

What's in store for us?



France Désaulniers
Communications Advisor

If we can say one thing about the issue of quality assurance in CEGEPs, it's that it's sure got a lot of people talking...and ruminating! This is even more true now that the *Commission de l'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (CEEC) has launched its audit process to, in the words of its own Website, evaluate "the ability of the [evaluation] systems themselves, and the management thereof, to ensure the quality of the different dimensions of the colleges' mission." This is known as a process of meta-evaluation or, more simply put, the evaluation of evaluation.

We sat down with Charles Lemieux, President of the teachers' union at *Collège Marie-Victorin*, one of the schools targeted for the CEEC audit. A trained social worker, Charles has been teaching for some 15 years.



Isabelle Bouchard
Provincial Committee (CNR)

Q why the interest in quality assurance?

Well, I'd have to say quality assurance kind of hit us in the face! It was our first day back for the fall 2013 semester and the administration told us they'd been approached the previous spring—and given confirmation in June—that Marie-Victorin was going to be one of the CEEC's four target colleges. As soon as we found out we'd be part of the audit process, the executive committee began studying the CEEC document and informed the union office and general assembly straight away.



It was the members who took position on the issue in general assembly in November 2013. The college had set up an institutional committee that was made up of all categories of staff and steered by an educational advisor who would monitor the process full-time and provide advice along the way. In general assembly, we decided not to name a representative to sit on this institutional committee. Instead, the members gave us the mandate to organize a union day on the theme of quality assurance. I have to say that this day of reflection was instrumental in raising awareness on the issue. In the college, we sometimes have the mistaken impression that we're in complete command, but quality assurance is basically a boss telling us he's got one foot in our classroom. The OECD makes no bones about it in advocating for the evaluation of teachers in their classrooms everywhere and pushing for the redefinition of teaching as a function of labour market needs.

It's noteworthy that in the last report published by the CEEC on Marie-Victorin college, it says that the teachers have more relative weight than the academic council, which it views as a problem. Yet the collective agreement stipulates that the departments are the ones responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching.

We intend to continue leading the charge on the fronts of the IPESA and Strategic Development Plan, which are among the subjects of CEEC evaluation.

Q *What, in your view, are the key issues?*

I see three main elements: the advancement of the process and conversion of education into a consumer good, or in other words, the commodification of education; the complete overhaul of the teacher's role into that of facilitator, a transformation already triggered to some degree by the onset of the competency-based approach; and lastly, the dehumanization of a profoundly human act—that of teaching—which, like the first two elements, snubs its nose at the humanistic notion of education.

Q *What do you say to those who would argue that evaluation is normal in any job?*

Saying we're against quality assurance in no way means we're against quality teaching! What we're contesting are the oversight measures in the public college sector that are turning education into a commodity. We would be in support of some form of process or structure—as yet undefined but in which teachers would have a say—to support the harmonious development of the CEGEP system. What we're denouncing is a commission bent on evaluating each one of the institutions as a separate entity and fuelling competition among them, which could lead to a major rupture. There are already a good many internal mechanisms in place for assessing quality of teaching. Just think of the departments, the academic councils, the program committees... We are defending our professional autonomy, but we fully recognize that we have a collective and personal responsibility to see to it that our teaching respects the right of students to a quality education.

Q *You seem worried this process may have some perverse effects*

“We have to reclaim power over our teaching.”

Absolutely! Among the CEEC's prerogatives is the power to authorize CEGEPs to issue their own diplomas. What it's doing right now is fuelling competition among the colleges, which could cause the system to break apart. The commission is patting the colleges on the back, telling them what a great job they're doing and praising them for their maturity and ability to self-

evaluate. What this means is that in the not-too-distant future, we'll no longer need a centralized body to issue diplomas, so we'll be doing it locally. We can't preserve the viability of a public education system on the one hand while developing local programs to answer local market needs on the other. It's paradoxical. According to that logic, a program is linked to the local economy, which is a major shift away from the premise that CEGEPs are there to give a rounded education and



that it's up to industry to provide workers with more specialized training, as it was doing before.



Q *Do you share the opinion of some that the CEEC is the equivalent of a rating agency?*

The quality assurance process is an insidious process; it's an ideology. As a union, we have to keep fighting it. Our college, for example, like other CEGEPs, is in the process of drafting a strategic development plan founded on the same principles of "branding" and competition that are at the very heart of the quality assurance ideology. We want to try to redirect the orientations away from this market-driven approach.

Q *What kind of body could replace the CEEC?*

There are some promising avenues, including restructuring the way programs are developed in the college sector. As we speak, there are 14 Social Work departments in our CEGEP system, but all with very different programs. The reality is that there is no longer any generic program in Quebec, no curriculum that is

common to all Social Work students in the province. Yes, students acquire the same competencies, but there is no general program that they all follow. If we are to practice what we preach and defend the integrity and sustainability of our CEGEP system, we have to rethink the whole idea of developing local programs as part of a competency-based approach and start demanding that program curricula be established province-wide.

Q *So how would you define quality teaching?*

There is something intangible about it; something that simply can't be evaluated. Teaching is an eminently human interaction. When students are surveyed, the vast majority of them say they are very satisfied with the education they've received, and this finding has remained relatively steady over time. The fact is that the quality of teaching is intrinsic to the teacher! A course with Charles Lemieux will always be a course with Charles Lemieux! But we perform our functions in collegiality, and it's there that we find the true embodiment of quality teaching.

“Competition among colleges is much more entrenched than we might think!”

We're at a crossroads, and FNEEQ needs to be on the offensive!

Thank you, Charles!

Further readings:

DE SELYS, Gérard and HIRTT, Nico, *Tableau Noir, Résister à la privatisation de l'enseignement*, Éditions EPO, Brussels, 1998

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), *“Observation des pairs en classe”*