Québec Education
Program

Approved Version

Preschool Education
Elementary Education

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To preschool and elementary school teachers

I am pleased to present the 2001 version of the Québec Education Program for preschool and elementary education. This program is the result of the work of more than 500 people from the education community, most of them teachers.

The program has been revised in the past few months in order to clarify and simplify it, in keeping with comments by stakeholders in the schools.

The Québec Education Program represents the cutting edge in education. It is based on the most recent Western research on teaching and learning. Young Quebeckers will therefore have the benefit of the most advanced subject content that can be found.

This rich, diversified program focuses on learning adapted to young people's reality, ensuring the development of general competencies that are essential both in their academic careers and in their lives in society. It stresses the exploration and understanding of various dimensions of everyday life, encouraging students to make connections between their learning and real life. Thus young people will be able to develop high-level competencies in a school that is concerned with their success and is rigorous and suited to their needs.

The Québec Education Program presents you with pedagogical challenges that are achievable and that will allow you to use your expertise. I urge you to work within your cycle team and school team to establish conditions that will allow every student to follow his or her own educational path and fulfill his or her potential.

Parents have an important role in this process. They will have to provide support for their children by giving them a home that has everything needed for them to succeed in school. In this regard, I am counting on your cooperation in strengthening the relationship between teachers and parents.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your involvement in promoting educational success for the greatest possible number of young Quebeckers, and I urge you to familiarize yourself with the Québec Education Program.

By doing so, you will prepare our youth, the citizens of tomorrow, to contribute to the development and growth of Québec.

FRANÇOIS LEGAULT
Minister of State for Education and Youth

Table of Contents

Chapter

1

Introduction

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The General Context of the Québec Education Program

Many governments have undertaken major reforms of their education systems in recent years, in response to important changes that have occurred in modern society over the past few decades. These reforms are based on recent research on education, which suggests three orientations for reform: the new curriculum should be comprehensive and diversified, have a long-term perspective and be open to the world. These are the orientations that can best prepare the citizens of tomorrow to meet the challenges of a pluralistic society that welcomes diversity, a knowledge-based job market that is constantly evolving, and economic globalization.

The last reform of Québec's education system took place in the 1960s, in the wake of the Parent Commission, and focused primarily on the democratization of education. Several decades later, that objective has been attained; all young people in Québec have access to schooling. Now, however, schools face new problems in support and supervision, student retention, and training. Family life, social relations, economic structures, the organization of work and the role of technology in everyday life have changed. Individuals now face new demands in both their personal lives and the workplace. These changes create strains and confront schools with new challenges: the number of young people experiencing social maladjustments or learning difficulties or leaving school without a diploma, and the number of functionally illiterate adults illustrate the need to rethink the orientations and organization of the education system. What is necessary now is to expand our goal from the democratization of education to the democratization of learning.

In the past two decades, numerous briefs, reports and surveys, such as those by the Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation, have reflected on how schools can deal with the new sociocultural trends. In 1994, *Preparing Our Youth for the 21st Century,* the report of the task force on elementary and secondary school learning profiles, urged the education system to take into account major trends such as internationalization, globalization, the information explosion, rapid technological development and the growing complexity of social life. It defined the broad subject areas that should form the basis of the school curriculum, including general competencies related to intellectual methods and skills. In 1996, the Commission for the Estates General on Education stimulated a broad social debate concerning the effectiveness of the education system, which made it possible to define society's expectations with respect to schools and the curriculum. The final report of the Commission for the Estates General and *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools*, the report of the Task Force on Curriculum Reform (1997), laid the foundations for the educational policy statement *Québec Schools on Course* (1997), which established the main orientations of the curriculum reform. The policy statement made success for all, with no lowering of requirements, the new goal of education in Québec and called for a curriculum based on the learnings essential for early 21st century students, the diversification of educational options, especially in Secondary Cycle Two, to meet the needs and interests of all students, and a more flexible organizational model that is better suited to current thinking on child psychology and development and that respects the autonomy of educational institutions and their professional staff.

The Québec Education Program is a response to these suggestions. It is the official ministerial document that defines the learnings essential for the education of young people.

