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ACCOMPANYING EVALUATION OF LEARNING
IN QUEBEC SCHOOLS

TO SUPPORT LEARNING AND TO RECOGNIZE COMPETENCIES

Booklet 1: Relevance and Need for
Accompaniment for the Evaluation of Learning

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Louise Lafortune

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The series of six booklets that make up the document *Accompaniment of the Evaluation of Learning: To Support Learning and to Recognize Competencies* is part of the Accompaniment-Research-Training Project for the Implementation of the Quebec Education Program. This series of booklets is meant as a tool for reflection and intervention for the education community. It serves to further the understanding of certain concepts relating to the Quebec Education Program, to the evaluation of competencies, and to the development of coherent practices to accompany evaluation as a support for learning and recognition of competencies.

Note : We welcome your comments at the following address:
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Booklet 1

The Need and Relevance of Accompaniment in the Evaluation of Learning

Evaluation of learning is a complex subject. The complexity of evaluation is due to various factors, and increases when examining the evaluation of competencies. Complexity is further increased when examining the evaluation of competencies from a socio-constructivist perspective. Traditionally, evaluation is seen as an individual, professional task, not one where we would generally invite others to review our judgments regarding student work. As professionals, we do not typically take into account the opinions of others who are concerned with evaluation (students, parents, or colleagues...). Particularly within the context of learning cycles, this notion of evaluation needs to be rethought and changed if we want students to be evaluated according to an end-of-cycle assessment. When examining a student's academic progress over two-years, where at least two people are involved in a regular and significant way, evaluation ought to be done in a team. When exercising professional judgment in the evaluation of student progress, accepting feedback from others becomes necessary. This is essential as evaluation judgments regarding student academic successes have significant effects that can sometimes extend far beyond the school career.

Within the framework of education reform, significant changes to evaluation are prescribed. Needless to say, it is necessary to accompany school staff, and in particular teachers, who evaluate students.

Accompanying evaluation is an approach that, in addition to training, also includes monitoring and continuity in content which takes place over time. For some accompanists, this also means being involved in their own accompaniment training so that they can be prepared to help the school personnel who make evaluation judgments. This approach may seem complex ; however, it ensures that judgments are thought-out collectively, reflect the prescribed changes, help students in their learning, and ensure the rigor, coherence and transparency required for the fairness that students have a right to expect.

The relevance and the need for accompaniment in the evaluation of learning merit discussion. The first section of this document focuses on the concept of accompaniment. By describing from the outset the objectives of the accompaniment perspective, it is possible to illustrate how such an accompaniment is suitable to the evaluation process. The second, third and fourth sections of this document examine

the complexity of the evaluation process, particularly when connected to socio-constructivist accompaniment methods. The fifth section is dedicated to the “professional” task of evaluation. This section introduces the theme of professional judgment in relation to accompaniment. It establishes that professional judgment is developed and exercised with rigor, coherence and transparency through an accompaniment process. Though all methods that serve to evaluate competencies cannot be included in this first booklet (see Booklet 6 on the Methods for Accompanying Evaluation), the sixth section describes the distinct characteristics of the methods for accompanying evaluation. The seventh section of this booklet describes the way a competent professional acts with respect to evaluation. Finally, the eighth section outlines elements to be considered when selecting methods of evaluation. Throughout this document, questions for reflection are suggested for personal reflection on the concepts presented and about one’s own accompaniment, as well as to increase the repertoire of strategies for encouraging reflection in those we accompany.

1. The notion of accompaniment for the evaluation of learning

When it is time to implement a prescribed change, accompaniment cannot simply take on any shape or form ; it must provoke reflection in and on the action to ensure continuity and coherence with the educational reform’s orientations. This is the case for the Accompaniment-Research-Training Project, which not only aims for enhanced training through accompaniment, but also for continuous follow-up and support. Thus, those accompanied will, in turn, be able to accompany other school staff in the implementation of the QEP. In particular, the accompaniment of evaluation implies an understanding of the orientations that concern evaluation (as found in: Reference Frameworks, *the Basic School Regulations*, *the Policy on the Evaluation of Learning*, *the Scales of Competency Levels*, the Quebec Education Program) as well as the methods for applying those orientations.

Training which targets competency based evaluation practices is part of ongoing professional development, which can take diverse forms. Professional development can be in the form of training sessions (moments when a person provides a particular expertise for a limited and relatively short period of time, either a few hours or a few days), or in the form of accompaniment intended to provide long-term support (a number of days spread out over the course of a year or more) which includes elements of training. Accompaniment can support the process of reflective practice and a renewal of procedures by stimulating objectivity, as well as the questioning and analysis of one’s own pedagogical actions. This process falls within the scope of a socioconstructivist perspective if the process provokes reflective-interactions which force the questioning and confrontation of one’s educational practices and beliefs (conceptions and convictions). The process should also generate socio-cognitive conflicts which can create greater coherence or awareness of inconsistencies in educational practice, as well as the opportunity to verbalize, share and discuss those inconsistencies (for additional information, see Lafortune and Deaudelin, 2001 ; Lafortune and Martin, 2004 ; Lafortune and Lepage, 2006).

