continuing education and training includes the identification of non-formal and informal learning and should be approved by the end of 2005
- **Denmark**: access for all to the validation of learning in the initial and professional training of adults
- **France**: possibility for each person to have his/her experiential learning (VPLE) validated
- **French Belgium**: legal and operational agreement on the validation of competencies acquired formally or informally
- **Germany**: Pilot project developing a *Profilpass* to document informal and non-formal learning
- **Iceland**: directives and rules on the identification of formal and non-formal learning under construction
- **Ireland**: recognition mechanism based on outcomes; independent validation of learning sites
- **Italy**: definition and dissemination of shared formats and methodologies on the descriptive standards of competence
- **Malta**: establishment of a structure for the development, identification, and recognition of occupational qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skills, or competence
- **The Netherlands**: establishment of a mechanism for the validation of experiential learning (VEL) and a resource centre (*Knowledge Centre*) on the validation of experiential learning
- **Norway**: a reform on competencies with a central focus on giving adults the right to document their *realkompetanse* without having to take the road of traditional examinations. Reexamination of regulations to ensure more uniform application of the rules for the validation of formal, non-formal, and informal competencies
- **Portugal**: national mechanism for recognition and validation (the RVCC system) of formal and non-formal learning and learning acquired in the various stages of life
- **United Kingdom**: national mechanism (NVQ/SVQ) proposing recognition and validation of competencies acquired formally, non-formally, and informally (approximately 500,000 qualifications a year)



## A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT INVOLVING THE MELS AND THE CEGEPS

### FIFTEEN CEGEPS TOOK PART IN A PILOT PROJECT ON THE NEW APPROACH IN THE AREA OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND COMPETENCIES

In the spirit of the Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training and in the context of the reexamination of the recognition of prior learning and competencies in the education network, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) has proposed that the CEGEPS experiment with a new harmonized approach (vocational education and technical education) and targeted, for this purpose, the program *Early Childhood Education* (322.A0). This approach is intended to serve as a model for other programs. For this project, the MELS worked with Cégep Marie-Victorin (specifically the team at the Bureau de la reconnaissance des acquis [prior learning assessment office]) to create instruments for the evaluation of educational competencies specific to this program. Next, the Ministère proposed that the interested institutions set up an experimental group in order to provide a service for the recognition of prior learning and competencies in the program, using the proposed instruments. Cégep Marie-Victorin was chosen to coordinate the pilot project, in collaboration with representatives from the Ministère.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE PILOT PROJECT

Based on the main objectives listed in the proposed memorandum of understanding, the mandate given by the MELS to the institutions involved can be summed up as follows:

- set up an experimental group made up of representatives from the institutions involved so that they can regularly share their expertise and provide follow-up for the project
- test, in each institution involved, the proposed updated approach by providing the target population with a service for the recognition of prior learning and competencies in *Early Childhood Education* in order to validate it
- test and validate the new Web site on the recognition of prior learning and competencies
- contribute, at the request of the MELS, to the discussions and the work currently under way in order to ensure the reexamination and development of the recognition of prior learning and competencies at the CEGEP level by formulating proposals and rec-

ommendations related to such issues as funding, the transmission of results and local staffing needs, training, professional development, harmonization between secondary school and CEGEPs, etc.

#### STAGES AND SCHEDULE

The project was officially launched at a meeting of representatives of the institutions involved in Montréal on June 13, 2002. This meeting had been preceded by two information sessions (the first one in Québec City on May 9, the second in Montréal on May 17) on the goals and intentions of the MELS and for which the CEGEPs had been invited to set up an experimental group. A group made up of fifteen institutions was established.

**Six meetings were organized** during the year 2002-2003: three in Montréal and three in Québec City. At the request of the participants, it was agreed that the first item on the agenda of each meeting would be a period devoted to discussion on the various scenarios for the implementation of the project in each of the institutions, in order to

take advantage of the expertise of each representative and perhaps identify areas of consensus on the practices developed in the network. The other items on the agenda varied according to the needs expressed by the group. They dealt with various technical aspects of the project as well as the principles and orientations of the approach proposed by the MELS.

The first year of the pilot project will provide an opportunity for participants to familiarize themselves with the new approach and the proposed instruments. For several institutions, this pilot project was a jumping-off point for a reexamination of an existing service for the recognition of prior learning. For others, it was an opportunity to implement such a service. This is why it quickly became clear to everyone that the planned duration of the pilot project (only one year) would be insufficient, especially given that, as the new model was implemented, the participants became aware of several structural problems related among other things to the current framework and the regulations now in effect in CEGEPs. The coordination team at Cégep Marie-Victorin was therefore given a mandate to make representations on this question to the MELS and to inform the Ministère on the results so far and problems encountered.

Following these discussions, the representatives from the MELS agreed to continue their technical and financial support for the experimental group for an additional year, and to take into account problem areas that had been pointed out to them when deciding which aspects would be empha-

sized in the context of the work currently under way for the implementation of the Action Plan for Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training.

Because of the structural problems mentioned above, measures were taken with the bodies concerned, as soon as work was resumed in the fall of 2003, to make it possible for a representative from the higher education sector at the MELS and another from the Commission des affaires de la formation continue at the Fédération des cégeps to join the experimental group as special observers.

**During the year 2003-2004, six more meetings were organized.** The January 2004 meeting was devoted to the validation of evaluation tools. Over two consecutive days, content experts from the institutions in the experimental group were invited to give their points of view on the various instruments designed for the *Early Childhood Education* program. Coordination and facilitation for the meeting was provided by the representatives of the MELS, who were thus able to organize all the proposals and ensure they were followed up, in collaboration with the members of the team from Cégep Marie-Victorin, which was especially assigned to this aspect of the mandate.

The other meetings were devoted to continuing the work begun the previous year, namely the systematic collection of data, the activity reports of each participant, the assessment of the various aspects of the approach recommended, the identification of the main obstacles encountered, and discussions on the organizational dimensions in-

volved as well as on the content of the instruments made available to the CEGEPs.

The common thread of this whole process could be summarized as follows: an effort to provide the most satisfactory answer possible to the question "Can we, with the updated approach proposed by the MELS, contribute to laying the foundations for a true reexamination of the recognition of prior learning at the CEGEP level?"

### PRODUCTION OF A REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to take into account as faithfully as possible the work carried out in this pilot project, a report was written and submitted in October to the various bodies concerned.<sup>11</sup> The major conclusions of this report, as well as the main recommendations and proposals for actions that seemed to be required, had already been submitted for approval to all members of the committee of representatives from the participating institutions at the last meeting, the one in June. Without going into the technical details and specifications, we can give a preliminary general overview of the points of view expressed in this report.

At the end of the pilot project in their respective institutions, the representatives **said they were generally in agreement with the overall principles and characteristics of the updated approach as it was being proposed by the MELS.** These seemed desirable to them in many respects, in particular as appropriate responses to the requirements of the adult's right to recognition of prior learning. To

12. Tremblay, Gilles. Rapport d'expérimentation de l'approche actualisée en reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences : Une collaboration MEQ, Formation professionnelle et technique – Cégeps, Montréal, Cégep Marie-Victorin, octobre 2004, 94 pages.



this end, their implementation appears not only desirable, but essential. Nevertheless, **it seemed important to them to qualify certain statements of principle included in this approach and especially to underline the fact that many of them are practically inapplicable given the rules currently in force in the CEGEPs.**

Many structural factors have proven to be hindrances to several of the requirements of the proposed model. These obstacles, in the course of the pilot project, have contributed greatly to preventing the institutions from establishing the services necessary to accept the large number of applications and implementing all elements of the service as ideally envisaged. This is why efforts were directed towards pinpointing these difficulties, in order to define the precise nature of the problems encountered, which was made possible thanks to the different points of view expressed, both those of applicants and those of the professionals from the CEGEPs and the content experts.