1.2 The School's Mission

School is the main place where young people learn about the previous achievements of society. Its educational activities create an environment in which students become familiar with their culture, pursue understanding of the world and the meaning of life and develop new ways of adapting to society.

Québec schools have a mandate to prepare students to contribute to the development of a more democratic and just society. Their primary responsibility concerns the basic learnings that students must acquire in order to achieve success in school beyond the elementary level. But they also have a responsibility to help students take their place in society, by familiarizing them with basic social knowledge and values and giving them the tools they need to play a constructive role as citizens.

As presented in the policy statement, the schools' mission is threefold: to provide instruction, to socialize and to provide qualifications.

- ## TO PROVIDE INSTRUCTION
  ### WITH RENEWED CONVICTION

The first responsibility of every educational institution is to cultivate the mind of each student. Although schools are not the only places where children learn, they play a vital role in fostering intellectual development and the acquisition of learning. This orientation reaffirms the importance of students' cognitive development and mastery of knowledge.

- ## TO SOCIALIZE, TO PREPARE STUDENTS
  ### TO LIVE TOGETHER IN HARMONY

In a pluralistic society such as ours, schools must act as agents of social cohesion by fostering a feeling of belonging to the community and teaching students how to live together. This means that they must transmit the heritage of shared knowledge, promote the fundamental values of democracy and prepare young people to become responsible citizens. They must likewise prevent exclusion, which jeopardizes the future of too many young people.

- ## TO PROVIDE QUALIFICATIONS
  ### THROUGH A VARIETY OF OPTIONS

Schools have a duty to make it possible for all students to achieve educational success and to facilitate their integration into society and the workplace at the end of their schooling, whatever the path they choose. To this end, the Ministère de l'Éducation defines the basic curriculum. However, it is the responsibility of the educational institutions to provide all students with an educational environment commensurate with their interests, aptitudes and needs by differentiating instruction and offering a broader range of educational options.

Within the framework of its educational project, each school defines its own orientations and the measures it intends to take in order to implement and enrich the Québec Education Program in light of the specific needs of its students and the principle of equality of opportunity.

1.3 ORIENTATIONS OF THE QUÉBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM

A program that recognizes and builds on the schools' achievements

Although the Québec Education Program introduces changes, it builds on the past. The broad objectives pursued by the schools in the past are not dismissed, but are seen from a new perspective.

Subject-specific learnings that are integrated into the development of complex intellectual skills

The school should foster the development of the intellectual skills required in an evolving knowledge-based society. Subject content thus remains paramount. Since it is now integrated into a broader approach to learning rather than being dissociated from the processes by which students understand it, it should be better assimilated and mastered.

An orientation of this sort calls for a focus on the development of the mental processes involved in the assimilation of knowledge, their use in real life and their transfer during subsequent learning. In addition, this approach requires that the school play a stronger and more active cognitive role by developing students' thinking skills.

Learnings that are fundamental and functional

School gives all children an opportunity to acquire a broad range of fundamental learnings associated with understanding the world, personal development, socialization and, of course, academic progress and the subject-specific learnings that involves. But schools, like any institution that is part of a larger system, run the risk of being too focused on their own reality. Care must therefore be taken to present the fundamental learnings in a way that gives them meaning and focus.

It is important that students at the same time develop the competencies that will enable them to use their learnings to better understand the world in which they live, to construct their personal identity and to interact in a variety of situations.

Qualifying, differentiated learnings

In the logic of the Québec Education Program, "success for all," the theme of the education reform, may be interpreted in two ways. The main meaning is that schools must continue to strive until every student who is able to do so earns a diploma. The second meaning underscores the school's responsibility towards all students, whatever their aptitudes, talents and interests, to provide educational options adapted to their needs.

At the elementary level, learnings should be *qualifying* in the sense that they enable students to solve problems that correspond to their ability and provide them with appropriate preparation to continue their education. The school must enable all its students to obtain the best pos-

sible education and to reach as high a level of achievement as possible. This entails ensuring high-quality teaching and support for students, an appropriate progression of learning situations and high but realistic requirements for each learning cycle. Learnings are also qualifying insofar as they help students to discover and develop their strengths, and thus begin to orient them towards a career choice.

