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TEACHING FRENCH IN A MULTI-ETHNIC QUÉBEC

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TEACHING FRENCH

REMUE-MÉNINGES has received a number of accounts and viewpoints on the teaching of French as a mother tongue in the last few months. In fact, there are so many points of view that are so diverse and deserving of consideration in one way or another that we could have devoted all of this second issue to this one topic. Certainly, teachers' opinions on teaching French, be it at the elementary, high school, college or university level, are far from unanimous. As well, there are differences between teachers who teach French as a subject and those who teach other subjects.

Generally speaking, there is little interest in returning to old methods or increasing the amount of time spent teaching French at the expense of other aspects of the curriculum that are vital parts of

education today. A majority of teachers we talked to indicated very definitely that the lack of resources, heavy workloads and inadequate supervision of students were the main obstacles that had to be overcome in order to attain the goals proposed by many as a way of improving the quality of French written by Québécois. Teachers by and large appreciate the new French syllabuses and the teaching materials that go with it.

Because we had to restrict our choice of articles, we decided to focus on three aspects. First of all, Christophe Auger, professor at the Cégep de Trois-Rivières and a member of the Conseil de la langue française, outlines the basic points in the Conseil's statement of advice on the teaching of French as a mother tongue. Then Aline Boulanger, a lecturer at UQAM and adviser to the ministère de l'Éducation on written output in French, explains her point of view

on the training of French teachers and the written work done by Grade 6 students. We conclude with a discussion with Raymond Toupin, who has taught at the high school level using all the syllabuses Québec has gone through since the 1950s.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that although students, parents and the public are relatively satisfied with the quality of French used by high school students,¹ surveys indicate that the most virulent criticisms of how French is taught come from teachers themselves. This is why REMUE-MÉNINGES will undoubtedly have more to say on this topic in further issues.

1) Gilles Bibeau et al, *L'enseignement du français, langue maternelle, perception et attentes*. Dossiers du Conseil de la langue française, no. 27, 1987.

TEACHING FRENCH AS A MOTHER TONGUE

By **Christophe Auger**
professor at Cegep de
Trois-Rivières and member of
the Conseil de la langue française

In a statement of advice addressed to the minister responsible for the application of the French Language Charter that was made available last September, the Conseil de la langue française makes recommendations about all levels of education and society as a whole. Research begun in 1984 has revealed a disturbing situation with respect to the French learned by students at all levels.

In its position paper, the Conseil de la langue française examines the situation of the teaching of French as a mother tongue in the context of the development of the French fact in Québec and the linguistic needs of Québécois. Although the paper deals primarily with the teaching of general language skills at the elementary and high school levels, it does discuss the situation at the college and university levels to a certain extent.

The Conseil de la langue française approached the teaching of French from the point of view of the linguistic planning and development of Québec. Right from the start we looked at this issue in terms of the evolution of Québec society over the last twenty (20) years. We posed the question of what part the school system has played in the development of French by analysing how schools respond to current linguistic needs and clarifying the role of the school system in linguistic planning and development.

An impressive number of reports, studies and surveys on the state of the teaching of French all come to much the same conclusions: young people finish high school, college and even undergraduate university studies and get their diploma or degree without having acquired an adequate command of French. This means that they cannot adequately fulfil the roles for which they have been

trained by these educational institutions.

An overall plan

Schools are not the only ones to blame for this situation. More generally, the status and quality of a language depends to a large extent on the capacity and will of a population to embrace it and the will of political, economic and cultural leaders to promote it by all means at their disposal.

Schools nonetheless have a privileged role to play: it is their job to ensure the quality of the language through the quality of the teaching they dispense. The Conseil recommended that this privileged role be confirmed by having the school system officially recognized as a partner in all relevant legislation, including the Public Elementary and High School Education Act, the CEGEP Education Act and the Public Instruction Act. In addition to its symbolic value, such recognition would assert the fundamental role of the school system in supporting the linguistic development chosen by Québec society, helping to make it effective and correcting its very real weaknesses. It is therefore vital that we devote substantial efforts to teaching French as a mother tongue.

The Conseil de la langue française has made a series of recommendations concerning pedagogy, organization and motivation at the various levels of education. We believe that to make our teaching more effective, an overall plan is necessary. The recommendations call for adjustments designed to ensure that the school system responds more adequately to today's linguistic needs. The members of the Conseil are convinced that these measures can be put into practice if everyone working in the field of education is committed to doing so.

At the college level

For example, when we propose that language skills be a compulsory part of the French syllabus at the college level, we are emphasizing that basic French language skills are a fundamental prerequisite to further learning. The gaps and deficiencies in students' language education must be overcome if more specific goals are to be pursued subsequently at the

college level. This in turn suggests that weaknesses in how French is taught at the high school level have to be corrected.

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We call for the co-operation of professors teaching other subjects, because we believe that it is very important for all professors to reinforce the work done by the French professors by paying close attention to the quality of French written and spoken by students. We also say that each professor has primary responsibility for the use of good French in the discipline that he or she teaches.

In the same vein, we propose that each institution develop a policy and practical measures for applying it covering all activities that are part of the life of the school, cegep or university.

Other recommendations in the position paper address the pedagogical, organizational and motivational approaches of the school system. In terms of pedagogy, we are asking that syllabus objectives be spelled out, that requirements be defined so that a student can move on from stage to stage and that effective assistance be provided for students who have problems. We also propose that more time be devoted to teaching French in elementary and high school.

Regarding organizational aspects, we propose that syllabuses and teaching be assessed, that language skills become a hiring criterion for teachers, that mechanisms for evaluating a potential teacher's knowledge of French be introduced, and that students have access to scientific and technical books written in French.

As for motivation, we emphasize that a good command of French is important to succeed at school, and call for the co-operation of parents, the mass media and the workplace in promoting information about the French fact and valorizing French in society.

The role of teachers

Correcting the situation requires the participation of everyone involved in teaching French. Teachers have a primary role and responsibility. It would be too easy to wash our hands of all responsibility by blaming the ministry of education, the administration, the

deterioration of our working conditions, or social, economic and political circumstances...

The new demands made on teachers at all levels of education in terms of how closely they keep track of students will certainly add to the workload of French teachers as well as that of teachers in other disciplines. The Conseil realizes this. Although we do not wish to speak for the bargaining parties, we recommend that the conditions in which French is taught throughout the education system be reviewed. In our opinion, this is an essential prerequisite for attaining the proposed goals.

What will happen to these recommendations?

We hope our recommendations will be implemented as soon as possible, because any delay in making up for lost time will make the situation even worse for everyone working in the field of education and for society as a whole. Many of the measures proposed are relatively inexpensive to implement, which precludes one handy excuse for not doing it. The recommendations as a whole do, however, require a clear determination on the part of the government to support Québécois in using and promoting their language. This is not all that costly, but at times one has the impression that some people would like it to carry a price tag — so as to give them a “golden” excuse for inaction.

With respect to the recommendations on teachers' working conditions, we hope that by December 1988 or in the following months we can count on the efforts of all our partners to ensure that the recommendations are adopted and implemented. Take note...

Much as been said...

More remains to be done...

The Conseil de la langue française is not the only agency that has examined the teaching of French as a mother tongue. The Conseil supérieur de l'éducation published a report last October entitled “La qualité du français à l'école: une responsabilité partagée” (The quality of French at school: a shared responsibility) in which it made twenty (20) recommendations to the minister of education. After the alarmist sur-

veys, the studies and reports, it is time for action.

If you wish to obtain a copy of this position paper or of the reports and studies done by the Conseil de la langue française, write to:

Bureau du Conseil de la langue française,
800, Place d'Youville,
Québec
G1R 3P4
Telephone: (418) 643-2740

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THE SITUATION OF FRENCH

By **Aline Boulanger**,
lecturer, UQAM

Trained as a linguist, I work in various fields related to French and the teaching of French. In my capacity as a supervisor of field work in courses on teaching French as a mother tongue and as a second language, I teach university students, most of whom will in turn be teaching high school students. As a consultant to the ministère de l'Éducation, I analyse some of the writing done by Grade 6 elementary school students.