Within the framework of the educational reform, some evaluation practices are called into question, whereas others must be revised to better suit the evaluation of competencies as opposed to evaluation of fragments of knowledge or a group of skills. In this sense, accompaniment from a socio-constructivist perspective becomes a support measure for the construction of knowledge and the development of competencies for those being accompanied, in the course of interaction with their peers. Accompaniment calls for monitoring over a certain period of time (several months, and perhaps more than a year). The socio-constructivist dimension requires planning activities with the dual purpose of creating socio-cognitive conflicts, as well as recognizing such conflicts in the action. This allows those being accompanied to develop a certain detachment from their learning activities. The socio-constructivist form of accompaniment also requires a process of co-construction that enables each person to participate in the development of a shared model of understanding based on personal models of understanding (regardless of whether or not they are conscious models). This shared model of understanding will be individually reconstructed and subsequently used in each person's way of doing things (adapted from Lafortune and Deaudelin, 2001). The different roles and perspectives of the people involved in accompaniment enrich the process, which creates a kind of partnership. In addition, socio-constructivist accompaniment not only compels the implementation of a certain educational culture (Lafortune and Martin, 2004), it also necessitates the development of professional competency standards that are associated with leadership in accompaniment.

Ideas, processes, and learning and evaluation situations can be developed as a team. They are enriched by the contribution of each team member. However, a real challenge in the accompaniment process for changes in evaluation practices is “not accepting everything”. Questions, such as the ones which follow, can serve to initiate reflection on the need and the relevance for accompaniment in the evaluation of learning.

Questions for Reflection

- **How can we accompany the questioning of current evaluation practices ?**
- **How can we foster openness toward change in evaluation practices concerning the development of subject specific competencies ?**
- **How can we foster openness toward change in evaluation practices concerning the development of cross-curricular competencies ?**
- **How can we foster the acceptance of peer feedback which questions one's ideas and evaluation practices ?**
- **How can we foster an awareness regarding the importance of coherence in evaluation practices linked to the official requirements ?**
- **How can we use this awareness, or how can we uncover inconsistencies in a non-threatening manner, without generating too much resistance to change ?**

2. Evaluation: a complex subject

Evaluation of learning is a complex subject in itself. Within the framework of the educational reform, it serves two functions: 1) to support learning, and 2) to recognize competencies and account for learning. As a support for learning, this implies examining student progress in order to find ways of helping them develop their

competencies while taking into account their present level of achievement, as well as helping students develop a sense of responsibility towards their learning. To do this, self-evaluation, co-evaluation and peer evaluation are suggested. However, as these approaches are not common, they are not easily integrated into existing educational and evaluation practices. Self-evaluation can be used to get students to ask questions such as: What have I learnt ? How did I learn it ? What helped me to learn it ? However, use of these types of evaluations (self-evaluation, co-evaluation, peer-evaluation) to help students progress is more difficult. Co-evaluation is a process where students and the teacher(s) combine the results of their evaluation judgments, during or at the end of learning. How can such a sharing process be executed efficiently ? How can this be accomplished so that each student reflects upon his or her self-evaluation ? How can this be done so that there is individual reflection as well as a collective reflection on the group result ? Finally, as the name suggests, peer-evaluation implies evaluation with ones' peers. This method is little used ; yet, students are often able to recognize the strengths and limits of their peers better even than their own competencies.

Self-evaluation, co-evaluation and peer-evaluation can help to formulate judgments in evaluating students for the recognition of competencies and to report on learning. Student comments can help to refine our own observations and can help to put certain interpretations into perspective. These processes ensure rigor, coherence and transparency. Evaluations made in order to report on learning, in addition to being complex, have an influence on students' academic progress in a cycle, in their school lives, and even into their adult lives.

No matter which approaches are used, the communication of an evaluation judgment ought to be prepared and refined for students. Students will interpret the feedback received, whether it is spoken or written, and adjust their efforts, their study habits, and their attention in class, according to their interpretation. In addition, it is not only the intention or what is said that matters ; the manner in which it is said, the tone used and the explanations given are equally important. This communication has a considerable influence on parents who take their child's success to heart and who want to understand their child's progress in order to better interpret the report on learning. They often need explanations: How can we provide these explanations within the context of the evaluation of competencies ?