This process will make it possible, on the basis of the consensus established, to identify the main problem areas and propose a certain number of measures to untangle the snags and alleviate these difficulties. The proposals formulated concern four aspects considered to be priorities for the recognition of prior learning, namely:

- missing components of education or training
- the need to clarify or modify certain articles of the *College Education Regulations*
- the training needs of the different categories of staff working in the area of recognition of prior learning and competencies and the need to raise awareness in the CEGEPs of the principles and basic characteristics of this issue
- the review of the funding formula

We hope, through these proposals, to identify with precision the nature of the obstacles to be overcome and make modest suggestions of avenues that could be used to identify the best adjustments to be made to the rules and structures in place and thus contribute to the reexamination of the recognition of prior learning at the CEGEP level.

Gilles Tremblay  
For the coordination office,  
Cégep Marie-Victorin



## ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ WHY RECOGNIZE THE PRIOR LEARNING AND COMPETENCIES OF ADULTS?

The recognition of prior learning and competencies, as underlined in the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*, constitutes one of the main pillars of any system of continuing education and training.

The current supply of training, based on a precise chronological, sequential progression and on a standard of competence based on age, is no longer sufficient to prepare citizens for the requirements of the knowledge-based society and the economy.

In work settings, these questions are asked with even more insistence, given the urgent need to act, because of, among other things, the aging of the labour force and the high level of international competitiveness that companies have to contend with. The recognition of prior learning is no longer individual. It has become an issue that concerns whole industries, sectors, and even multiple sectors. Under these conditions, all transferable professional competencies are worthy of being taken into account, no matter how they were acquired. The existing systems and those being developed have to respond to a diverse set of needs.

At the same time, the recognition of prior learning and competencies of qualified immigrants is one of the solutions recommended by Québec to meet its labour needs. It is also important to act in areas closely related to the recognition of the training and experience of immigrants, that is, the updating of their competencies and access to information and counselling.

The main reasons for recognizing prior learning and competencies are to:

- guarantee the optimal use of the competencies of the entire Québec work force, including those of workers trained or having acquired work experience in other countries
- stimulate demand for development and adaptation of the labour force
- link, in a single continuum, initial training, continuing education and training, and learning through experience
- make visible and readable all the diverse and distinctive learning, competencies and learning paths of individuals
- increase the possibilities and opportunities for access to diplomas and qualification certificates
- offer training and learning processes that correspond as much as possible to the current and future needs of each individual
- avoid obliging experienced adults to repeat training in areas they have already mastered
- offer workers official information regarding their competencies in relation to one or more occupational standards recognized by the industry
- respect the rights of persons to have their learning and competencies recognized for their personal development projects

## A REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND COMPETENCIES FOR THE MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT

As a follow-up to one of the measures in the action plan for the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*, the Ministère is working on defining, in a reference framework, its main orientations in the area of recognition of prior learning and competencies.

In keeping with the spirit of this policy, the adults, their needs, and their characteristics are at the heart of this framework. From this perspective, the Ministère reaffirms the three basic principles for the recognition of prior learning, which were formulated in the brief from the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation published in 2000 and adopted for the reference framework of the above-mentioned policy.

In this sense, the Ministère has recognized the right to the recognition of prior learning and competencies and, to this effect, is committed to a major reexamination of this issue, in response to the current and future needs and expectations of the population.

Moreover, the Ministère also recognizes that the population can pursue various objectives such as obtaining a diploma, professional development, and improving employability.

The person-centred approach can be characterized by the following four terms: accessibility, comprehensiveness, flexibility, and validity. One of the key elements is the harmonization of the education and employment systems in order to ensure reciprocity between them. Let us now look at the meaning of each term:

### COMPREHENSIVENESS:

The concept of recognition of prior learning must be understood in its broad sense: academic learning, extracurricular learning, experiential learning, customized training, etc.

### ACCESSIBILITY:

It is important to make the services accessible in all educational institutions, and at the same time facilitate access through the use of information and communications technologies and distance education.

### FLEXIBILITY:

The structure of the recognition of prior learning and competencies must favour harmonization among the programs at various levels of teaching and different standards, as well as promote decompartmentalization.

### VALIDITY:

The activities and the mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning and competencies must be well-defined and reliable. It is therefore necessary to establish norms and standards in order to ensure quality.

The reference framework is demanding for the Ministère, since it implies conditions such as:

- a further review of the administrative, legal, and regulatory frameworks
- strategic planning and accountability
- the establishment of an appropriate services structure in order to meet the needs of individuals, whether in the networks or with partners
- continuing education and training activities for target personnel and the continuation of research in the area of recognition of prior learning and competencies

Finally, the reference framework emphasizes the importance of partnership with all the stakeholders in order to harmonize their efforts. This partnership should permit the Ministère to link the recognition of prior learning and competencies to a government perspective on continuing education and training in a society that aims at, among other things, a better qualified labour force.





## THE MOSAIC OF ACTORS IN THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND COMPETENCIES

The field of the recognition of prior learning and competencies has known its ups and downs, but it is now firmly established. In this section of the newsletter, we invite you to read about the actions of the various partners.

At the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and at the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, as well as among their partners, every actor has developed approaches and means to meet the needs of the population.

For example, in the school boards, in adult general education, the instruments available to staff responsible for the recognition of prior learning and competencies are now more numerous and varied. Here are some of these instruments:

- the comprehensive test *Prior Learning Examination* for English as a second language and for French as a second language
- the *Secondary School Equivalency Tests* (SSET) and the official document *Attestation of Equivalence of Secondary Studies* (AESS)
- the *Spheres of Generic Competencies*, which permit the acquisition of units related to optional subjects for obtaining secondary school diplomas (DES)
- the *General Development Tests* (GDT)
- examinations not requiring taking a course

In addition, other material will shortly make it possible to increase the number of services offered to adults in general education. We could mention, among others:

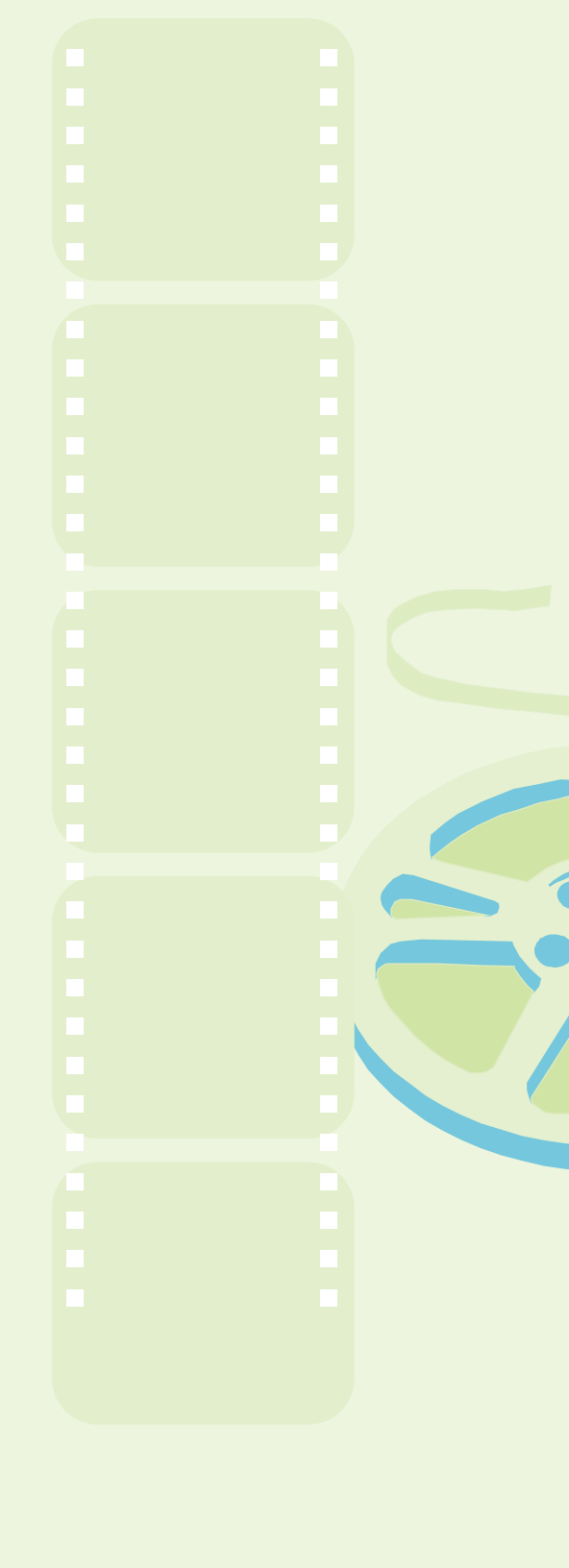
- the tests of the *General Educational Development Testing Service*, which make it possible to earn credits in optional subjects, which contribute towards secondary school diplomas (DES) and towards the *Secondary School Equivalency Certificate* (SSEC)
- the language scale of the common framework for francization, for the purpose of the recognition of prior extracurricular learning
- the *Record of Learning*, which lists the previous formal, non-formal and informal learning of the adult
- a model statement of competencies proposed to facilitate the autonomy of adults in their continuing education and training plans