A sacrificed generation

I, too, think that there is a problem in the learning of French today. However, I would like to look at this issue from a somewhat different angle. I think that it is particularly the students “taught” according to the “Programme-cadre de français” (General French Syllabus) who have problems mastering written French.

The General Syllabus was based on the principle that a language is a whole and not merely a series of separate techniques. Furthermore, it emphasized oral French so as to encourage students to master this form of communication, since it was thought at the time that students were weak in this area. The students who were “subjected” to this syllabus are now CEGEP and university students, and most of the assessments of the teaching of French that we hear these days are based on how these students use the language.

I do not deny that this generation has a problem. In fact, I would go so far as to say that this generation was sacrificed with respect to the mastery of the French language in Québec.

At the same time, however, I refuse to accept the oversimplified view that dictation and filling up pages in workbooks are the solution.

Grammar

Writing is a complex activity that involves something more than making the participles agree with “avoir” or “être” and mastering the irregular plurals. It requires understanding how to put together the information or arguments used so as to make the text as effective as possible. The only way to learn and practice these rules is to write and write and write. In fact, I consider that the major weakness my students have is their ignorance of formal rules of grammar. The mistakes in their texts indicate that they do not reason through what they write. This level of language skills may be satisfactory for students in general, but it is not acceptable for future French teachers.

With a view to developing ways of defining minimum requirements in French at the end of elementary school, the evaluation branch of the ministre de l'Éducation gives Grade 6 students a writing test (students in their last year of high school are given a similar test). The structure of the test reflects the requirements of the syllabus. For the last two (2) years, I have done detailed linguistic analyses of a sampling of the tests written.

The current syllabus distinguishes between different kinds of speech (expressive, argumentative, informative) and structures the learning process around them for both the understanding and the production of different kinds of texts. The rules of structure corresponding to the various kinds of speech are taught, and the students must then apply these rules in their work. The rules about how the language works are used to help produce written texts. They are therefore taught in relation to the forms of speech studied, assimilated through various exercises and then applied and reinforced in the students' writing.

A definite improvement

In studying the texts written by Grade 6 students, we found that they know to structure their texts according to the rules of the form of speech they are asked to produce. In other words, they are able to write argumentative texts as well as expressive texts. In terms of form, a detailed analysis of the mistakes in their texts indicated that the greatest number of mistakes occurs in agreements of gender and number — hardly earthshattering news! The pass rate improved from 1986 to 1987, with definite progress in the elements pertaining to the content itself, i.e. the coherence of the text. This is not to suggest that we should rest on our laurels, but it does indicate that the syllabus and the quality of the teachers' work are appropriate.

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More work is needed

The situation is different at the high school level, where the syllabus has not been widely introduced and where various different methods have been used in teaching the students; as a result, the situation is more uneven than in the elementary schools. In the light of elementary school results, one could suppose that similar changes will occur at the secondary school level as the syllabus is introduced.

In conclusion, I would say that we should concentrate our efforts on the generation of students now studying at CEGEP and university. We have to offer them remedial measures to help them acquire the basic concepts they lack. Perhaps CEGEP and undergraduate university syllabuses need to be rethought, but I think we should be careful not to carry any such revisions so far as to include the basic concepts that should be taught in elementary and high school. Trying to teach these language skills at the CEGEP or university level would be an extremely short-sighted solution. What is needed are temporary measures that will only be used for as long as is necessary to salvage the "sacrificed generation".

Nor should we discard or completely rewrite the French syllabus at the elementary and high school. What we should do

instead is perfect it, which means continuing to develop teaching methods that present grammar and syntax as tools for writing rather than as ends in themselves!

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"HOW DO YOU EXPECT HIM TO LEARN, HE DOESN'T LIKE ME"

An encounter with
Raymond Toupin,
French teacher

Raymond Toupin, a French teacher at the Séminaire de St-Hyacinthe, kept coming back to this quotation from Félix Leclerc to sum up the essence of his replies when we asked him about the state of French courses. Before commenting on the various syllabuses that have guided and structures what he has taught since the 1960s, he wanted to stress that regardless of the objectives or methodological approaches, each teacher has to develop his or her own teaching strategy and establish a relationship with the students based on mutual respect, understanding and trust.

Raymond Toupin has a strategy that captivates his students, as we saw for ourselves when we arrived unannounced in one of his classes. The day we were there, teacher and students were letting their dreams run wild. Using an article in a magazine as the starting point, Raymond Toupin had invited his students to dream. He began with his own "journey" and then asked them to close their eyes and plunge into the imaginary. The imaginary is not all that far from reality and its influences. The texts we heard discussed dealt with peace, the quality of the environment, happiness, friendship, space travel and effortlessness (not having to sweat to get results).

The teaching strategy

For Raymond Toupin, it is vital that a teacher adapt any syllabus to each group of students and build some leeway or flexibility into

his or her teaching to accommodate a combination of easy-goingness, demandingness and tricks for earning students' trust, winning their interest and making them realize the progress they are making.

"We used to be able to spend a whole year analysing the same text," he explains. "We had to find ways of making it interesting and achieving the goals with this approach. For example, I would ask my students to find and compare twenty different kinds of clothing in a historical text. Without realizing it, they had to read and re-read the text dozens of times, something they would never have been willing to do if I had asked them directly."

He sees adaptation as very important, even though he teaches fairly homogeneous groups of students in the second year of high school at a private school. He prepares a lesson plan corresponding to syllabus goals for each level. He also individualizes teaching for each kind of student. In developing his teaching materials (using his personal computer), Raymond Toupin strives to give the student an overall view that is then assimilated through a series of steps, repetitions and corrections. Reviews and discussions of the work done and what has been learned are a regular part of his classes which means that as well as assimilating the subject matter as such, his students also learn how to learn. He considers classroom instructions very important.

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Concentration

Toupin believes that the student's concentration is a key factor in learning French, particularly how to write. As he points out, writing is a kind of mental gymnastics that fewer and fewer people now still practise in their daily lives. Perhaps only two to four per cent (2%-4%) of the population still has to produce error-free writing. This reduces the significance of writing; and in an audio-visual world, there is simply no longer the focus on it that there used to be.

Yet learning French — especially written French — is a matter of concentration. He uses a lot of re-reading and reviewing of each

other's and the student's own work. Students are challenged to compare papers, work through successive phases of enriching one's writing, or three or four steps in producing a text. Toupin allots marks for spelling, the basic idea or desired style, the visual quality of the presentation and respecting the deadline.

The relationship between teacher and student

The teacher's approach to teaching must be consistent with his or her personality, self-possession and command of the subject taught. If a teacher is under stress, a student detects it the minute he or she walks into the classroom and this can have very major consequences on how well he or she learns. There is absolutely no point in shouting or getting angry. Discipline has to be understood without being abusive, so that the student himself or herself appreciates it. Toupin points out that there is a way of asking for an getting something. You can't be too demanding, or the students will feel incapable or replying. *"But when I require something, I want to get it!"*

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Students having problems

Where Toupin teaches, supplementary classes are given over lunchhour. He thinks that these classes should be given greater importance, and that the best way to do this would be to incorporate them into the regular schedule of classes. The main problems encountered by his students are grammatical homophones, verb forms, agreements (singular-plural, verbs, etc...), vocabulary and spelling. Diagnostic tests (one in the first three years of high school, and another for the last two years) consisting of "fill-in-the-blank" dictations are used to screen for the kind of help that is needed here.

The general syllabus of the 1970s

Within the framework of the general syllabus of the 1970s, I could have my students read for a full period of one cycle (6 or 9 days). I would ask them to make five comparisons. They could identify the comparisons, but the

general syllabus did not say what was to be done with them. We worked by themes, but the syllabus did not specify what the study of French in a theme involved. The students learned to collect their ideas and knowledge on a given theme; but as far as the language itself went, it was another story.