In this perspective, learnings have to be *differentiated* in order to meet individual educational requirements. Particular attention must be paid to each student; the approach used must build on his or her personal resources and take into account prior learning and interests.

Learnings that are contemporary and rooted in culture

As products of a society at a given point in its history, schools transmit the beliefs, values and knowledges of that society at that time, both implicitly and explicitly. Inevitably, then, the learnings will reflect contemporary reality in both form and content, but they will be more meaningful and deeper if their cultural references are familiar and they are placed in a historical perspective.

Schools must thus play an active role in promoting culture, understood here as the fruit of intelligent human activity past and present, by providing students with many opportunities to discover and appreciate cultural activities in various spheres beyond the scope of the learnings in the programs of study. In addition, since every subject has its own cultural baggage, by virtue of both its history and the questions it raises, it is also important for students to understand the origin of the subjects taught, the problems they deal with, the types of questions they try to answer and the approaches they use, in order to be able to use them appropriately.

Schools must also pay special attention to the teaching of English, language of instruction. As a means of communication essential to all human activity, language is an important element of the students' cultural universe and a vital means of personal expression. Language proficiency favours students' personal development and social integration and enables them to acquire knowledge in other subjects. As a result, it should be a linchpin of students' education and a key concern of all educators.

1.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE QUÉBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM

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

A program that focuses on the development of competencies

The focus on competencies entails establishing a different relationship to knowledge and refocusing on training students to think. The idea of a competency reflects the conviction that students should begin at school to develop the complex skills that will permit them to adapt to a changing environment later on. It implies the development of flexible intellectual tools that can be adjusted to changes and be used in the acquisition of new learnings.

The Québec Education Program defines a competency as **a set of behaviours based on the effective mobilization and use of a range of resources**. *Set of behaviours* refers to the capacity to use appropriately a variety of resources, both internal and external, in particular, learnings acquired in school or in everyday life. One aim of a competency-based program is to ensure that students' learnings serve as tools for both action and thought, which is a form of action. Unlike a skill, which may be applied in isolation, a competency makes use of several resources and is itself used in fairly complex contexts.

The concept of *resources* refers not only to everything that students have learned at school, but also to their experiences, skills, interests, etc. In addition to these internal or personal resources, students may rely on many external resources, such as their classmates, their teacher, documentation, etc.

Finally, the idea of the *effective mobilization and use of resources* implies that the behaviours associated with a competency involve more than just an automatic response or reflex. It implies that students, in seeking to attain a clearly identified objective, deliberately acquire and use intellectual and social concepts and skills to find an appropriate answer to a question or the solution to a problem. The competency is complex and progressive. It is more than a simple combination or juxtaposition of elements, and the students can continue to develop it throughout the school curriculum and beyond.

A program that recognizes that learning is an active process

Pedagogical pratices are based on ideas of how learning takes place. Two major currents of thought, behaviourism and constructivism, have influenced our thinking on this subject. Certain learnings that schools are responsible for developing are taught by means of practices derived from

the behaviourist school, such as the use of repetitive exercises to memorize knowledges. However, many aspects of the Québec Education Program, particularly those related to the development of competencies and the mastery of complex knowledges, call for pratices that are based on the constructivist approach to learning. This approach sees learning as a process, and the student as the principal agent in that process. The situations that are seen as most conducive to learning are those that present a real challenge to students by obliging them to reexamine their learnings and personal representations.

1.5 MAIN IMPLICATIONS OF A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH

Organizing the content of a curriculum in terms of the development of competencies entails specific pedagogical practices, which correspond to the main orientations of the Québec Education Program.

Promoting integrated learning

The Québec Education Program targets the development of competencies that draw on learnings acquired in a variety of situations, which do not necessarily follow a subject-specific logic. This requires that the school transcend the boundaries between subjects in order to help students perceive the connections between their various learnings. The grouping of the subjects in five broad subject areas—languages; mathematics, science and technology; social sciences; arts education; and personal development—reflects this desire to establish as many and as varied connections as possible among related subjects—which does not rule out establishing connections among subjects belonging to different subject areas.

Schools must also develop cross-curricular competencies, which have no subject, occupational or other limits, and whose scope continuously broadens as they are applied in increasingly complex and diversified contexts.