To learn more, visit the Ministère's Internet site at the following address:

[www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/DFGA/politique/reconnaissance/reconnaissance.html](http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/DFGA/politique/reconnaissance/reconnaissance.html)

In **vocational education**, the number of adults who use recognition of prior learning and competencies services continues to increase each year.

Services are provided in half of the school boards throughout Québec. We have observed nevertheless that these services are concentrated in six school boards. Most of the school boards concerned have established a structure for the recognition of prior learning and competencies (for example, the Service régionalisé ou centralisé de reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences).



The adults have access to recognition of prior learning in nearly 85 vocational education programs. It is interesting to note that the population using these services has increased appreciably over the last three years, but also that the number of people receiving diplomas following an application for recognition of prior learning and competencies has grown significantly. Several school boards, sixteen to be precise, have taken part in a provincial pilot project on new tools for the *Secretarial Studies* program. This pilot project has made it possible to validate the rigour, flexibility, and quality of the instruments.

In **technical education**, we have seen a considerable increase in recognition of prior learning and competencies services being offered, as is the case for vocational training. Recognition of prior learning and competencies is available for approximately 60 programs in 38 CEGEPs. These services are concentrated in eight institutions. The majority of these institutions have established a special service structure for the recognition of prior learning and competencies. We can also observe that for the most part, continuing education and training provide the recognition of prior learning and competencies services, which are offered mostly in programs leading to an Attestation of College Studies (ACS).

At the CEGEP level, the Ministère is proposing an approach harmonized with that of vocational training. We see a real willingness in this network to contribute to reflections and the work currently under way at the Ministère. The partici-

ipation of 16 institutions in a pilot project on the Ministère's proposed approach for the recognition of prior learning and competencies for the *Early Childhood Education* program in 2003-2004 made it possible to validate its usefulness in the CEGEP network and led to recommendations for changes to the legal and regulatory frameworks. The dynamism evident in the institutions following this pilot project leads us to believe that a true reexamination of the recognition of prior learning and competencies is under way.

#### FOR ALL THE NETWORKS IN VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING

The Ministère continues to develop the accessibility of services by working at several levels: design of new assessment instruments, creation of a Web site for applicants, changes in the legal and regulatory frameworks, and support for the network for the establishment of structuring projects.

One of the challenges to be met, for technical training as well as for vocational training, is to match the needs for recognition of prior learning and competencies expressed by the labour market and the needs for recognition of competencies based on the standards in the programs. The acquisition of missing competencies also remains a crucial issue for the process of recognition of prior learning and competencies. This problem of offering persons training that respects their prior learning and their competencies requires that organizations find innovative approaches and appeal to the creativity of the vocational

and technical training networks. Miscellaneous forms of recognition are currently being explored (in-company training, training in educational institutions, assisted self-teaching, distance education, etc.).

There is constant progress being made in the reexamination of the recognition of prior learning and competencies in vocational and technical training.

Various projects currently under way demonstrate the flexibility of the approach and are a source of inspiration for the continuation of the work. It should be emphasized in this regard that the information contained in the *Québec PANORAMA* of this newsletter will highlight one of the innovative experiments that have been carried out.

Moreover, in the **university community**, recognition of prior learning is proceeding by way of decentralized administration in departments or faculties. All the universities in Québec have signed the Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credit, which makes it possible to ensure that:

- the transfer student is deemed admissible and has been presented with an offer of admission
- the transfer student has achieved a passing grade in his/her course(s) and has obtained grade levels that would normally be required of continuing students
- the credits earned are related to the program of study in which the transfer student will register, or the credits can be counted as electives for the program of study

Currently, the Association canadienne d'éducation des adultes des universités de langue française (ACDEAULF) is doing research on the recognition of prior learning in Québec universities. The purpose of this research is to gather data on the number of cases of recognition of prior training or experience for admission to undergraduate and master's-level programs as well as on the number of cases of recognition of prior training or experience for obtaining credits within an undergraduate program.

The researchers also intend to analyze current practices in the institutions as well as their assessment with respect to the definition of terms, the interpretation and application of procedures for the processing of applications, as well as the effectiveness of methods, information instruments, and instruments for the assessment of applications from the point of view of service providers.

In addition, certain universities are already experimenting with new approaches and methods for the recognition of extracurricular learning and competencies.

Moreover, for the last few years, a Comité national des services aux entreprises, which is made up of representatives of the CEGEPs and school boards, has been working on the promotion of the recognition of prior learning and competencies and examining new avenues in order to make this concept a reality in the services in companies.

A very interesting project, currently under way, was presented to the committee. This project consists of

developing a training program for counsellors on recognition of prior learning and competencies. According to the preliminary results, further training is required for content experts and administrative staff.

One might also wonder if the **work integration enterprises** are also concerned by the recognition of prior learning and competencies. For example, since 1998, the Collectif des entreprises d'insertion du Québec (CEIQ) has been working on the question of the recognition of prior learning and competencies. The approach recommended by the CEIQ is that of recognition of overall training, which includes technical and vocational education, personal training, and social training. This concern for the recognition of overall training arises from the observation that the work integration enterprises are training sites that provide persons who have little schooling and who are marginalized from the labour market opportunities to learn in a real work context.

Here is how, more specifically, the CEIQ defines overall training: "centred on the needs of individuals, the approach is comprehensive and links personal and social aspects as well as professional ones. Training is integrated and is aimed not only at improving the employability and qualifications of individuals, but also at reestablishing their citizenship and their identity. Supervision needs to be sufficient and competent."

At the end of their training, the persons have acquired work experience combined with competen-

cies that are expressed in knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It is therefore easier for them to reintegrate into the labour market or to return to school.

The **professional orders** must, for their part, verify competency in order to protect the public from any harm that could result from the exercise of certain activities.

A professional order is required by law to verify the competency of persons asking for a permit to practise a profession. The conditions for issuing such permits are regulated by the government through legislation and regulations. More than 390 diplomas are currently designated by regulations of the government of Québec as being given the right to 50 permits issued by the 45 existing professional orders.