The new syllabuses

Before the introduction of the new syllabuses, expressing one's feelings had no place in process of learning French, at least not in the general syllabus. The new syllabuses introduced the possibility of doing so. But the best thing about them is the directive approach they take and the clear goals they set for learning the language, literary genres and the quality of the related teaching aids, notably in defining the work to be produced. Previously, it was all left up to the teacher's initiative, which meant that there were tremendous variations in the kind of teaching students got. We received the teaching aids by the second year of the new syllabus, in contrast to the situation with the general syllabus when we arldy received any teaching resources at all. There was a period of transition and choices to be made about the new resources. Nonetheless, the teacher still has to adapt them to his or her personality and groups of students. You will never get anything across if the student does not like the teacher. The teacher is the key to getting the student to like the subject matter.

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PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL CEGEPS

By **Claudette Larouche** and **Lionel Couture**,
Cégep André Laurendeau

We need to have a better understanding of the new population of "migrant" students whose attendance at Cégep André Laurendeau has risen significantly, so that we can adapt our various student services and teaching methods accordingly.

An increase in the number of allophone and Haitian students at

André Laurendeau has caused problems related to human relations, values, attitudes, etc., as well as those of learning and teaching.

Several difficulties had already arisen, and it was hard for all of us — regardless of our role as professionals, administrators, professors, support staff or students — to discern the causes of these multi-faceted problems.

A few accusations of racism began circulating... were they warranted?

We were no longer on familiar ground in our work milieu. How were we to deal with the unknown? The first thing we had to do was to get a better grasp of the situation.

The Commission Pédagogique mandated a new committee to pinpoint the problems brought about by rapid changes in the student body.

Background

It is clear that the vast majority of students at Cégep André Laurendeau are French-speaking Québécois, although other minorities are readily found: Haitians, Asians, Latin Americans. A study conducted in the fall of 1986 (in a Français I course) gave a more detailed profile, as shown in the following rough figures:

French-speaking	
Québécois:	80.0%
Haitians:	7.5%
Asians (mainly	
Vietnamese):	3.0%
Europeans:	3.0%
Latin Americans:	1.5%
Other minorities:	5.0%
TOTAL:	100%

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Problems

Generally peaking, there is a high failure and drop-out rate among minority students, and many feel rejected by their milieu. At Cégep André Laurendeau, a study carried out by the "allophone" sub-committee in the fall of 1984 revealed the following data:

- Such students have different values and ways of thinking.
- They have difficulty integrating and making use of available resources.
- Their knowledge of the lan-

guage used in school is seriously lacking.

In short, they are generally not well integrated and have serious problems with the language, in addition to being culturally different.

Are "allophones" who are poorly integrated systematically discriminated against? Are they victims of racist attitudes? The answer is not simple.

We cannot automatically assume, at any rate, that minority groups will find themselves in a situation of harmonious coexistence with the majority, or that there will be peace among the minority groups themselves.

Basic Attitudes

1. Some people maintain that newly-arrived groups should assimilate completely with the majority, and eat, dress, and talk "like everybody else". With this approach, even the fight against racism constitutes an attempt to eliminate differences so as to make everyone "alike".

The problem with this "assimilationist" approach is that it tries to eliminate cultural differences and denies the fact that even after several generations, a Québécois of Vietnamese or Haitian descent is still a Québécois of Vietnamese or Haitian descent. It is utopian to try to erase these differences, even under an American-style "melting pot" of cultures.

2. Others recognize that in terms of private life, new arrivals have a right to their own culture, way of living, eating habits, etc., but must act "just like anybody else" when they step outside their front door. This is the multicultural approach that we heard so much about in the sixties and seventies.

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3. Finally, others say that we cannot ask minority cultures to renounce their identities and "melt themselves down" into the culture of the majority. What is needed is a genuine exchange of ideas and experiences, where minority cultures move closer to the majority and vice versa. This is an intercultural approach, which requires an open mind and receptive attitudes about what others can give us despite

any differences which may at first be disheartening. Working to develop a more open attitude is one way of renewing the fight against racism in a more effective way; if all cultures can be enriched, no one culture will then be able to lay claim to an innate superiority or impose itself on the others.

In our view, this approach should be proposed as a basis for any concrete measures, if steps are to be taken to do more than just talk. We must bear in mind that different cultures are but diverse expressions of the human experience, and are of interest to all human beings. It's not very hard to be drawn by the "joie de vivre" of many Haitians, for instance, or the diligence shown by many Vietnamese.

Survey on Racism and Discrimination (Winter '87)

An informal survey on racism and discrimination at Cégep André Laurendeau was conducted by its intercultural committee in January 1987. (It was not intended as a scientific study.)

A clear explanation of the purpose of the survey was given, along with a definition of racism and discrimination.

Almost 600 students in Français 2 (winter '87 session) and approximately forty teachers participated in the study. The collected data was compiled from a single bloc, i.e., by grouping the teachers' responses and those of the students.

The sample was made up of 631 respondents who started off by indicating their native culture:

French-speaking	
Québécois	84.9% (536)
Haitian	4.6% (29)
Latin American	2.2% (14)
Asian (Far East)	2.9% (18)
Other	5.4% (32)

It should be noted that there is a lower percentage of minority groups than that shown in a study done at the beginning of the autumn session. This is due particularly to the very high failure rate among students in Français 1 whose native culture was other than Québécois (especially students from Haiti and southern parts of Asia).

Are Certain Groups Discriminated Against?

— According to 27.8% of the participants, discrimination hardly ever occurs.

— According to 42.3%, discrimination does exist, but is a rare phenomenon.

It should be noted that, while 63% of the French-speaking Québécois felt that discrimination does indeed exist, their perception was shared by a much higher percentage of students of Haitian descent: 90% replied "yes".

Discrimination

When asked whether they had been witness to concrete acts of discrimination, 69 participants said "no"; the rest were grouped as follows:

2.1%yes, directed against me personally

6.8%yes, directed against a friend or acquaintance

19.8%yes, directed against a person I didn't know.

In all, 30% of the sample (181 participants out of 631) felt that this represented a serious injustice: in general, students said that discrimination was more often practiced in the cafeteria and classroom than elsewhere in the school.

Racism

According to almost half the participants in the survey (49%), racist behaviour is a rare occurrence; one-third (34.5%) felt that it occurs frequently (31%) or very frequently (3.5%).

However, if we study the responses collected from respondents of Haitian origin, the percentage of those seeing racist behaviour as a frequent or very frequent occurrence rises to 45%.

Respondents mainly attribute racist behaviour to students (75%), far more so than to teachers (9.4%) or non-teaching staff (6%).

As for the frequency of racist incidents, respondents' answers have to be examined more closely on the basis of their experiences.

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Despite the fact that of those subjected to discrimination, one out of four (23%) thought this was a rare phenomenon, the tendency to see discrimination as a marginal phenomenon increased with one's distance from the problem (35% of

those who were witnesses but not victims, and 44% of those who had not witnessed anything...). In other words, the less exposure one had to racist behaviour, as either victim or witness, the greater the chance of seeing racism as a marginal phenomenon.

Solution

In reply to the question, "Whom would you prefer to go to if...?", barely 12% indicated "the administration" or "a department head".

Three-quarters of the participants indicated their preference for one of the two solutions below:

35.2%: a committee in charge of handling complaints concerning discrimination or racism;

39.0% a competent person (or persons) to advise you so that you will be able to find a solution to the problem.

Those who suffered discrimination ('yes, directed against me personally') asked twice as often for assistance as for the chance to voice their complaint to a committee.

Involvement

In view of this problem, individuals' involvement is directly linked to their experiences.

Nearly 70% of the respondents had witnessed no acts of discrimination; accordingly, 62.3% did not wish to get involved.

Nevertheless, 28% of the respondents wanted to get involved, or at least take part, in extracurricular activities.

A few people mentioned (in "other responses") that they would make an effort not to act in a discriminatory way.

