



Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers
l'Association provinciale des enseignantes et enseignants du Québec

Reform of the History Program in Quebec

Brief Prepared by the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers in Response to the Consultation Held by the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

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Introduction

The Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT) represents the 8,000 teachers in English public schools in Quebec. QPAT has prepared the following response to the consultation regarding the history program.

There is general consensus that the secondary III and IV history program needs to be reviewed. However, QPAT thinks that the short timeframe for a consultation and the even shorter timeframe for the tabling of the expert committee's recommendations make it impossible to properly account for the views of the various actors in the educational milieu; the current process does not seem designed to receive and consider input, but rather comes across as a *pro forma* consultation at best. The QPAT response cannot be complete in the way that QPAT would want; nevertheless, QPAT submits the following comments and recommendations.

Structure of the Program

The consultation document raises the point of using a "national framework" within which to teach history. This concept is problematic as it is not clearly articulated. The "national framework" could provide the basis for structuring the course if this means examining the political, territorial, social and economic evolution of all those who have occupied the space that is today Quebec and Canada without providing a singular interpretation or being designed around a dominant pre-conceived singular theme. If such is the case, it must be made explicit and clear. QPAT would not accept a program that favours one political interpretation over another or that examines history through only one point of view.

Fundamentally, the history program must present a balanced, objective, factual view of the sequence of events of Quebec history and overall Canadian history. It must also include the evolution and role of all various groups throughout its history. Ultimately, history must provide a telling of a story that allows the individual hearing the story to come to his or her own conclusions about its meaning. The program itself must not seek to inculcate or direct the student to a predetermined orientation or conclusion.

The history program should be presented in a chronological structure over two years in secondary III and IV. The current structure of using the second year to explore themes tends to confuse students and leaves them with the impression that they have already covered the content. It also demands an approach that is not best suited to the typical student: given that for most students this will be the final course that they take in history, emphasizing the historical method and continuous analysis of documents rather than providing them with a better overall understanding of what has happened in the past does not serve them well. The use of a chronological "story" also has better potential for engaging students in their learning rather than focusing on a method that few of them will ever use again or examining broad themes to which they cannot relate. Themes should still be developed; history should not be the learning of disconnected dates and facts. However, these themes can be explored within the chronological timeline approach and the examination of notable individuals, events and movements. For most students, this approach is more appropriate considering their natural stage of development, particularly for the large proportion of special needs students integrated into regular classes.

Given that this re-structuring of the course will still leave the program with more time than was the case with the pre-2006 program, it will allow for greater development of pre-existing topics and the addition of some new areas. For example, the two year structure would provide more time to deal with historical events in Canada after the Second World War that are not limited to questions of Quebec's relationship with the rest of the country. In addition, it would also allow for the development of certain key concepts in a module on geography, without redeveloping a geography course as such, that are essential to understanding the evolution and development of Quebec and Canada.

Focusing on a chronological, factual approach does not mean that there needs to be an evacuation of the competency approach inasmuch as competencies represent the ability to develop critical thinking. Within the chronology there should be occasions for students to be exposed to the different perspectives on the topic at hand; they should also have opportunities over the course of the two years to analyze and develop their own views on topics. This approach will provide every student with the same objective foundation and starting point; the competency for this course should reflect this orientation. Competency 2 should be the focus of the course; what occurs in competencies 1 and 3 is a natural by-product of what happens in developing competency 2, but they do not need to be their own areas of focus. This shift in emphasis from explicit elements of historical method and citizenship to content and chronology is developmentally appropriate for the great majority of students, while allowing them to gain a long-term understanding of history that is more appropriate to them.

Evaluation

The consultation document makes relatively little mention of evaluation, which is problematic: any program is inevitably framed by the evaluation of learning that is expected of it. To propose major changes in the approach to a program without having just as carefully considered the evaluation of learning will leave teachers and students in the lurch. In QPAT's view, the evaluation of students should be focused on an age appropriate mastery of the chronological narrative. Evaluation should also allow for the development of age appropriate critical thinking and analysis skills related to history. Beyond this, there are many questions regarding evaluation that need to be answered, but for which there is insufficient basis for a response. For example, it is unclear whether a student who did not pass secondary III would have to repeat the year or whether that student would be placed in secondary IV regardless since it is considered one program. As noted above, the timeline and format of this consultation do not allow QPAT to formulate a proper response.

With respect to the final exam, the observation has been made in the past that students who are good readers and writers do not need to know much history to pass the exam. While this tendency may be lessened compared to what the case was with a number of prototype exams in social studies, it needs to be stressed that an exam in history should be examining knowledge and understanding of history, not language skills; the writing components of the exam must reflect this.

Concern Specific to the English Sector

Any new history program must have proper documents, materials and textbooks available in English prior to implementation. During the implementation of the reform, the English sector students were at

a disadvantage in this regard. It is unacceptable for the English sector that this happen again. Students in the English sector are expected to learn the same curriculum as the students in the French sector just as teachers in the English sector are expected to teach the same curriculum as their colleagues in the French sector; they should have the same tools at the same time as the French sector.

Summary and Recommendations

QPAT thinks that the consultation timeframe is too short to examine every issue adequately. Despite this, QPAT recommends that:

1. The program must be objective and balanced and not built around one defining idea;
2. The program should have a chronological structure over two years as this is better suited to students;
3. The focus of the program should be the political, social, economic and geographic evolution over time of the different peoples who have occupied territory of Quebec and Canada;
4. Given that the course is now taught over two years, additional topics in areas such as essential geography and Canadian history post Second World War should be included;
5. The competencies should be rethought to allow for students to focus on essential elements in the chronology and to use competency 2 as the focus of the program while understanding that what is in competencies 1 and 3 occurs naturally within the teaching of the course;
6. Evaluation should be based on an age-appropriate understanding of the chronological narrative;
7. The final exam must be certain to examine knowledge of history as opposed to language skills;
8. Documents, materials and textbooks must be available in English prior to the implementation of a new program.