If the applicant does not possess the designated diploma, the requirements of a professional order can be satisfied if that person possesses an equivalent diploma or recognized training. A regulatory framework approved by the government determines, for each professional order, the norms and the standard of competence that should be applied to the analysis of an application for recognition of an equivalence.

We can see that the number of these applications has risen exponentially since 2000-2001 (806 applications received). In 2002-2003, the number of applications was 3,854, of which 2,500 were from immigrants.

Among the applications processed in 2002-2003 (not to be confused

with applications received), the majority, 54 per cent, were subject to complete recognition of equivalents by the professional orders and 37 percent, to a partial recognition. Only 9% of the applications processed were turned down.

The partial recognition of an equivalence means for the applicants that supplementary training (courses or internships) is required in order to satisfy the admission requirements. In 2002-2003, approximately 1,700 applications have been subject to a requirement for supplementary training.

In order to meet the constantly shifting challenges of the recognition of prior learning of immigrants, the professional orders that are members of the Québec Interprofessional Council adopted, in 2001, an *action plan on the access of immigrants to regulated professions*. This plan focuses on information, training, and consultation.

Many activities related to this plan have already taken place: information tour on access to the professional orders for persons working in immigration and labour force training; specialized training in intercultural relations and study days on the recognition of prior learning for the staff of the professional orders; participation of the Québec Interprofessional Council (QIC) in the interministerial table for the recognition of prior learning and competencies, in the working group of the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles on access of immigrants to regulated professions, and in the Équipe de travail sur la reconnaissance des diplômes et des

acquis obtenus à l'extérieur du Québec [Work Team on the Recognition of Credentials and Skills of Persons Trained Abroad] created by the government in December 2004.

For more information:

<[www.professions-quebec.org](http://www.professions-quebec.org)> is the portal for Québec's professional orders, the Web site of the Conseil interprofessionnel du Québec.

<[www.opq.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.opq.gouv.qc.ca)> is the Web site of the Office des professions du Québec.

With respect to the **sector-based committees**, it should be recalled that Emploi-Québec supports 29 sector-based manpower committees, each made up of representatives of employer associations, companies, unions, and employee organizations in each of the sectors of economic activity involved. The committees also include representatives of ministries and organizations that have links with the sectors concerned.

The principal mandates of these committees are to define the specific needs of their respective sectors, propose measures to stabilize employment and reduce unemployment, and develop continuing education and training. Each of these committees is the forum for expressing the needs for an entire economic sector.

Several of these committees have adopted positions or carried out studies on the recognition of prior learning and competencies. One of the major concerns is related to the unwieldiness of the procedures and process.

That is why, in particular, the **Commission des partenaires du marché du travail** defined the general framework for development and recognition of competencies. This system established a set of

#### List of the sector-based manpower committees

- Aerospace
- Agricultural production
- Automotive services
- Chemical, petrochemical and refining
- Culture
- Doors and windows, furniture and kitchen cupboards
- Electrical and electronics industry
- Environment
- Food processing
- Food trade
- Forest management
- Graphic communications
- Industrial metal manufacturing
- Information and communications technologies
- Lumber
- Marine fisheries
- Marine industry
- Metallurgy
- Ornamental horticulture
- Personal care
- Pharmaceutical and biotechnology products
- Plastic processing
- Railway industry
- Retail trade
- Road transportation
- Rubber
- Social economics and community action
- Textile industry
- Tourism

parameters that makes it possible to set guidelines for the development of competencies in the workplace and the recognition of competencies acquired by the labour force for an occupation or a function. This system provides for the use of various learning strategies in the workplace.

The development of these different strategies is entrusted to the sector-based manpower committees, which set occupational standards and design, on the basis of those standards, instruments for the recognition, development, and assessment of competencies suited to the needs of the labour market. The general framework supports any structured learning strategy developed on the basis of an occupational standard, applied essentially in the workplace, and which favours the development, mastery, and recognition of the competencies of its labour force, increases access to occupations, and promotes the transferability of learning.

**Emploi-Québec** collaborated with all this work; this agency is responsible for the validation of the procedures and methods used as well as the follow-up of learning.

The general framework provides for the issuing of official documents for the recognition of competencies. These documents, the certificate of occupational qualification and the attestation of competencies, are entered in the *skill registry*.

Currently, Emploi-Québec and the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport are trying to make these systems less cumbersome and develop links between the two ministries. The recognition of com-

petencies concerns both bodies and their partners from the point of view of the definition and complexity of competencies, but especially with respect to the transferability of recognized competencies.

In addition to the sector-based manpower committees, there are two committees for job entry and job retention concerned with populations that have particular employment problems:

- the Comité d'adaptation de la main-d'œuvre pour personnes handicapées (CAMO-PH) (labour force adjustment committee for persons with disabilities)
- the Comité d'adaptation de la main-d'œuvre pour personnes immigrantes (CAMO-PI) (labour force adjustment committee for immigrants)

The Comité d'adaptation de la main-d'œuvre pour personnes immigrantes is working actively on the question of the recognition of prior learning and competencies. It defines the problem as follows:

The inadequacy of the recognition of prior learning and competencies can be seen as one of the main obstacles to the integration of immigrants into the labour market.

All immigrants, especially if they wish to enter the labour market, need to have their prior learning recognized, whether this learning is academic, extracurricular, or experiential, in order to be able to transfer their competencies to the receiving society.

However, while part of the supply in recognition is mostly reserved for immigrants (specific supply: educa-

tion credential evaluation report from the MRCI,<sup>13</sup> equivalents for diplomas and training issued by the professional orders), this supply appears not only very limited but barely accessible for the persons for whom it is intended.

In terms of non-specific supply, there are so many actors and practices that it is easy to get lost: the school system and its various methods of evaluation and recognition, Emploi-Québec and its programs for the apprenticeship and qualification of its labour force, sector-based committees, and their occupational standards for the occupations and functions of work, etc. Moreover, the question of access to missing components of education or training is as crucial as that of recognition.

In order to help immigrants, the CAMO-PI emphasizes providing information and services through:

- the production and distribution of a guide to services provided in recognition of prior learning and competencies in secondary schools intended to support those working in employability so that they are better able to inform applicants, advise them, and direct them to the proper resources
- the distribution, on its Web site ([www.camo-pi.qc.ca/](http://www.camo-pi.qc.ca/)) of a guide to services provided in recognition of prior learning and competencies in secondary schools
- the submission of a brief to the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation

The CAMO-PI also collaborated on pilot projects for which it had been mandated by Emploi-Québec, such as the *Projets ingénieurs et infirmières* developed in close collaboration with the orders concerned.



In addition, joint action with the different persons working on the issue is supported by, among other things, the creation of a working committee within the CAMO-PI, in which the main stakeholders are represented.

Finally, the **community sector** staunchly defends the rights of adults to recognition of prior learning and competencies, through, among other things, the various organizations representing this sector. More specifically, their demands concern accessibility to recognition of prior learning and competencies for the adults without diplomas, especially those who have not attained a level of schooling equivalent to Secondary III and who have poor or non-existent writing skills. They also promote the acknowledgment of prior learning and its recognition in order to facilitate returning to studies, the reduction of the time required to obtain a diploma, integration into workplace, and active citizen participation.

Community groups contribute in particular to self-recognition of learning and competencies and therefore help with the determination of competencies in order to encourage adults to go further in the various different dimensions of their lives. They also play a role in the development in action of citizenship competencies. Their practices and approaches could enrich the entire process of recognition of prior learning and competencies.

### **A FEW NUMBERS ON THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND COMPETENCIES**

We can illustrate the state of the recognition of prior learning and competencies in Québec using quantitative data on a certain number of services, activities, and even specific populations of adults.

Certain statistics are from 2002-2003 and others from 2003-2004. We are presenting these statistics in a way that we hope will make them clear to the partners of the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*.