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POLICY FOR WELCOMING MINORITY STUDENTS*

CONSIDERING

That it is essential to have a general atmosphere at the college which provides people with the peace of mind they

* Translated from the French: "Politique d'accueil pour les étudiantes et étudiants des communautés culturelles".

need in order to develop and take full advantage of the services thus offered;

CONSIDERING

That for this to be achieved, people must first know themselves and be open to the group;

CONSIDERING

That knowledge about people increases with knowledge about the societies which shape them, and that any interaction between the individual and society is a circular rather than hierarchical process;

CONSIDERING

That any form of racism or sexism at a college is unacceptable under the principle of equal rights;

CONSIDERING

That in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, discrimination is prohibited on two (2) grounds:

a) social (ethnic origin, sexual preference, marital status, religion, political convictions, social status, language);

b) biological (physical appearance, sex, pregnancy, age, handicap)

The college must advocate respect for these rights, within the scope of its influence.

Steps toward greater collective well-being cannot be taken without a well-structured approach and set of guidelines. For this reason, the college has opted for the present policy based on an intercultural approach.

An intercultural approach requires an open mind and a receptive attitude towards what others can give us. It calls for real changes in which minority cultures would move closer to the majority and vice versa. As a result, if all cultures can be enriched, no one culture will be able to lay claim to an innate superiority or impose itself on the others.

Welcoming policy

The objectives of the policy are:

- to assert the college's openness towards students from other cultural backgrounds;
- to further their integration within the Cégep
- to help them succeed in school
- to promote an intercultural approach among students and other interested parties.

This would involve a series of concrete measures.

1. Training

- Language training for any "allophone" students who need it.
- Training teachers and other staff members in an intercultural approach.
- Intercultural education for all students.

2. Services Offered

- Establishing a learning-assistance program.
- Taking into consideration the particular needs of this clientele within the Student Services programs (financial assistance, guidance and psychology, group dynamics, etc.).

3. Committees

- Support for existing committees
- ethnic committees (AGECAL)
- intercultural committees (Commission pédagogique)
- "Cégep-rencontres" (Student Services)
- Setting up a committee on discrimination.

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The Role of Various Bodies

Role of Teachers and Departments:

- make students more aware of what the various cultural communities have to offer them
- see to it that intercultural education is integrated in the classroom
- publicize available resources.

Role of the Commission pédagogique:

- evaluate how well the welcoming policy's objectives have been fulfilled.

Role of Educational Services:

- coordinate resources and activities set up under the policy (eg. professional development, counselling services).

Role of Student Services:

- sensitize students to the positive input of various cultural communities in the school, etc.
- set up a program of intercultural activities
- adapt services in order to take into account the needs of students from different communities.

Role of Committees:

Ethnic Committees:

- combat racism
- further the integration of students from various ethnic minorities
- organize intercultural activities to help participants learn more about different cultures.

"Cégep-rencontres":

- participate in activities to welcome new students and facilitate their integration.

Intercultural Committee:

- promote intercultural relations with all those involved
- carry on further study of an intercultural approach.

Committee on Discrimination:

- provide information on what is meant by discriminatory behaviour, and propose a code of ethics
- ensure that help will be given to those concerned
- handle complaints concerning discrimination*.

Sub-Committee on Language One (1) complementary course (compulsory):

- 4 groups planned
- 3 intensive weeks in August
- group of 22 students

Performa

(university training for a certificate in Educational Psychology):

- collaborated with Ms Lise Dallaire
- pedagogical advisor
- discussion on interculturalism
- guest speakers or participants in panel discussions: 1 Haitian student, 2 professors (Vietnamese, Haitian), 2 specialists from the "Centre Monchamin".

"Cégep-rencontres":*

- The objectives of this sub-committee were:
 - a) to help new students integrate

* The committee could operate by linking up with a "correspondent" in each department or service.

* Cégep-rencontres: This is the name of a committee which organizes all kinds of student get-togethers (eg. "happenings", encounter-type activities, etc.).

b) to improve the quality of human relations in the Cégep.

- This consisted of a buddy system where new students were teamed up with "old" ones, who shared what they knew about the milieu and the services offered. Exhibits (kiosks).

Social Aspects:

- intercultural gatherings
- meetings between new students and their "older buddies" (intercultural supper)
- survey on discrimination

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Between French-language and English-language CEGEPs, LANGUAGE IS NOT THE ONLY DIFFERENCE...

by **Mao Chambers**,
professor of mathematics,
Champlain CEGEP

Is there a difference between teaching in an English-language CEGEP and teaching in a French-language CEGEP? I began teaching in a French-language CEGEP, and now I work in an English-language CEGEP. People still tend to think that we understand things better when we are there, on the spot, involved; consequently, since I have seen both worlds from the inside, I should see the differences and therefore be able to identify them. This is why REMUE-MÉNINGS asked me to write a brief article on this question. I agreed spontaneously. Obviously, what I have to say is based on empirical findings and is not the result of any scientific research.

Almost exactly twenty years ago, I went to the CEGEP Édouard-Montpetit for the first time. I met my department head and the director of educational services (DSP), who showed me around the college. The Johnson government had just opened the CEGEP. They explained to me that the goal was to carry out a renewal of educational approaches so as to provide Québec society with the system of education that it needed.

There was a conviction at the time that the renewal of Québec's

educational system was part of the mission of CEGEP professors. This conviction could be seen as well in the demands put forward by the Fédération nationale des enseignants et enseignantes du Québec, affiliated with the CSN. And it is still reflected in our collective agreements. Contract articles on departmental prerogatives, on consulting the pedagogical committee, on the workload, and all the provisions restricting the employer's authority in teaching, are partly a result of this conviction.

When I began teaching at St-Lambert five years later, I was once again part of a new adventure. The CEGEP had just been founded. People had to become acquainted simultaneously with an institution and a power structure that were both unfamiliar. There again we gave ourselves a mission, namely to develop better teaching than the teaching we had received. We wanted to avoid subjecting our students to what we had been subjected to! At the time, we did not realize that succeeding in doing so would be a form of paying tribute to our predecessors. It implied that they had shown us what to do.

There is good reason for so much talk about burnout today. Who wouldn't be burned out after setting such ambitious goals? Especially considering that we tilted at these windmills armed only with a few degrees... This was as true for teachers in French-language CEGEPs as for those in English-language CEGEPs. However, the goal of the English-language CEGEP was grounded in its own *raison d'être*. Excellence in education was not seen as a tool required to carry out social projects or to promote national goals.

Professors in French-language CEGEPs inevitably took more interest in government policies. Many of them were part of or would later become part of the state apparatus. Others had friends or former colleagues in powerful circles.

It is appealing to try to "compare and distinguish" the two solitudes. But the image of two solitudes is misleading. All that the designation "English-language CEGEP" means is that English is the language of instruction. Because, outside the media, the

"English-speaker" does not exist: the so-called English-speaking professors are Greek, American, Indian, Egyptian, Sikh, Italian, Danish, Chinese, Czech, Vietnamese... the list could go on and on.

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Talking about two languages implies that there are only two ethnic groups. But the reality of the situation is much richer and varied than one might imagine. One colleague talks to me about the Christian Church in India, whose roots go back to the arrival of one of the twelve apostles in that region. Another survived a German concentration camp. Yet another, a Dutchman, helped Jews escape the Germans. Americans went into exile in Canada during the Vietnam War for various different reasons. Other professors have fled from East Europe countries. Arabs teach alongside Israelis. During the bombing in Lebanon, one colleague waited anxiously for an end to hostilities so as to be reunited with her fiancé.

But although we may be differentiated by language and history, we also have things in common. I have alluded to different educational missions; however, we are all convinced that there is important work to be done in teaching.

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ADULT TRAINING ISN'T YET

Definitions are conspicuously absent

It is increasingly common for young people and adults to find themselves together in the same workshops learning welding, technical design, beauty care, secretarial and business skills: in short, getting training in one of the 125 highly skilled trades taught in high school.

In vocational training, the distinction between young people and adults is breaking down. This is being described as a process of

"harmonization". (Le Devoir, 08/02/88)

The newspaper report said that "harmonization" would lead to situations in which a teacher would have to teach classes made up not only of young people and adults, but of French-speaking and English-speaking students together.