Structuring school organization in two-year learning cycles

The Québec Education Program divides elementary education into three two-year cycles. This organizational model takes into account the need for a long-term approach in developing competencies. It corresponds better to the students' learning rate and permits more differentiated teaching practices. In addition, it makes possible the formation of teams of teachers, who may stay with a class for more than one year, providing pedagogical support and evaluating learning.

Adapting the evaluation of learning to the aims of the Québec Education Program

Evaluation is an integral part of the process of learning. To be consistent with the Québec Education Program, it should bear on the competencies targeted by the program. As part of the overall learning process, formative evaluation is used throughout the cycles, primarily to support students in their process of learning, and to enable teachers to adjust their pedagogical activities. Evaluation is also used for summative purposes, to determine the degree of development of the competencies and record it in a progress report.

The focus on the process of learning gives students a greater role to play in evaluation during the learning process. Techniques such as self-evaluation and peer evaluation enhance students' awareness of their own progress throughout the learning process and allow

them to analyze it and to compare their ideas with those of their teachers, classmates and parents.

Various tools and means, not all of which need be officially recognized, may be used to evaluate learnings and assess the degree of development of competencies by students. Observation checklists, annotated assignments and portfolios are all part of the learning-centred approach and enable students and teachers to evaluate learning processes, the development of competencies and the acquisition of learnings.

Evaluation also leads to communication with parents. In addition to the report card required by the *Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education*, this communication may take various forms: annotated portfolio, meetings between the parents and the teacher, etc. At the end of each cycle, the information gathered and collated should provide an overall assessment of the students' learnings and some indications concerning the most favourable conditions for their progress in the next cycle.

Recognizing the professional nature of teaching

A corollary of the Québec Education Program's emphasis on learning and competencies is a new vision of the teaching profession. More than ever, teaching requires autonomy, creativity and professional expertise. As mediators between students and knowledges, teachers must stimulate their students, reinforce their intrinsic motivation and encourage them to do their best. They have to create an educational environment that encourages students to play an active role in their learning, to make them aware of their resources and encourage them to use these resources, and finally, to motivate them to transfer their learnings from one subject to another and from school to everyday life.

As individuals, teachers are responsible for their professional actions and are expected to work closely with colleagues and to share responsibility. As members of a professional community, they share with their colleagues the mandate they receive from the school regarding student learning.

Making the classroom and the school a learning community

The development of competencies and the cycle-based organization of teaching require the active participation of the whole school team in the school's educational project. Through cooperation, collaboration among teachers of different subjects, and shared projects and activities, teachers can pool their energy to maximize student learning.

The Québec Education Program is designed to facilitate this process by making it easier for teachers to share pedagogical and didactic expertise and for all members of the school staff to harmonize their efforts.

Along similar lines, the Québec Education Program aims to provide an opportunity to approach learning from a cooperative perspective. This perspective should be shared by all members of the school community—students, teachers, administrators and other professionals—who must work together as a team to create optimum teaching-learning conditions and to make the school a genuine learning community.

1.6 Constructing a World-View: The Focal Point of All Student Learnings

The way we see ourselves and our surroundings—our world-view—depends on many factors and is subject to many influences. From the outset, genetic heritage and family background have an enormous impact on our world-view by influencing our emotional makeup and the way we see reality. Although it is undeniable that children bring to school a predisposition to interpret the world in certain ways, school can have a major influence on their world-view, mainly because they attend school during the period in their lives when their ideas are most flexible.

The development of a world-view, which is related to the sense of judgment and conscience, is fostered by reflection on the great existential issues (life and death, love and hate, success and failure, peace and violence, etc.). It also depends on the extent to which students are willing to compare their world-view with those of others and to look critically at themselves and their actions, reactions, opinions, beliefs, values and attitudes.

Programs, instruction and teachers and other educators constitute the first sphere of influence in a school, but not the only one, since it is widely believed that young people's peers, individually and collectively, have just as much sway over their attitudes and behaviours, either temporarily or permanently. Still, the official part of a school's curriculum can exercise a decisive influence on the way students choose to construct, alter and develop their world-view. There are numerous areas for action, both subject-specific and cross-curricular, and all members of the school community should be on the lookout for opportunities to support students in their process of reflection.