#### **For university teaching**

The Association canadienne d'éducation des adultes des universités de langue française (ACDEAULF) is currently researching the state of recognition of prior learning and competencies in universities. The results should be available in 2006-2007.

#### **For the community sector**

We have no quantitative data for this sector, but we know that it provides a lot of training to personnel on various facets of the recognition of prior learning and competencies. This sector also places a great deal of importance on support for persons making applications for the recognition of learning or competencies.

#### **For the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles**

Over the past two years, more than 16,000 persons obtained a comparative assessment for studies carried out outside Québec.

#### **For Emploi-Québec**

We observe that 3,000 new apprentices register annually in the *Workplace Apprenticeship Program*, the primary strategy of the *general framework for development and recognition of competencies*, and benefit from the recognition of competencies process that is part of this program.

There are also more than a hundred cases of file assessments among the clients of occupations and qualifications regulated by the Act Respecting Manpower Vocational Training and Qualification.

In the specific case of the qualifying program in the drinking water sector, nearly 3,000 workers are currently registered and are at one stage or another of the process of supplementary training and recognition of competencies.

#### **For the professional orders**

We find annually approximately 4,000 applications for various equivalents, including 2,500 for diplomas obtained or for training already taken.

#### **For the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport**

##### **In adult general education:**

- In 2003-2004, 6,500 persons had opportunities to take examinations without taking the courses.
- 388 applicants passed the *Prior Learning Examination* for English as a second language.
- Beginning in spring 2005, we will begin using the comprehensive *Prior Learning Examination* for French as a second language.

THE ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE D'ÉDUCATION DES ADULTES DES UNIVERSITÉS DE LANGUE FRANÇAISE (ACDEAULF) is an organization of people working in adult education in Canadian French-language university institutions. Its institutional members include 18 universities, and it has 10 associate members, organizations that, within their mandates, share its concerns.

The aim of the ACDEAULF is to promote the quality, accessibility, and suitability of the training offered to adults in French-language Canadian university settings and to offer those working there a meeting place, and opportunities for research and training.

For almost 40 years now, the ACDEAULF has played an active role in the major debates around adult education in university settings through representations to the concerned bodies, for example, by submitting briefs. In addition, it organizes, on a regular basis, conferences, seminars, and study days, for example.

In 1985, the ACDEAULF organized a conference on the recognition of prior learning in university settings. In 2005, it received from the Ministère de l'Éducation a grant to do a progress report on the situation in Québec universities. Its concern for the recognition of prior learning remains current, and this national conference is evidence of this.

#### **The recognition of prior learning in Québec universities: the current situation<sup>14</sup>**

Acceptance of the principle of recognition of prior learning is widespread, if not unanimous, in Québec universities. We think that progress has been made, in particular in university settings, since the publication in June 2000 of the Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation's brief on the recognition of prior learning. However, no detailed and systematic information has been collected since then, which is the reason for this project.

The ACDEAULF will soon be collecting data from statistics and documents available as well as from meetings with a representative sample of resource persons for the purpose of taking stock of the situation regarding recognition of prior learning in the Québec university network.

This will involve organizing the quantitative data on the basis of the number of cases of recognition of prior training or experience for admission to undergraduate and master's-level programs, for obtaining credits within an undergraduate program, and for the recognition of a program in one year of an undergraduate program. Policies, regulations, and methods currently in effect, information instruments and instruments for the assessment of learning, as well as the human and financial resources allocated to this area will be examined.

The project will analyze the diversity of current practices in Québec universities. The project will also deal with the definition of terms, the area of application, the methods used to process applications, the effectiveness of methods and information instruments and instruments for the assessment of learning, the point of view of those working in the field, the problems encountered, etc.

**The report will be made public in the fall of 2005.**

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14. Research project carried out by the ACDEAULF and funded by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport du Québec.

- 5,834 applicants obtained an Attestation of Equivalence of Secondary Studies (AESS).
- 348 applicants have passed tests for one of the *Spheres of Generic Competencies*.
- 8 school boards will offer the tests from the *General Educational Development Testing Service (GEDTS)* in spring 2005.
- The work is continuing involving the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles concerning the scale of language skills in the common framework on francization for the purpose of the recognition of prior extracurricular learning.
- Currently being produced, the record of learning is not strictly speaking an instrument for the recognition of prior learning. It is a reception and reference tool intended to take stock of and specify the previous training of applicants, in order to subsequently assess them using any appropriate means and recognize them officially. Among the educational services related to reception and recognition of prior learning, the record of learning, as a training service, is aimed at helping adults carry out their personal continuing education and training projects.

#### **In vocational education:**

- every year, approximately 8,000 persons, including roughly 1,000 anglophones, take the General Development Test (GDT)
- in 2003-2004, 1,301 adults used services for the recognition of prior learning and competencies, which represents an increase of nearly 30% in comparison with the 1,004 persons the previous year
- among the applicants, 168 persons, 13% of the total, declared that they were born outside of Québec
- services are provided in 37 school boards throughout Québec. They are concentrated in 6 school boards serving 80.2% of the total clientele. Most of the school boards concerned have established a structure for the recognition of prior learning and competencies (for example, the Service régionalisé ou centralisé de reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences)
- individuals made applications for the recognition of prior learning in 84 vocational education programs, including three English-language ones
- the data show a significant rise in the number of graduates. In 2001-2002, 170 persons obtained their diplomas thanks to the recognition of prior learning and competencies; this number was 342 persons in 2002-2003 and 359, in 2003-2004.

#### **In technical education:**

- 1,702 adults used services for the recognition of prior learning in 2003-2004, which represents an increase of 5%, compared to 1616 in 2002-2003
- in addition, we see an increase of 20% in the number of periods/students/weeks for which there has been a service for the recognition of prior learning. The pilot project for the *Early Childhood Education* program, in which 16 CEGEPs took part, is certainly largely responsible for the reexamination of the recognition of prior learning and competencies in the CEGEP network
- services are provided in 38 CEGEPs over all of Québec. They are concentrated in 8 institutions serving 63.6% of the entire Québec clientele
- applications were made for the recognition of prior learning and competencies in more than 60 programs, the majority to obtain an Attestation of College Studies

## **ASSESSING COMPETENCIES RELATED TO AN OCCUPATIONAL STANDARD**

### **Responsibility for the creation of instruments**

Under the general framework for development and recognition of competencies approved by the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail, the labour force sector-based manpower committees are responsible, in collaboration with Emploi-Québec, for establishing the occupational standards and designing learning instruments and instruments for assessing competencies. The instruments used in one of the strategies of the general framework, the Workplace Apprenticeship Program, are the apprenticeship booklet and the journeyman's handbook. They were designed in accordance with methods and a process as rigorous as those governing the establishment of occupational standards.

### **The choice of journeymen**

The criteria and processes for the selection of journeymen, who are experts in a trade, are defined by the sector-based manpower committee responsible for establishing the occupational standard. The journeyman plays the role of supervisor and guide, and passes on his or her practical knowledge to the apprentice. When the apprentice has already mastered certain competencies in the occupational standard, the journeyman is also the one who makes the assessment. In fact, as the expert in a trade, the journeyman plays the key role of assessor.

Assessing a competence involves placing a worker in a significant performance situation and observing him or her. On the basis of assessment factors drawn from performance criteria, the journeyman judges the quality of something produced or the performance of a task and from that deduces the level of mastery of the competencies by the apprentice. The assessment criteria for competencies recorded in the apprenticeship booklet form the basis of the assessment. The task performance situations should be significant, but they may differ from one standard to another and even from one competency to another, even within a single standard.

For example, the choice of assessment method can vary according to the necessities of the trade, the work functions, or the profession that is the subject of the occupational standard.