Parents are worried and are calling for an explanation. Before long, as the specific requirements of education for young people are defined, discussion will indirectly turn to the specificity of training for adults. The problem is not that young people and adults find themselves taking the same math, welding or sociology courses together. It is that over the past twenty years, the general thrust of adult education policy has remained unchanged: an emphasis on curriculum, shortcuts in learning, and scrimping on resources which are at times diverted to the main sector.

A sorry tale

All institutions are equipped with adult education services except for the Ministère de l'Éducation, which shut down its adult education department (D.G.E.A.) several years ago.

The most characteristic aspect of adult education is the conditions of its teachers: casual employee status for almost all school board staff over the past twenty (20) years; working conditions in colleges which we are all familiar with; in the universities, in response to a massive influx of adults, a no less massive use of hourly-paid professors; and lastly, for the literacy "shock troops", conditions comparable to those of daycare workers.

It is only by accident that one comes across programs actually designed to deal with aspects of life which are relevant to adults.

A few important details...

- First, the federal government has always put far more money into adult training programs in Quebec than the province has.
- Second, general training has only ever been tolerated to the extent that the subjects taught were compulsory prerequisites for vocational training, and offered the shortest way to get

such training. People could then return as quickly as possible to the ranks of the skilled workforce. With adult training programs at the federal level and a manpower program at the provincial level, this is increasingly the case.

- The legitimacy of this *modus operandi* was always couched in terms of adult students' own desire to enter or re-enter the work force as quickly as possible.

Quebec had to defend its prerequisites for general training, but in the name of what? Is there a definition of general training for adults?

There is no point in looking far and wide for an answer: a concept of general training for adults has never been proposed. Instead, regular programs are "extended" for adults who are invited to take remedial courses. Such program curricula are seen as legitimate as they provide access to vocational training. Programs thus tend to offer only prerequisite courses: French, English, math. Exemption procedures have also begun to appear in certain Cegep options, and as a means of entering university.

In Cegep, to dispel any uncertainty on this matter, course options were proposed which contained no general training whatsoever. Result: well after the FNEEQ had done so, the Conseil des Collèges began to ask itself questions about the proliferation of Cegep diplomas and — more importantly — about what the labour market had in store for adults graduating with these degrees. It was thus seen fit to take shortcuts in defining general training for adults.

As we saw earlier, the scope of adult education was to be limited to remedial courses leading to vocational training, and the key thing was to be out of work. Many adults shared this view.

But many others had a different idea of training for themselves as adults. Like us, adult students are men and women, workers, citizens, spouses, parents. They have chosen to enroll in educational activities, perhaps to complete plans they have for their lives, to get new ideas or add new dimension to their lives, with or without specific work in mind. Even when their studies are related to a very

immediate objective (such as settling a question or problem, learning new job skills, seeking advancement), the whole fabric of adult life is involved in the learning process. But the curriculum material deals only with those dimensions which are seen as politically neutral. This educational deficiency should be described as a "learning gap".

No one at the helm?

The 1980s had nonetheless kicked off with a newly-formed task force (Commission Jean) whose work was to be central in bringing adult education out of the shadows.

However, the Commission hadn't even handed in its report when the adult education budget was reduced, leaving just about enough to cover the cost of pencils and erasers. After that, the first significant move was to let the D.G.E.A. go up in smoke so as to "re-deploy" the ashes to the regular educational structures.

In 1983, the Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation reminded the Minister of his duties in a brief statement:

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"The changes to be enacted in the adult education system, the Ministère de l'Éducation, and the school boards and colleges will not have any meaning unless four principles are upheld, if not reinforced.

These principles are among the ones most vigorously defended by the majority of groups and individuals at the Commission Jean hearings:

- adult education open to the entire population, according to specific public criteria;
- the right of adults to regular educational services and to expanded services designed to suit their particular needs;
- the specificity of adult education, in both pedagogical and administrative terms;
- input by adult students when defining their educational needs." (translation)

The internal logic of these criteria was such that the government found them difficult to accept as a whole, and only some aspects were supported. So, for instance,

the orientations and action plan made public in 1984 in no way endorsed the fourth principle, which was the one providing general coherence in terms of adult education.

This policy, according to the Director General of the Fédération des Cégeps, "sets down an important transfer of powers and responsibilities from the education sector to that of manpower". The author of the article then added, "In adult education, Cégeps have become vocational training colleges. Is this a basic trend that we want to see prevail?" (Le Devoir, January 27, 1988)

This trend is one of consequences of the lack of definition of general training for adults.

We are thus forced to return to a concept of basic training:

"Basic training for everyone must make it possible to acquire knowledge, skills, and fundamental attitudes which are applicable to a variety of changing situations and remain indispensable tools for human development and self-expression."

But who will tell us what this basic training should consist of? What would be indispensable to the development and self — expression of people who, as we may recall, are workers, parents, spouses, citizens, individuals, and members of various groups?

A definition is indispensable, but the necessary elements are fragmented

From time immemorial, there have been initiatives to try to meet the needs of adult students as adults. As these experiences often reflected a social rather than individual approach, they either "petered out", operated on meager resources essentially used to promote higher academic levels ('scolarité'), or remained isolated.

Twenty years ago, for instance, TEVEC broadcast an hour and a half of educational programs every day for the adult population of Saguenay/Lac St-Jean. Half of the 90-minute period was devoted to regional socio-economic issues, and was thus linked to the realities of adult life. The project was discontinued.

In literacy, certain aspects of Paulo Freire's ideas were kept and the rest discarded. Thus, for

example, the idea of literacy as a means of acquiring new powers was endorsed — the capacity to integrate socially, go shopping without getting lost, fill out an income tax form, and in addition, ensure better access to services. Basic training? Elements of fundamental training are certainly present, but are not referred to as such; the underlying orientations are used, but only in a piecemeal way.

Training programs in "preparation to work" consist of people who, for a variety of reasons, cannot find or keep a job. Full-time training, an allowance while studying, etc. — almost as good as the army. Basic training or correction of various types of dysfunction?

One of the most popular university programs is the "certificat en animation". Tens of thousands of people have taken these courses. Among them are many teachers, for example, who thus add a new skill to their repertory; but many others simply treat this as an encounter group, good for meeting people and discovering things about themselves.

At the university level, curiously enough, studies with a focus which is relevant to the realities of adult life are conspicuously absent. Yet it is the only level where, even in qualifying courses, there is "participation in defining one's needs".

For the other adult students — those who don't go to university — there's nothing like a good job.

From the commission Jean... to liberalism

Elements of a concept of basic training have nonetheless existed for a long time. The Commission Jean's summary on adult education places such a concept at the centre of its concerns. UNESCO (Paris, 1987) recently passed a declaration on learning rights which includes the following points:

- the right to read and write
- the right to question and reflect
- the right to imagine and create
- the right to "read" one's surroundings and write history
- the right to educational resources
- the right to develop personal and collective skills.

With hindsight, it may be concluded that the work of the Com-

mission Jean made ample room for trends of the seventies based on the development of the individual. Yet, while adopted by official thinking, these considerations were not given the additional thought and attention needed to render them operational.

Parallel to the Commission's failure to impose a definition of general training and basic training was its distaste for the idea of having to translate the principle of participation into political and administrative measures.

This fundamental element was brushed aside by government authorities, leaving a free-market type of situation, with diverse needs being met in a host of different places, and each individual, through personal choices, finding his or her needs answered by whatever courses are offered — or so the story goes! Regular programs are "extended" to include adults attending remedial courses. For the other adults — those who don't go to university — there's nothing like a good job.

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Privatization in Public Education

DON'T DEPRIVE US OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS; THEY'RE TOO GOOD TO LOSE

Luc Lachapelle, Teacher at the Séminaire Salésien

With this slogan the CSRE (the regional school board in the Eastern Townships area) launched its most recent publicity campaign. The CSRE invested almost \$150,000 this year in a drive to enhance the image of public schools and increase their share of the student market.