Questions for Reflection

- **How can self-evaluation, co-evaluation and peer-evaluation be used as a support for learning ?**
- **How can self-evaluation, co-evaluation and peer-evaluation be used for the recognition of competencies ?**
- **How can we accompany school personnel in a reflection about their use of self-evaluation, co-evaluation and peer-evaluation with respect to evaluation as a support for learning as well as for the recognition of competencies ?**

3. Evaluation of competencies: increasing complexity

Evaluation of learning as prescribed by the Quebec Education Program and the Policy on the Evaluation of Learning is based on the development of competencies. Evaluating competencies is a complex process, because competencies are developed

and evaluated in actual real-life situations. Evaluation of competencies can not simply involve answers provided to written questions on pieces of paper. Certain competencies such as “communicates appropriately” require observation of students’ oral expression. Competencies require the combined use of internal and external resources². Evaluation, therefore, consists of recognizing the resources that were put into action and the manner in which this was done. In other words, students must use their resources in new situations, where it is not possible to simply reproduce a previous procedure. Creating situations that embody this concept of evaluation is not simple ; specific conditions are required when placing students in real-life situations which will allow them to demonstrate their level of competency development. In accompaniment, we should ask ourselves what these conditions are.

Learning is a concept with a variety of meanings that have changed according to the era and to different schools of thought. This new interpretation of the evaluation of learning is situated within this context. Evaluation implies a process of development or change that is stimulating and personal to learners who then construct new representations to explain their reality. These representations are coherent and sustainable based on their perception of their environment and the interaction between their internal and external resources (Legendre, 2005).

This new notion of evaluation of learning stems from three main ideas that have influenced our concept of the evaluation of learning: evaluation of knowledge (prior to 1981), evaluation of the achievement of objectives (1980s and 1990s) and, more recently evaluation of competencies (MEQ, 2003). The QEP (MEQ, 2001 ; 2004) subscribes to the idea of the development of competencies, as well as to their evaluation. The notion of competency itself generates other concepts that affect the models of evaluation practices: mobilization, know-how, resources, etc. This notion of evaluation places an emphasis on the student’s actions while learning in a situation where they structure and internalize learning (constructivism), as well as on the social nature of learning (socio-constructivism).

Questions for Reflection

- **What methods of evaluation were most commonly used before the educational reform to evaluate students ?**
- **What do these methods serve to evaluate ?**
- **How can we accompany reflection on evaluation methods that respect the orientations of evaluation as a support for learning as well as for the recognition of competencies ?**
- **How can we popularize the current orientations of evaluation in order to facilitate parents’ understanding ?**

4. Evaluation of competencies and student participation in the creation of evaluation judgments: additional complexity

Considering that students construct their knowledge and develop their competencies while interacting with their peers, evaluation takes on a particular meaning ; it falls

² “The notion of **resources** refers not only to the students’ overall learning in school, but also to his or her experiences, skills, interests, etc.... We refer to these as internal or personal resources and they are added to a vast number of external resources that the student can call upon, such as peers, teachers, documents, etc.” (MEQ, 2001, p.5).

within a socio-constructivist perspective. This implies that students will construct their own concept of evaluation, a vision of what they want from an evaluation. Students want not only a grade or a mark, but also comments (written or oral) that will allow them to understand the evaluation judgments. They also want suggestions for how to adjust their learning, either as they are taught or for the recognition of competencies and the assessment of learning.

It is possible, even desirable, for students to participate in the preparation of the evaluation: What do they think ? How would they like to be evaluated ? How can the evaluation help their learning ? What can students gain from their participation in the evaluation (self-evaluation, co-evaluation, and peer-evaluation) ? How can we communicate evaluation judgments that support learning, that stimulate learning, and that encourage their involvement in the pursuit of learning ? Students can be informed of the evaluation criteria, but they can also provide comments or discuss them. In this way, students can be brought to understand the evaluation process, to learn to self-evaluate and to evaluate their peers, as well as to see evaluation as a support for learning and to take on their share of responsibility in this process.

Questions for Reflection

- **How can we evaluate competencies given that knowledge is constructed in interaction with peers ?**
- **How can we evaluate competencies in real-life situations, in action ?**
- **How can we accompany reflection on the evaluation of competencies from a socio-constructivist perspective ?**

5. Evaluation as a professional task

An education professional must take on the task of evaluation. This task is often perceived as an individual undertaking. However, within the context of the educational reform, having others review one's professional work is important, even essential. However, comments of colleagues on evaluation methods and judgments are not easily accepted ; they can be perceived as a criticism of one's work, and as a threat to autonomy. Yet, evaluation in cycle-teams helps to bring about judgments that are more coherent throughout a cycle and even the overall academic career (see booklet 5 on cycle-team work).