#### **The issuing of official documents**

Under the Workplace Apprenticeship Program, the journeyman is able to verify the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes of the apprentice using the assessment tools in the apprenticeship booklet. When the apprentice shows he or she possesses a competency, the journeyman confirms this by signing the Apprenticeship and Evaluation Booklet. The competency can then be recorded in the *skill registry* by Emploi-Québec personnel.

This registry makes it possible to store the information on the competencies of workers and thus ensure better knowledge of the development of competencies of the labour force according to the occupational standards.

When his or her journeyman has assessed the competencies in a standard and signed the recommendation document provided for this purpose in his or her apprenticeship booklet, the apprentice can ask for the certificate of occupational qualification. In fact, as is also the case for the issuing of diplomas by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the issuing of a certificate of qualification is not an action based on a deduction, but a decision by the minister responsible for employment. This decision is taken following the recommendation of an apprenticeship journeyman and that of Emploi-Québec: it must be in keeping with the recommendations of the general framework for development and recognition of competencies and the Act Respecting Manpower Vocational Training and Qualification.

## RECOGNIZING COMPETENCIES IN THE DRINKING WATER INDUSTRY

The Ministère de l'Environnement's Regulation respecting the quality of drinking water requires that any person working in the treatment, distribution, or transportation of drinking water have a diploma, certificate, or other attestation recognized by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir ou du Sport or by Emploi-Québec. There are therefore more than 3,000 workers responsible for the operation of facilities for the collection, treatment, and distribution of drinking water who will have their competencies recognized and certified under the qualifying program created by Emploi-Québec.

In collaboration with the Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre en environnement (CSMOE), the Ministère de l'Environnement and officials working in the area of drinking water, Emploi-Québec has developed this program based on the development of competencies in the workplace according to the buddy system approach. This program is based on theoretical training coupled with learning in the workplace according to the buddy system formula. The advantages of such a program for the recognition of competencies are numerous:

- **recognition** of the competencies of workers already holding a job
- **the possibility** of ensuring that competencies requiring repetitive movement are mastered
- **learning and adoption** of better work practices

The possibilities of this qualifying program are many. It makes it possible to adapt to the needs of workers as well as to various work settings. It can be applied to about ten skills profiles that correspond to various work functions in the drinking water industry. For each profile, a process for the acquisition and recognition of competencies is proposed. The professional qualifying program for drinking water is a concrete example of a model for the recognition of workplace competencies that works well!

To find out more (in French only), consult [www.emploi-quebec.net](http://www.emploi-quebec.net), *apprentissage* section, then click on *Programme de qualification en eau potable*.



The apprenticeship booklet is the document used by the apprentice and the journeyman to identify the learning objectives. It also includes tools for the evaluation of competencies to help the journeyman assess the apprentice's mastery of these competencies.

The journeyman's handbook is the supervision document for the journeyman. The information it contains supplements the contents of the apprenticeship booklet. It is designed to be used for learning in a production situation.

It takes into account recommendations by experts on the prerequisites for the acquisition of competencies, providing details on these prerequisites and how to evaluate them.

The certificate of occupational qualification is the official document stating that a worker has demonstrated that he or she possesses all the competencies in an occupational standard entered in the *skill registry*.

## EXAMPLES OF INSTRUMENTS PROVIDED TO JOURNEYMEN

### PROGRESS REPORT: EXISTING TRADES THE INDIVIDUAL TRAINING PLAN

Name of apprentice:

Emploi-Québec booklet no.:

#### WORKPLACE APPRENTICESHIP

MODULE TITLE	LEARNING PROFILE		APPRENTICESHIP FOLLOW-UP		
	to be acquired	to be verified	Signature of Emploi-Québec representative	Date	Agreement (n°)
1. Metal cutting					
2. Joint preparation					
3. Preparation of work					
MANDATORY (CHOOSE 2)					
4. SMAW welding					
5. GMAW welding					
6. FCAW welding					
7. GTAW welding					
OPTIONAL					
8. Welding using various processes					
9. Checking the quality					

The attestation of competencies is the official document that states, for a given date, the level of competencies of a worker with respect to an occupational standard.

The acquisition of all the competencies in an occupational standard is an individual, voluntary project that can be spread out over a very long period and is not an end in itself. It should be recalled that the objective being pursued is an increase in the competencies of the workers of Québec in keeping with the real needs of the labour market. It is therefore sometimes possible that workers will not need, in order to perform their work, all the competencies that make up an occupational standard or that they do not want to acquire all those competencies. Changes in the professional life of a worker may also occur in the course of learning: career progress, loss of employment, change of tasks, or the search for a new job. In all these situations, it is advantageous for the worker to obtain an attestation of his or her competencies.

## PROGRESS REPORT: EXISTING TRADES ASSISTED SELF-EVALUATION

### MODULE 1 METAL CUTTING

#### COMPETENCY

- to cut metal using various instruments or types of welding equipment

#### ADOPTION OF PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

- Awareness of occupational health and safety rules.
- Methodical organization of work.
- Good communication with the members of the team.
- Maintenance of a safe workspace.
- Constant concern for the quality of the work.
- Concern for efficiency (time and materials).

Elements of the competency		/	Initials apprentice/journeyman	
A.	To prepare the work		_____	_____
	■ Interpretation of oral or written instructions	_____		
	■ Identification of materials	_____		
	■ Tracing the outline of the pieces	_____		
B.	To cut metal using power tools (optional)		_____	_____
	■ Hand tools (saw, shears, etc.)	_____		
	■ Electric saws	_____		
	■ Electric abrasive tools	_____		
	■ Shearing tools	_____		
	■ Pipe cutter	_____		

## Canadian PANORAMA

### THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND COMPETENCIES:

#### A PANCANADIAN REALITY

The Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) has for many years been the main defender of the assessment and recognition of prior learning in Canada. Since the early 1990s, people with a strong interest in recognition of learning in adults exchange information on procedures related to experiential learning and work together on the means to integrate current academic standards and standards in companies. Experts from throughout Canada and from abroad have contributed to giving form and substance to the recognition of prior learning in this country. The members of CAPLA have thus become modern pioneers in recognition of prior learning. They have been working relentlessly in their communities, institutions, and organizations to create a climate favourable to learning and the recognition of prior learning for adults, thus facilitating social inclusion, personal growth, equity, and financial prosperity for each individual.

In spring 2003, the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada asked CAPLA for a progress report on the recognition of prior learning in Canada's public institutions. Part one (84 pages) of this study can be found on the CAPLA Web site ([www.capla.ca](http://www.capla.ca)).

#### Halifax Declaration for the Recognition of Prior Learning

In 2002, the Halifax Declaration for the Recognition of Prior Learning was circulated. It had been written on the basis of the results of a survey of the delegates at the Conference for Prior Learning Assessment and Qualification Recognition, which took place in Halifax on October 28-31, 2001.

This declaration noted that the recognition of prior learning is fundamental to a lifelong learning culture; that all learning should be recognized or considered for recognition by educational, professional and work organizations; Canadians including immigrants to Canada should have the right to have their prior learning assessed and recognized.

In order to attain these goals, the declaration called for: 1) dedicated funding for the recognition of prior learning; 2) national standards and criteria in order to ensure high quality PLAR/QR services and programs; 3) national leadership; 4) federal government leadership and support in order to develop and sustain initiatives.

The recognition of prior learning and competencies is a rapidly evolving reality in Canada and in the provinces.