Should it come as any surprise that, even in a period of financial restraint, a school board would launch a full-scale campaign to promote public schools? Or that Quebec's Minister of Education looks on with approval at the emergence of "honest competition" between the public and private school system? Is it surprising for the Ministère des finances to leave the possibility open of per capita funding (similar to that

used in the private school system)? We must be careful not to underestimate the situation which has prevailed these last few years with regard to students: a marked drop in student enrollment in vocational training, an ensuing surplus of personnel and, last but not least, a clear decrease in the overall number of students and an increase in the overall number attending private high schools...

This trend is even more marked in the Eastern Townships than at the provincial level, where private schools represent 17.7% of the student population. In fact, with eleven (11) private institutions in the region (six of which are concentrated in Sherbrooke) and a student population of approximately 3,900, according to the Association des Institutions d'Enseignement Secondaire (AIES), the private system would monopolize roughly 20.5% of the high school student population in the Townships.

In a context such as this, how does one resist the lure of competition? And how does one compete with a system in which "excellence" rests on a specific philosophy of education and image, which is sustained by an imposing selection process: systemic selection (96% of the private student population is in the general sector); social selection (I.Q. tests, entrance exams, support for the objectives of the education plan, etc.); and finally, economic selection (tuition — the provincial average stands at approximately \$1,000 per year)?

How does one compete with such a system, except by turning to practices which until now had been used only in private schools...?

Public schools: an all-out offensive

It is within this context that the regional school board in the Eastern Townships (CSRE) launched its offensive to RESHAPE THE IMAGE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS (using television and press to do so), and went after the private school clientele (notably via the press and through direct contacts).

It was no doubt time that public schools reacted with some degree of vitality to the kinds of criticism that had become the norm over the last few years: criticism aimed especially at public schools' weak

performance, lax discipline, lack of supervision, and more recently, lack of educational vision and a faceless quality to the education thus received. The idea of setting the facts straight through a publicity campaign didn't come about immediately... moreover, it may well be asked how public schools came to be in such a defensive position in the first place!

But the publicity campaign does more than set the facts straight. Its point is to DEMYSTIFY PRIVATE SCHOOLS... THE BETTER TO POINT OUT THEIR SIMILARITIES WITH THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS. In the same breath, the campaign asserts that "order, considered thought and coherence" are concerns shared by private and public schools alike; that all private and public schools must offer the same basic programs and follow the same education plan ('régime pédagogique'), under the same Minister. It states that academic results presented in a more realistic way would also relativize the superiority of private schools over public ones. Finally, as for the competence of teaching personnel, it is pointed out that the Ministère is the body which certifies teaching competence... for both private and public schools.

And it goes one step further TO PROMOTE ITS PARTICULAR MARK OF DISTINCTION — for which private schools laud themselves — and this is the argument that really hits home! A large part of the CSRE's campaign centers on only one of its schools (Mitchell-Montcalm), where satisfaction is expressed by students, parents and professors, emphasis is placed on artistic performance, especially in music (eg., "Last year, our students carried off 18 out of the 22 trophies at a provincial competition...") and finally, where extracurricular activities are much vaunted:

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"Examples? Winter camp in the Laurentians for graduating students, a trip to the Dominican Republic to do volunteer work of a humanitarian nature, numerous concerts and art exhibits, inter-school sports, film festivals, co-productions with local radio and television stations, participation in the funding drives of two foundations, etc. Who can top that?

Overcoming Biases against the Public School System:

BIAS #5

ARTISTIC TRAINING

We can finally say that this bias is on the way out in our school.

For example, specialists agree that the quality of musical training offered at Mitchell-Montcalm is more than adequate. Last year, our students carried off 18 out of 22 trophies at a provincial competition.

In photography, film, and video, we are not content with a brief initiation for students; to the contrary, students experiment, create, and undertake ambitious projects once they've received some solid theoretical training.

"The artistic training we received at Mitchell-Montcalm was absolutely beyond compare!" At MITCHELL-MONTCALM, we earn our reputation for excellence.

Overcoming Biases against the Public School System:

BIAS #6

"IN OUR DAY..."

In the 1970s, there was no self-control, order or discipline in the schools... the situation bordered on anarchy. But wait a minute! Times have changed, and so have schools. Today we strive for discipline, rigour, a taste for excellence, and ambition to succeed, and these are the qualities found in our schools.

For the 1985-1990 period, serious and thoughtful reflection, order, and coherence are high on the school agenda. Without these qualities, a public or private school couldn't go on.

"I went to high school in the seventies, so I know what it was like to experiment with all kinds of things. Today, I can assure you that high school has become quite demanding." (Marie-Claude Vachon, math professor at Montcalm) (Translation)
At MITCHELL-MONTCALM, it's really changed.

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Overcoming Biases against the Public School System:

BIAS #7

STAFF AVAILABILITY

Public schools are often dismissed as anonymous and impersonal places that churn out cour-

ses and are limited by a collective agreement.

The dynamic staff at Mitchell-Montcalm makes it a very special environment. Students cannot avoid participating in an activity in these schools, whether it be cultural, scientific, humanitarian, or sports-oriented. Result: students find life pleasant there. Examples? Winter camp in the Laurentians for graduating students, a trip to the Dominican Republic to do volunteer work of a humanitarian nature, numerous concerts and art exhibits, interschool sports, film festivals, co-productions with local radio and television stations, participation in the funding drives of two foundations, etc. Who can top that?

"Montcalm is a young, innovative school, one that is very dynamic and open to social activities that are educational. It is a great place for people who have initiative and like to assume responsibility." (Monique Goulet, parent of a child attending Montcalm) (Translation)

At MONTCALM, participation is inevitable.

Overcoming Biases against the Public School System:

BIAS #8

PREPARATION FOR CEGEP

We are led to think that a public school wouldn't prepare your child adequately to go on to higher learning and be successful. Today, at any rate, this is clearly untrue. Graduates from public high schools are accepted in the most demanding programs at Cegep, and each year our former students earn university degrees from all faculties.

At Montcalm, it's very important for students to acquire an effective work method. It is also a matter of pride for us that our students adapt readily to the Cegep environment, as they find it normal to learn to live with everyone.

"I'm proud to say that I went to Mitchell and Montcalm. I was well prepared for my current Cegep studies and I'm sure it will be the same later on when I study scientific research and medicine." (Chantal Viscogliosi, Cegep student enrolled in a dual program of Pure Science and Music) (Translation)
At MITCHELL-MONTCALM, proper work methods are acquired.

Public Advertisements from the Sherbrooke Catholic School Board's Campaign (1987)

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In the regions

UNIVERSITY ON THE MAP

Montreal is separated from Rimouski by 532 kilometers; 390 kilometers separate Rimouski from Gaspé; in both cases, over five hours on the road. Yet the residents of Gaspé who are taking university courses will get their degrees from the Université du Québec à Rimouski, as will the residents of St. George de Beauce.

In addition to its Rimouski campus, UQAR serves a territory extending from Lac Mégantic to Iles-de-la-Madeleine on the South Shore of the St. Lawrence, and from Tadoussac to Sept-Iles on the North Shore. In the fall of 1987, 45.5% of courses given by part-time teachers were given off the Rimouski campus. There are more than forty "sub-centres" in total, providing teaching to a clientele made up mainly of adult students. This is the "regional" mission of the Université du Québec: UQAC, UQTR, UQAH and UQAT must each make university education available to a population which is scattered over a vast territory.

The problem of education in the regions emphasizes the contradictions between the centre and outlying regions. If Rimouski is considered a "region" in relation to Montreal or Quebec City, Gaspé is a region in relation to Rimouski. The holes in the education system sometimes have a negative effect on the regions and the problem is accentuated at the sub-regional level! The gaps are felt on several levels: programmes; clientele; available resources, working conditions, etc.

The degrees of higher education

The development of the Université du Québec network has meant broader access to university education. Today, it is no longer necessary to leave your region to earn a B.A. Many UQAR students and graduates could not have gone beyond a D.E.C. if it had not been for the Université du

(Excerpt from an ad in the Tribune, Jan. 30, 1988, Section A, page 3.)

