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A New Direction for Success:

Québec Schools on Course

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Development of the Québec Education Program is the basis for the renewal of programs of study. The Québec Education Program is divided into five cycles and is comprised of the Program of Programs and the programs of study for each subject. The Program of Programs is an undertaking for the whole school. Implementation of this program is meant to send a clear message: schools must, through the actions of the school personnel, take all the necessary steps to ensure that students acquire the tools they need to persue their education and to live in society. The Program of Programs is designed to influence all teaching practices and to instill a sense of belonging to the school in students, staff, parents and community.

As for the programs of study, they determine what students need to learn for each subject. They must be focussed on essential learning objectives and content and must propose enrichment content. They clearly define what is expected of students and include a cultural dimension. The programs of study are written from both a "horizontal" and a "vertical" perspective.

The Program of Programs is an important part of program renewal. Its originality stems first and foremost from its educational goals. By means of the cross-curricular competencies and themes which are largely drawn from the report Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools*, the purpose of the Program of Programs is essentially the integration of knowledge. An important tool, it serves to ensure that the actions of the school team are consistent, be it in the teaching of the programs of study, in the student services activities and the complementary services determined by the school board, or in the overall daily life at school.*

The Program of Programs first defines the cross-curricular competencies*, which are divided into intellectual and methodological skills, personal and social skills, and language skills. These elements are essential to students' education and may be acquired through the learning content in different subjects. These cross-curricular competencies should first be acquired in the classroom, that is, in the context of teaching and learning across subject areas. The acquisition of these competencies must therefore be pursued in each cycle from elementary to secondary school.*

The Program of Programs also includes a second component: lifelong learning areas, which are a reflection of the prevailing educational priorities. These areas make it possible to update the curriculum and to take into account social changes. By studying them at school, students learn the basics of modern life and social integration. They adopt values, attitudes and behaviours that will enable them to pursue their education and live in society. Like the cross-curricular competencies, these themes have anchor points in the programs of study, where they appear as learning content.

Moreover, as part of school life in general, activities are proposed to the students each year in order to enable them to progressively master the cross-curricular competencies and to acquire learning related to the cross-curricular themes. These activities also enable them to better understand the world around the, to develop their personality, to participate in life in society and to communicate with others.

To understand the role of the Québec Education program, it is essential to grasp what is meant by education: a process whose global objectives are based on inter-dependence among programs of study, subject areas and the Program of programs.

The Program of Programs provides meaningful contexts for the learning content of the subject. It also permits students to transfer what they learn in school to everyday life and to develop cross-curricular competencies.

It covers eight areas of lifelong learning:

Personal identity and world view.

Health and Well being

Personal and Occupational Planning

Social relationships

Environmental Awareness

Consumer rights and responsabilities

Media literacy

Citizenship and community life

The educational policy statement Québec Schools on Course *establishes the following guidelines for defining learning objectives and learning content: clearly identify essential learning; explicitly specify how the cultural component can be integrated into the subject areas; organise programs according to cycle; clearly demonstrate the progression of learning within the same cycle and from one cycle to another; and allow for the leeway that teachers require to exercise their professional judgement.*

The requirements for the programs of study are the following:

Presentation and design of programs of study

The programs of study are grouped by field of learning. General objectives are determined for each of the five fields: language; technology, science and mathematics; social sciences, arts education, and personal development. These objectives may be the same at the elementary and secondary levels; however, for some fields, it may be necessary to define general objectives specific to certain cycles, or to the elementary or secondary level.

The programs of study are developed and presented by cycle. At the elementary level, the duration of each cycle is two years for all subjects. At the secondary level, however, some subject cover only two of the years of Cycle Four. Programs of study will therefore be designed accordingly.

All programs of study are presented in the same, clear and comprehensible format. This requirement allows links between the subject areas to be clearer, promotes a common, global understanding of the learning outcomes expected of the students and facilitates the work of teachers, who are often called upon to teach more than one program.

At the elementary and secondary levels, the programs of study are designed to cover 75 percent of the time allotted for teaching the subject in the subject-time allocation. Enrichment content may be added as a guide.

At the elementary level, it is the school and not the Ministère de l'Éducation that allots the teaching time for the following subjects: French as a second language; English as a second language; arts education (music, visual arts, dance, drama); physical education and health education; history, geography and citizenship education; and science and technology. Therefore, the programs of study are designed on the basis of one hour per week, to which enrichment content may be added, thereby allowing the school to opt for one additional hour per week. In the case of arts education, the common core is composed primarily of visual arts and music. At the elementary level and in Grades 7 and 8, one program is designed for the four subjects, namely, music, visual arts, dance and drama. At the secondary level, each of these program is worth four credits.

Learning competencies

The goal of the program of study is to clearly define the competencies. The term competencies *is used without reference to a given typology and means. There are not many essential competencies in a program of study, but they apply to all students and are compulsory. They are not broken down into intermediate objectives of teaching strategies, nor are they organized according to a specific teaching approach or style of learning. The program of study suggests enrichment contents as a guide. These objectives expand on the essential objectives and may include new learning, but must no introduce learning content from the subsequent cycle.*

The program of study makes the links between the general competencies in a field of learning and the capacities for a cycle.

The program of study specifies, if necessary, while respecting the rationale for an organization by cycle, the logical sequence of learning. Moreover, it is up to teachers to decide how learning is to be organized within a cycle, by taking into taking account the needs of the students.

The program of study provides information on the evaluation of learning, according to the competencies. It establishes the relative importance of a capacity in relation to the other capacities. It specifies if the achievement of an ability is a prerequisite for one or more abilities in the subsequent cycle.

In a program of study, the learning competencies are presented using a "vertical" approach, that is, they are related to those of the preceding and subsequent cycle, if applicable. Information on the links between the learning content of a given program and that of other programs of study is presented using a "horizontal" approach.

In a program of study, links are clearly established between the learning objectives and the cross-curricular competencies.

Learning content

The program of study determines the essential learning content and includes the enrichment content as a guide. The enrichment content is clearly separated from the essential content. The expression learning content *must be understood in the broad sense. It refers to a set of knowledge and skills that is the focus of learning.*

In a program of study, the learning content is presented in relation to one or more learning objectives.

The learning content is selected on the basis of research data and widely shared views.

Learning content formally includes cultural appreciation, especially of the most noteworthy cultural works and productions of various origins and from different eras.

The program of study provides the basic notions and concepts that the students must understand at given stages in their schooling, since these notions and concepts serve as the foundation for subsequent learning. If applicable, the program presents a concept map illustrating the relationship of the various concepts. The program also indicates how a given subject contributes to the building of concepts, especially those of time, space and matter.

The anchor points for the cross-curricular themes of the Program of Programs are clearly indicated.

In the first cycle of elementary school, the programs of study make reference to learning begun in preschool education, especially with regard to early learning in science and to the building of concepts related to the social sciences.

Programs of study dealing with the language of instruction or second language provide information on the study of literacy works and, if applicable, the reading of texts involving other fields of learning.

In conclusion, it appears clearly that we have to encourage teachers to adopt the paradigm that underlies the whole curriculum reform: that of learning. If we want teaching practices to help students acquire competencies, we must allow teachers to think about their current practices, to state their beliefs, to understand what the adoption of a new model will mean to them, and to express their doubts and hesitations, so that we are working from their ideas. Therefore we must establish the habit of working as teams in the schools, opening the doors of the classrooms to see and be seen. In short, we must encourage a transformation of the professional identity of teachers.