For information purposes, here are references for the different provinces:

#### ALBERTA

[www.prior-learning.athabascau.ca/PLA/html/overview.html](http://www.prior-learning.athabascau.ca/PLA/html/overview.html)

#### BRITISH COLUMBIA

[www.plar.bcit.ca/](http://www.plar.bcit.ca/)

#### PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

[www.hollandc.pe.ca/](http://www.hollandc.pe.ca/)

#### MANITOBA

[www.plarinmanitoba.ca/plar\\_main\\_e.html](http://www.plarinmanitoba.ca/plar_main_e.html)

#### NEW BRUNSWICK

[www.gnb.ca/0000/plar-era/e/index-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0000/plar-era/e/index-e.asp)

#### NOVA SCOTIA

[www.placentre.ns.ca/](http://www.placentre.ns.ca/)

#### ONTARIO

<http://www.plarformaturestudents.com/english/>

#### SASKATCHEWAN

[www.siastr.sk.ca/siastr/eligible/plar.htm](http://www.siastr.sk.ca/siastr/eligible/plar.htm)

#### NEWFOUNDLAND

[www.cna.nl.ca/](http://www.cna.nl.ca/)

#### NEW APPROACHES TO LIFELONG LEARNING

[www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/)

#### BILINGUAL CANADIAN SITE

[www.capla.ca/](http://www.capla.ca/)

At the second European summer university for research and innovations in lifelong learning held in Lyon, France in September 2004, the recognition of prior learning and competencies was one of the subjects discussed the most.

Québec, as a member of the Foundation of European Regions for Research in Education and Training, participated actively in the discussions.

This text outlines the orientations established by the European Commission to guide the acknowledgment of prior learning; it presents the experiment conducted by Switzerland and concludes by recalling the tensions that led to this concept.

## 1 A European framework for the acknowledgment of prior learning

With respect to the acknowledgment of prior learning, the European Commission is not proposing European legislation, but instead a reference framework. There will therefore be no regulation of diplomas in the member states of the Union, nor rules on the implementation of lifelong learning. The Commission limited itself to stating principles that would guide the member states and other interested parties.

At the time when formal and informal modes of learning are identified and validated:

- the system should focus on individuals, who should be able to see their competencies identified and validated if they wish
- those responsible for setting up the necessary system should ensure that it is high quality
- they should also define the roles of each actor and establish the rules that will make it possible to validate and identify competencies

- the processes, but also the criteria used for identifying and validating the informal learning modes should be stable and transparent
- the systems for the identification and validation of prior learning should really take into account the legitimate interests of all stakeholders. They should really give more power to individuals in their life courses and at the same time consider that their development depends on organizations that will be involved with it. This balance will make it possible to reinforce the legitimacy of the life courses of these individuals and their credibility

Here are some elements of vocational education specifically related to the transfer of credits at the European level:

- the system of transfer of vocational education credits is based on the desire of individuals to do part of their learning or acquire training in other countries, usually in a member country of the European Union

- all stakeholders should freely seek an agreement in order to be able to define the framework for learning, guarantee this framework, and accept the obligations it entails, as a matter of trust
- a contract will tie the various stakeholders, clearly establishing what the individual should do and the competencies he or she will acquire during his or her stay in another country
- it will be established what portion of credit values can be acquired in another country in a national system with a view to obtaining a diploma or acquiring credits from experience

With respect to the identification of a common framework for determining different levels of training and qualification, it will be necessary:

- to permit different diplomas and types of experience to be attributed to specific levels or references in all the member states. To this end, an eight-level training reference framework is currently the subject of discussions

## 2 A Swiss experiment in the recognition of the qualifications of the unskilled

- to create, in this connection, zones of mutual trust through agreements between individuals and the companies and organizations involved in the implementation and assessment of learning, for example.

There is a close relation between "under-qualification" and unemployment. The official definition of qualification refers to certified vocational education acquired in the sector in which the occupation is practised. It takes into account neither skills and competencies acquired through experience nor qualifications obtained in another sector, in certain private schools, or in another country. This results in a double process of exclusion. First of all, from the labour market, which favours certain persons through a selection process resulting from a policy, and then, from

training, which implies an unsuitable training supply, in particular because of prerequisites for access. In fact, the unqualified are victims "of the low level of recognition of their qualifications," to the detriment of experience, skills, competencies acquired through practice.

It was to counteract this double exclusion that the canton of Geneva created, in 2001, the "Qualification 41" mechanism, which is under the responsibility of the Office d'orientation et de formation professionnelle (OOF) in the Département de l'instruction publique. This mechanism, completely free for participants, is based on the recognition and validation of prior learning with a view to the issuing of a Federal Certificate of Qualification.

This concept is innovative, because most of the time, the assessments of competencies and the validation of prior learning involve an autonomous procedure independent of occupational qualification. Basing the mechanism on a process of recognition, Qualification 41 opted for close links among individual recognition, professional recognition, institutional recognition, and social recognition. This mechanism is particularly well adapted to the "unqualified."

It is in a logic of complementarity and not in a logic of compartmentalization of ever-increasing complexity and mounting costs that mechanisms for validation and certification have been established. At the institutional level, the assessment is only the first stage towards recognition, by way of validation (attestation in the cantons), then by the mechanisms of official CFC certification (courses plus examinations). It is therefore indispensable to go through these successive stages; to obtain qualification, individuals follow a continuum from individual recognition to social recognition.

The assessment often provides, through the work of explaining and appropriating one's skills, an opportunity for taking stock of oneself, not only with respect to professional experiences, but also with respect to one's own strengths and weaknesses as well as one's life course. Through this taking stock, each individual can hope to ask for the validation of competencies acquired through experience. The door is thus opened to training and qualification.

In the discussions that took place during that summer university, the question of tensions quickly surfaced. As we all know, any social innovation is a source of tensions and conflicts. In the acknowledgment of prior experiential learning, these tensions and conflicts are significant. The institutions responsible have to make substantial changes to their objectives and their ways of operating, and this can result in social conflicts. During workshops, there were discussions on the nature of these tensions. Here is a brief summary.

### **Tensions caused by institutional changes**

Career counselling is traditionally based on the external identification of job opportunities. Lifelong counselling is intended for everyone, young people and adults, and is based on the observation of the loss of points of reference in a constantly changing world. It is aimed first of all at permitting individuals to rebuild their identities on the basis of what they have learned through experience. Thus, the accreditation of experiential learning becomes a central tool based on internal identification.

However, if we do not want to be disappointed, the organizations responsible for counselling and validation of prior learning to certify a qualification or a competency, as well as the acknowledgment of credentials, should not lose sight of job opportunities. The proposals and choices concerning the applicants for counselling and validation should be related to employment forecasts and not be totally dependent on personal desires that cannot materialize into a job or an improvement in employment. Counselling and the acknowledgment of prior learning can only be supported and assisted. It assumes new competencies, a synergy among all the networks involved and a rapprochement with the various spheres of life. Territorialization and decompartmentalization are obvious sources of tensions among the networks, which are most often organized in parallel vertical structures.

### **Tensions caused by the clash between systems of validation**

Educational institutions, for example, teach skills and issue diplomas that make it possible to predict the action skills of the applicants. In the process of validation of prior learning, the diploma is awarded according to experience and indicates action skills acquired this way. Processing all the urgent applications from persons who want to have their experience recognized is not always easy for educational institutions, which have to at the same time guarantee the value of the diplomas awarded. It is therefore necessary to ask how knowledge acquired through experience corresponds to knowledge acquired in a school.

The situation is all the more likely to cause tensions given that knowledge acquired through experience is different from academic knowledge and each corresponds to a different logic. The processes of assessment and validation should therefore establish a correspondence between these two types of knowledge.

Linking a title or a diploma centred on knowledge with professional experience built and validated on the job is not easy. The assessment of files written essentially in terms of attitudes, skills and capacity to adapt has to be matched with standards defined in terms of subject matter and formal knowledge.

Moreover, educational institutions have to ensure that the diploma is in fact issued to a person who has demonstrated his or her learning, but especially his or her ability and potential to develop and to contribute to the development of his or her surroundings. This requires substantial efforts on the part of those involved in teaching, who have had little preparation for this exercise.