Who indeed can beat that? Perhaps private schools will want to have their say, as they are the ones being challenged. In fact, Mitchell-Montcalm shares practically the same pool of students with four private schools in Sherbrooke. It is less surprising, then, to see this public school act like a private school, publicizing its PARTICULAR MARK OF DISTINCTION (art programs and extracurricular activities, among other things). What distinguishes private schools can also apply to public schools.!

When distinction becomes the essence

When the expression of a school's or sector's distinctive character becomes its essence, it monopolizes energy and resources and diverts them from the overall activities. Thus, only students who uphold and perpetuate this distinction are likely to benefit from the system, and the others — even in a public system — will be more or less left out.

In a private school, when a student doesn't work properly, the fault lies not with the school but with the student. Would it be different in a public school concerned primarily with expressing its distinctiveness? Must we look at Louis Riel (a comprehensive high school in Montreal) for a public school's response to the question?

Finally, isn't there a risk that in demystifying private school — so as to resemble it more, after all — public school will eventually resort to the same selection practices that it had up until now denounced in the private system? And in the

Percentage of Students in Private High Schools in Relation to the Overall Population of High School Students in Quebec (General and Vocational):

76-77	79-80	82-83	85-86	86-87
10.8%	12.1%	13.7%	16.8%	17.7%

Statistics compiled from Statistiques de l'Éducation, September 1987, Direction Générale de la Recherche et du Développement

name of excellence and the demands of competition!

Overcoming Biases against the Public School System:

BIAS #1

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Recent studies show that professors are just as qualified in one system as they are in the other. The programs are exactly the same. We hear all too often that professors are more readily available or more devoted under one system. Yet grades are highly comparable and are proven to be at least equivalent.

"My children attended Mitchell and Montcalm schools and completed an excellent program. The professors have a lot to do with it." (Gérard Deshaies, parent of a child attending Montcalm)

(Translation)

At MITCHELL-MONTCALM, quality is now assured

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Overcoming Biases against the Public School System:

BIAS #2:

THE QUALITY OF SUPERVISION

The whole system of student supervision has been re-evaluated these past few years in the public schools. It is now false to assume that students are left to themselves in the schools. All parties concerned have agreed to certain regulations, with clear, firm guidelines. But everything depends on a consciously humane form of discipline.

Concretely, for instance: all students have a professor who is responsible for them; any student who is having trouble may choose a tutor; parents are notified on a daily basis if their child is absent from class, etc.

"We no longer have to worry about entrusting our children to the school. I have witnessed a genuine concern there for the welfare of our young people. It's very reassuring." (Ginette Thiffault, parent of a child attending Montcalm)

(Translation)

At MITCHELL-MONTCALM, your children are in good hands.

Overcoming Biases against the Public School System:

BIAS #3

"YOU HAVE TO PAY FOR QUALITY"

For those who pretend to offer most, this is the definitive argument. However, our students' levels of achievement are comparable, if not equal; discipline now reigns in the public schools, and it's a known fact that we offer a greater diversity of programs.

Personnel members are recognized for their competence, devotion and accessibility. A regulation dress code is enforced, which nonetheless respects students' need to express their individuality at that age. Absenteeism is monitored four times a day. Effort and excellence are encouraged and acknowledged. We group gifted children together, and are concerned with students who have learning difficulties. Musical instruments, photography equipment, video cameras, sophisticated laboratories, etc., are at the disposal of students, free of charge.

"Of course you have to pay for quality. But I don't see why I should pay double." (Georges Allard, parent of a child attending Montcalm)

(Translation)

At MITCHELL-MONTCALM, quality is already included in the cost (of our taxes).

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Overcoming Biases against the Public School System:

BIAS #4

DRUGS

There are two attitudes toward the problem of drugs: the "ostrich approach" (deny the phenomenon and get rid of the students who use drugs) and the assistance approach (recognize the problem and try to find a remedy). It doesn't take much to see which approach is more educational...

Whatever the school, your child will have to learn to come to terms with the problem of drugs. It is a social problem which affects society as a whole.

"The extent of drug abuse at Mitchell and Montcalm is no different from anywhere else. The only difference is that here, we attack the problem out in the open." (David St-Amour, student at Montcalm)

(Translation)

At MITCHELL-MONTCALM, we face the truth.

Québec's mandate. And yet, the quantity of programmes offered and the level of degrees given at the end of studies are inversely proportional to the distance between the place where the courses are given and the major centres.

The Université du Québec à Rimouski gives only two Ph. D. programmes and six Master's programmes. A student from Rivière du Loup who wants to continue studies in geography will have to become an exile. After earning a B.A. from Rimouski, he or she must go to Quebec City or Montreal to study at the graduate level.

At the off-campus centres, most programmes lead to practical or professional first cycle university certificates. Some sub-centres offer "made to measure" courses for specific clients, for instance "Banking Practice and the Law" given to employees of the Caisses populaires in Baie Comeau. Most courses are offered in the evening or in intensive weekend sessions, while full-session courses are given to a small number of students. The university education available to residents of so-called "distant" regions is usually a complementary education connected to their profession and sometimes involving years of part-time study.

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Resources and the quality of teaching

A first cycle certificate or B.A. obtained from Rimouski, has the same official value as a degree at the same level from a university in Montreal, Sherbrooke or elsewhere. Still, the disparity in available resources has an effect on the quality of work that can be done in "regional" universities. Françoise Patenaude, part-time biology teacher, underlines the UQAR library's inadequacy: 'It becomes nearly impossible to suggest reading to students; they must ask for most books through inter-library loans and the cost of the service puts a limit in the number of books used. The result is decreased course value, limited avenues for research and dissatisfied students and teachers.

The poor resources available to UQAR are even more of a handicap in off-campus teaching: the

available libraries are those in the CEGEP or polyvalent high school in the area. Access to adequate audio-visual or computer services is also limited.

Can we make up for these gaps by the quality of the contact between teachers and students in small classes? At UQAR the size of classes is still within the human scale; there are no amphitheatres with 200 students crowded together. The relationship between teachers and students can be direct; the teacher can act as a resource person and counsellor... when he or she can squeeze this in, between two workplaces!

Community teachers

At UQAR, as in most Quebec universities, more than half of the teaching is done by part-time teachers. When looking at off-campus teaching, the proportion is even more marked.

Furthermore, while most on-campus courses in Rimouski (fall, 1987: 73%) are assigned to part-time teachers from the immediate region, less than a third of the courses (fall, 1987: 28.9%) given off-campus are assigned to part-time teachers who live near the workplace. In other words, in more than half the cases (fall, 1987: 53%), a part-time teacher must travel to his or her work.

Availability of work for part-time teachers is thus made possible at the cost of isolation and travel fatigue. A teacher is available to give his course and counsel students between two bus trips. Active involvement is difficult for a teacher who cannot participate in the life of the department or the university, and cannot establish relationships and follow-up with students and other teachers or professors. Moreover, even part-time teachers who live near work often have another full-time job and, like outside part-time teachers, they find it very difficult to be present and get involved. The availability of a university education to residents of outlying areas is thus made possible at the cost of reduced contact with teachers.

In summary

Fewer programmes, restricted access to teachers and resources, over-tired teachers: the "regional" university appears to be the poor

cousin of the institutions in major centres...

And yet, through the education offered to residents of distant regions, who would otherwise have to leave home to study; through local stimulation, through the employment offered to professors and part-time teachers, the "regional" university appears to be an essential agent for development...

It remains to be seen whether the Quebec government and Quebec universities will know how to play their cards right, to assure that university students and teachers in the "regions" have adequate conditions for work and study, which is the guarantee of quality education.

Marie Bélisle

Part-time teacher, UQAR

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HIGHER EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE: A FORM OF ALIENATION?

The availability of Remue-ménages has allowed teachers to communicate their concerns to their colleagues. As members of institutions, we are confronted with the contradictions in a system in which we are both accomplices and victims. Our youthful optimism often prevented us from seeing these contradictions, and if we did see them, we hoped to overcome them with our confidence and energy. Today, we are somewhat uncertain and depressed. It is time to review the meaning of our profession. Before we can hope to find solutions, even partial ones, we need a clear analysis of reality.