1.7 Components of the Québec Education Program

The Québec Education Program comprises cross-curricular competencies, broad themes for learning, a preschool education program and programs of study grouped in five subject areas.

Cross-curricular Competencies

The Québec Education Program recognizes the need to develop intellectual, methodological, personal and social, and communication-related competencies in all students. These competencies are called *cross-curricular* because they are of a generic nature and are used in various subject areas. By definition, they have greater scope than subject-specific competencies, since they go beyond the boundaries of the subject areas. They are used in the subjects as well as in the broad themes for learning, but transcend both insofar as they reflect the convergence, integration or synthesis of learnings acquired over a period of time. In this sense, they are valuable tools for people who have to live in a society of complex, unpredictable and continuously changing situations and interactions.

Broad Areas of Learning

The Québec Education Program presents a number of broad areas of learning, which deal with aspects of contemporary life, and in particular, problems young people face. The inclusion of these broad areas of learning in the Québec Education Program is intended to encourage students to make connections between what they learn at

school and in their everyday lives, and to provide them with opportunities to develop an understanding of various life contexts and envision possible actions in specific situations. The broad areas of learning enable students to relate different areas of learning and to look critically at their personal, social and cultural environment.

The Preschool Education Program and the Subject Areas

The Preschool Education Program is for 4- and 5-year-olds. It is based on competencies defined in terms of children's overall development. These competencies have the same status as subject-specific competencies but more closely resemble cross-curricular competencies.

There are 14 programs of study organized in five subject areas: languages; mathematics, science and technology; social sciences; arts education; and personal development. These programs define the subject-specific competencies and indicate the essential knowledges for each subject.

The Interdependence of the Components of the Québec Education Program

The Québec Education Program is a system that is more complex than its components. There are two levels of coherence within this complexity, intraprogram and interprogram, the former of which exists within each competency, whether subject-specific or cross-curricular, and between the competencies in a given program, and the latter of which concerns the connections among the subject-specific competencies, the cross-curricular competencies and the broad areas of learning.

This principle of coherence brings out the essential unity of the Québec Education Program and the fact that it should be seen as a whole. All of its components have the same purpose, which is to ensure the comprehensive development of the students. According to this logic, the subject-specific competencies, cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning should be developed in a synergistic, interactive way and should form a unified whole in a learning situation.

Given the comprehensive nature of the cross-curricular competencies and the broad areas of learning, the development of these competencies and the integration of the learning process with the broad areas of learning are part of all activities at school, and are the responsibility of all staff members.

Figure 1
Québec Education Program
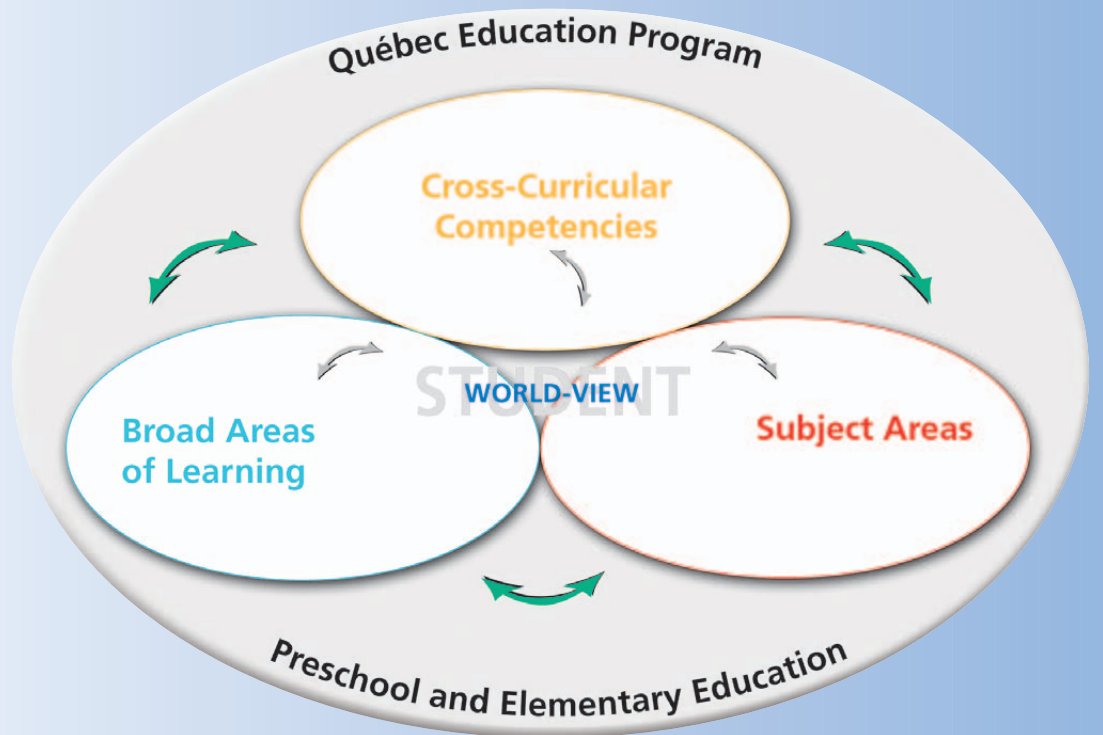
1.8 COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAMS OF STUDY