The development of the validation of prior learning inevitably requires a strong commitment on the part of the educational institutions – in particular, institutions of higher learning – to transform their methods of certification and their references. The assessment of prior learning inevitably leads educational institutions – in particular, institutions of higher learning – to base themselves not only on their standards of training, but also on activity standards towards which the program leads, produced through a restructuring of reformed training. There are risks of significant impediments when applicants are asked to situate themselves in relation to the standard of competence for a diploma for which a translation in terms of skills and competencies does not exist.

Relating two methods of validation of prior learning also requires considerable efforts from applicants, who can succeed by transforming "raw" experience into reappropriation through existing forms and processes of social recognition. It is still essential to express this work in words; this goes without saying for applicants for validation, who need to be supported in the oral and written translation of their professional activities. This support is all the more essential given that sometimes providing evidence can be difficult.

### **Tensions arising from social conflicts**

Among applicants from traditional educational structures, there is a fear that diminishing the value of the diploma will be combined with a loss of privilege. Since the Middle Ages, diplomas and certification have not only been presumptions of competencies, they also allowed holders to maintain exclusive preserves. The acknowledgment of prior experiential learning breaks the monopolies held by the applicants from the traditional structures.

Some companies, though still very much in the minority, are beginning to take into account atypical life courses. Most companies, however, continue to give priority to traditionally qualified people who are for the most part from settings with a high level of social capital.

In the sectors where there are labour shortages, companies often see lifelong learning only as a way to motivate their personnel. For these enterprises, permitting occupational and social mobility is a political objective. Most are not prepared to assume the consequences from the point of view of work organization and remuneration. In fact, reforming the management of life courses clashes with the inertia and contradictions of economic and social organization. The new management of life courses assumes a thorough transformation of economic and social organization. All the innovations and experiments presented during the European Summer University show that this is not an unrealistic objective.



ON  
THE  
WEB

WWW.

#### INTERNET SITES

• **The recognition of prior learning and competencies**  
• [www2.inforoutefpt.org/rda/](http://www2.inforoutefpt.org/rda/)

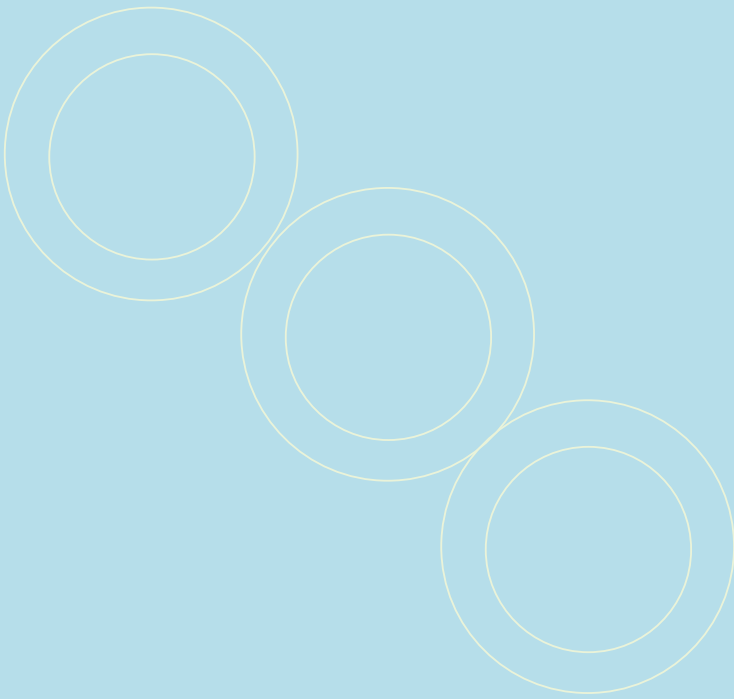
• This site answers all the questions you never dared to ask about recognition of prior learning. What is recognition of prior learning? Why is it important? How do you have your prior learning recognized? The user is guided through the whole process, whether it be for filling out the various forms for recognition of competencies or for drafting a résumé. When the file is complete, the user forwards it to a resource person, who contacts him or her in the days following receipt for follow-up.

• **Cégep Marie-Victorin**  
• [www.collegemv.qc.ca/fr](http://www.collegemv.qc.ca/fr)

• The Bureau de la reconnaissance des acquis at Cégep Marie-Victorin makes it possible to assess the competencies of adults who have acquired them outside of an academic setting.

• **Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials**  
• <http://www.cicic.ca/evaluation/indexe.stm>

• This site will be of interest to immigrants who want information on admission to Canadian universities and colleges, the evaluation of credentials for the purpose of employment in Canada, the recognition of prior learning in Canada, and the recognition of the competencies of refugees.



PDF DOCUMENTS

**La reconnaissance des acquis, une responsabilité politique et sociale**  
[www.cse.gouv.qc.ca/f/doc/formulaire.asp?fic=42](http://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca/f/doc/formulaire.asp?fic=42)

This brief from the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation is presented in three parts: the first deals with the foundations of the recognition of prior learning, the second with the current situation in secondary school, and the third with avenues for development intended to meet diverse needs.

**La reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences au Québec : un choix stratégique dans une société en changement – Synthèse des principaux écrits**  
[www.csq.qc.net/educat/edusoc/recognized.pdf](http://www.csq.qc.net/educat/edusoc/recognized.pdf)

Produced in April 1999 for the Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec by sociologist Jacques Tondreau, this study provides a brief history of the recognition of prior learning and competencies, providing a definition, presenting the practices, the stakeholders, and the debates on the subject, and explaining the issues and requirements of such a system.

**Colloque du Forum de la formation du CIQ**  
*Tendances, rôles et pratiques en reconnaissance des acquis*  
[www.professions-quebec.org/pdf/Conference%20recognition%20des%20acquis.pdf](http://www.professions-quebec.org/pdf/Conference%20recognition%20des%20acquis.pdf)  
Produced in May 2001 by the Québec Interprofessional Council (QIC) following the conference *Tendances, rôles et pratiques en reconnaissance des acquis* tenu [Tendencies, roles and practices in the recognition of prior learning] held in Montréal, this document contains the conference proceedings. It presents the government orientations in the area of recognition of prior learning, then deals with recognition of prior learning by the CEGEPs, the universities, and the professional orders.

**Information document on services for the recognition of extracurricular learning**, Ministère de l'Éducation, Direction de la formation générale des adultes, Service de l'évaluation des acquis, avril 2002.  
[www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/dfga/politique/reconnaissance/pdf/acquis2002.pdf](http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/dfga/politique/reconnaissance/pdf/acquis2002.pdf)  
This document provides information on registering for and taking examinations, the *Prior Learning Examination* for English as a second language and for French as a second language, as well as on the *Prior Learning Examination* (PLE), on the *Spheres of Generic Competencies* based on from the personal experience of adults and on the tests of the *General Educational Development Testing Service* (GED-TS).

## ON THE BOOKSHELF

Book

LA RECONNAISSANCE DES ACQUIS –  
COMPÉTENCES TRANSFÉRABLES PLUS  
SANSREGRETT, Marthe and D. Dyane. Montréal,  
Hurtubise HMH, 2003, 104 p.

This book suggests activities for determining the strengths and weaknesses of an individual in terms of competencies. It will help any individual who is looking for employment, who is seeking a new position or a promotion, who wants to create a company, or who wants to prepare for retirement.

Price: \$12.95

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This publication is available on the Web site of the Direction de la formation générale des adultes in colour and in black and white.

<<http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/dfga/politique/bulletin/index.html>>



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"Creativity is the power to connect the seemingly unconnected."

*William Plomer*