The following article examines the reasons young people study and want to attend university rather than receive technical training. The myths surrounding university education alienate many young people. This alienation, to which we all contribute, is one of the main sources of our dissatisfaction.

The typical route

In our society, the value of a university degree is broadly recognized (without regard to the

intrinsic value of education). It is thought that graduate degrees mean better social standing, a more secure income and a more comfortable job. As a result, many young people are content to "progress" through the school system, even if they are indifferent or allergic to educational values. They go on without asking whether there are alternatives that would better suit their interests or capabilities and would allow them to find a satisfactory place in the labour market. This often means aiming for passing grades and dropping subjects that require a sustained effort (i.e. natural science and mathematics).

Thus they often find themselves in one field rather than another, not by choice but by elimination. This is often the case with students in the social sciences.

Two routes

Normally two kinds of interests should lead to studying the social sciences. First, those who hold a graduate degree wish to do "research" in their discipline. Here are some of the characteristics of pure researchers according to the Strong-Campbell test of interests, "Solving abstract problems gives them a great deal of satisfaction... They prefer intellectual activity to concrete achievements... They are not particularly interested in working with other people". Thus, certain people with degrees in the social sciences are scientific intellectuals.

The second type of interest that can lead to the social sciences is an interest in helping others. It can be found in social workers, psycho-educators, special education teachers, etc. who like their work. This is how the authors of the Strong-Campbell test describe the ideal helping professional: "The subjects are sociable, trustworthy, humanistic, and concerned about other people's fate. They can express themselves easily and get along with others. They consider themselves enthusiastic, popular; they are doers and good leaders."

Of course, some people can have both interests. These people come close to the ideal model of a college teacher. But the question for me is how many of our social science students have at least one of these two kinds of interests? (Since the vast majority of social

science students are women, from now on I will use the feminine gender).

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Scientific Interests

Every time I give a course on experimental psychology, I ask my students to take the Strong-Campbell interest test. Here is what I have found over the past few years: a minority of my students (10%) have social scientific interests, i.e. they have the interests of graduate students in the social sciences. My students are typically less interested in scientific research than the average educated person.

Practical interests

Almost half of my students have the interests of special education teachers, social workers or animators. However, they are not all interested in studying. The test allows us to measure people's interest in studying and shows that many students have none. They would surely be happier in a course on social techniques rather than in a university degree programme.

The other half of my students show a variety of interests (unrelated to extended study): they have much in common with farmers, estheticians, secretaries, nurses, dental hygienists, opticians, business women, restaurant managers, real estate brokers, army technicians, policewomen, etc. (Last winter several students showed a strong interest in military activities. Could this be due to the great acting by Sigourney Weaver in the movie *Aliens*?)

In total, 10% of my students in social sciences show they have interests that could lead them to a Master's in the social sciences. An undergraduate university degree in an applied area of the social sciences could be envisaged by 25%. Another 20 to 25% could aim for a technical course in social sciences, because they reject the academic world. Forty to fifty per cent of my students would therefore benefit from a radical change in career orientation.

Indifference

But these students seem indifferent to their orientation process. They seem to feel that the level of the degree they obtain is more

important than the type of qualifications it confers. In financial terms they are completely wrong. The magazine "Recherches sociographiques" recently published an article on the value of a college education "la rentabilité des études collégiales" (1). It says "The profitability of a professional DEC is excellent, but when someone with a general DEC does not go to university, neither she nor society has made a good investment." (p. 481) In 1980, a man between 25 and 34 who had a general DEC did not earn any more than a high-school graduate, i.e. \$16,500 a year. However, someone with a B.A. did not earn more than someone with a professional DEC, i.e. about \$21,500 (p. 490).

A woman with a general DEC earned \$10,900, while one with a high-school diploma earned \$9,700 (12% difference). A woman with a B.A. earned \$14,400, while a woman with a professional DEC earned \$13,200 (only 9% difference). These figures show that a well-chosen professional DEC is more profitable than a university degree chosen by chance.

It can be argued that the general education or level of culture obtained from a graduate degree is more important than financial considerations. This is no doubt true for students who get involved in their studies, but more than half of students in the social sciences are allergic to intellectual pursuits. They look upon academic demands as a senseless ritual which they must appear to respect in order to obtain passing grades.

The following situation occurs too frequently in high school. Teachers profess to having strict standards. In spite of these claims, students do not do the required work; do not understand the subject matter and they expect to fail... yet they get a passing grade.

(1) François Vaillancourt and Irene Henriques (1986), "la rentabilité des études collégiales", *Recherches sociographiques*, Volume XVII, no. 3, pp. 481-493. Also refer to two articles written by teachers at the Collège Edouard Montpetit, "Tension et tendances dans les cégeps d'aujourd'hui" by Louise Corriveau (sociology) and "Les étudiants en sciences humaines" by Louise Lacour-Brossard (history).

From this experience, they learn that passive resistance will quite often allow them to pass. Even without doing the required work, and without understanding the subject matter, they have a reasonable chance of getting passing grades.

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Passing grades: a trap

Four or five times out of six, most of the students in social sciences in CEGEPs get passing grades (Recherches sociographiques, p.458), and herein lies the very trap of passing grades. As long as the student passes most courses, she feels she is progressing and can avoid questioning her orientation. Even though her studies are kept to a minimum, even though the courses seem to be without substance, unintelligible and irrelevant, even though she is dying of boredom and has no idea where she is going — she is usually in class, sitting there in front of us, her teachers, and staring at us.

Dropping out

Many will ultimately drop out. "Close to 50% of students who start their college studies in social sciences do not finish them" (ibid. p. 461). Only 8% of those admitted in social sciences obtain a college diploma in other fields (ibid. p. 463). Thus, for almost 50% of those admitted, college becomes a place you learn how to fail and how to quit.

And yet, many of those who fail have interests that correspond to technical occupations or trades. If well oriented, they would have aimed for a career that would, in most cases, have allowed them to obtain an occupational identity and earn a decent living. But they are victims of the myth of higher education for everyone, even if their gut reaction is against academic values.

What happens to those who obtain their DEC in social sciences? A small number continue, and complete their university studies. Is it an exaggeration to say that out of a hundred students who begin CEGEP, only twenty get a B.A.? For 80%, social sciences were a false start in life, an experience in which they got more and more bogged down.

Waste

These false starts are very expensive: "The cost of post-secondary education (not university)... is now over a billion dollars." (ibid. p. 360). Since there are 155,000 students in CEGEPs and private colleges (p. 357), the cost per student is at least \$6,452 a year. If a typical student spends 900 hours in class yearly, each classroom hour costs \$7 (\$21 per three-hour class). In today's climate of budget cuts, it is ironic that vocational guidance services have been cut. On the one hand, a few dollars are saved, while on the other we spend a great deal of money to produce a large number of failures.

Can we at least say that most teachers are happy? This is doubtful, as seen in "L'école méprisée" by Robert Lagassé (2) and "Tant qu'il y aura des profs" by Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman (3). It is difficult to teach a group when most are potential drop-outs. Furthermore, because the majority are not interested in the subjects, they do not study enough to retain anything they can use in the future. These people are wasting their time, and we are wearing ourselves out dragging them along.

In summary, I think that a partial solution might be to give increased status to technical and professional education, as pointed out by Hamon and Rotman. One thing is certain, students will not become more educated citizens nor will they be happier just because they were kept at their desks for a longer time.

Philippe Thirias,

Teacher at Cégep Edouard Montpetit

(2) A Quebec book distributed by Québec Livre. The author, a former high-school teacher, tells of his experiences and why he thinks public schools are in such bad shape.

(3) 1984. Editions du Seuil, collection Points Actuels, A76. This book shows that things are no different for our French cousins. It also contains instructive statistical data.

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Fédération nationale des enseignants et enseignantes du Québec (CSN)
1601 Delorimier
Montréal, H2K 4M5
Telephone: (514) 598-2250

Editorial committee:

Louise Laforest
Luc Latraverse
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Contributors:

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Typesetting

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Layout

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Translation

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