The programs of study are defined in terms of competencies. A diagram illustrates the relationships among the competencies in each program. These competencies correspond to the educational aims and essential knowledges for each subject. The essential knowledges are generally presented in terms of strategies, learnings and techniques. They may be associated with individual competencies or with a whole program of study.

PRESENTATION OF THE COMPETENCIES

For each competency, the Focus, Key Features, Evaluation Criteria and End-of-Cycle Outcomes are indicated.

Focus of the Competency

The Focus of the Competency is broken down into four sections: Meaning of the Competency, Connections to Cross-curricular Competencies, Context for Learning and Developmental Profile

– *Meaning of the Competency:* indicates the place of the competency in the program and explains what it involves.

– *Connections to Cross-Curricular Competencies:* indicates which cross-curricular competencies students are most likely to use or develop in exercising the competency.

– *Context for Learning:* describes the conditions in which students should be placed to develop and exercise the competency; usually describes resources students may use and constraints imposed by the situation.

– *Developmental Profile:* provides indicators of the development of the competency for each cycle.

Key Features of the Competency

Each competency is broken down into a number of processes considered essential for its development or exercise. These key features connect knowledges to the processes for their integration or use. Although they may be the focus of specific teaching practices, it is through their combination and coordination, rather than their mere juxtaposition, that the competency is developed. The diagrams provided are designed to illustrate the synergy involved.

Evaluation Criteria

These are the observable standards for supporting and judging the development of the competency. They may be more or less general depending on whether they concern one cycle or all the cycles. They are clarified in the End-of-Cycle Outcomes.

End-of-Cycle Outcomes

These are benchmarks for what may be expected of students at the end of a cycle concerning both the knowledges most often involved and the types of situations in which these knowledges are used. They identify the major stages in the process of developing the competency.

Cultural References

These are the resources of the social and cultural environment that may contribute to the development of the competency.

Essential Knowledges

These constitute the repertoire of resources indispensable for the development and exercise of the competency. This does not mean that students may not use other resources, but that they must master these knowledges in order to develop and exercise the competency.

Suggestions for using information and communications technologies (ICT)

ICT are an absolute requirement today, and the Québec Education Program considers them tools and resources for teaching and learning. They provide access to documentary resources and at the same time serve as means of production. Every program of study includes a number of pedagogical suggestions to teachers concerning the use of ICT in the development of subject-specific competencies. These are only suggestions, however, although the use of ICT in teaching and learning is compulsory.

Prescriptive Elements in the Québec Education Program

The prescriptive elements that should be covered in the various cycles of the Québec Education Program are enumerated below. In keeping with the logic of the program, they should not be seen merely as items on a checklist. They provide guidelines for learning by indicating what students should normally have mastered by the end of each cycle. These elements are:

– the cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies and their key features

– the essential knowledges

– consideration of each broad area of learning

Each school must take into account the specific needs of its students and the principle of equality of opportunity.