Certain characteristics emerge from the Accompaniment-Research-Training Project to indicate that a person who is exercising professional judgment is able to:

- communicate and explain his or her thoughts ;
- receive criticism, accept the opinions of others, take risks ;
- examine a problem in its entirety and in its complexity ;
- demonstrate creativity ;
- analyze a situation and synthesize information ;
- demonstrate independence of thought ;
- demonstrate an ethical sense ;
- commit to a process of reflective practice.

These characteristics illustrate that evaluation is an activity involving more than the use of tools for various situations. Adaptations are necessary. The act of evaluation requires the observation of students, of their questions, of their academic progress, of their commitment to learning, and above all, observation of the way their learning, their ability to take a critical look at their learning, their ability to discuss their learning, and their ability to self-evaluate their work are all interrelated.

Evaluation, as a professional task, implies accompaniment ; accompaniment is a demanding action that falls within the scope of a professional development process. Accompanists are thus transformed themselves by the accompaniment they implement. The culture of the environment, and of the individuals that compose it, influences the way the evaluation will be accompanied. The clash of ideas, discussion and sharing can generate conflicts and questioning ; even more so where discussions regarding evaluation are involved. Accompanists provide support while accepting that their concepts of evaluation may be called into question. They reflect on their own practice as part of their reflective role, which is evinced in all the actions of accompaniment of evaluation and in the way evaluation judgments are made. The accompanist, with others, attempts to negotiate the meaning of the changes to be made in evaluation and to reflect collectively on the means and the conditions needed to implement this change, so that it reaches the students.

Questions for Reflection

- **How can we provoke reflection in order to generate acceptance of others' opinions on one's evaluation judgments ?**
- **How can we foster reflection on the characteristics of a person who exercises his or her professional judgment ? Characteristics such as:**
 - **communicating and explaining one's thoughts**
 - **receiving criticism, accepting the opinions of others, taking risks**
 - **examining a problem in its entirety and in its complexity**
 - **demonstrating creativity**
 - **analyzing a situation and synthesizing information**
 - **demonstrating independence of thought**
 - **demonstrating an ethical sense**
 - **committing to a process of reflective practice**

6. Characteristics of methods for evaluating competencies

The evaluation methods used to evaluate competencies in a socio-constructivist perspective ought to be diverse. The characteristics of these methods include the following:

- they involve a variety of structures ;
- they aim at objectivity knowing that there will always be some subjectivity ;
- they allow an alliance between qualitative and quantitative ;
- they allow the exercise of professional judgment ;
- they assist learning for the recognition of competencies and the end-of-cycle report ;
- they show transference of learning in a variety of situations ;
- they place the students in situation where they must be in action.

These characteristics can also be linked to evaluation accompaniment methods that:

- imply work in cycle-teams ;
- encourage the development of professional judgment ;
- lead to an examination of evaluation practices ;
- imply an examination of the evaluation practices of colleagues ;
- lead to a change in practices, which implies questioning former practices.

7. A professional approach in evaluation

Evaluation of student competencies implies the development of a specific professional approach on the part of staff. Part of that approach concerns the accompaniment of evaluation and can take the form of the following general actions:

- Carrying out evaluation practices that favor the progress of a school staff's process of change, the renewal of pedagogical and professional practices within a perspective of professional autonomy ;
- Carrying out professional judgment by acting in an ethical and a critical manner.

8. Accompanying changes in evaluation: some elements (actions, methods, etc...) for consideration

In action, a professional approach to a process of change in evaluation, can be realized through:

- The accompaniment of the development and use of professional judgment, which requires a particular effort ;
- An understanding of what is to be evaluated, namely competencies ;
- Finding balance between action and reflection. In other words, knowing “what to do”, “how to do it”, and most importantly “why we do it” ;
- The emergence of a set of beliefs and a description of practices.

The methods that can be used to accompany the changes in evaluation can be summarized as follows:

- Reflective questioning concerning evaluation practices ;
- Non-judgmental feedback that fosters reflection and action ;
- Development of self-evaluation and self-observation that fit into a process of self-reflection that leads to professional autonomy.

More specific methods can be suggested ; what is important is to foster reflection on the importance of accompanying changes in evaluation practices.

Questions for Reflection

- **How useful, necessary, and essential is it to accompany the evaluation of learning ?**

- **How can the need to accompany school staff during changes in evaluation practices be made clear ?**

Another method consists in collectively understanding the reasons behind resistance to change in evaluation practices. To this end, questions can be asked regarding the signs, causes and consequences of resistance, as well as seeking possible solutions. Questions, such as the following, can serve to begin reflection on resistance to change in evaluation practices:

- Questions for Reflection*
- **What are the observable signs of resistance to change in evaluation practices ?**
 - **Why is there resistance to changing evaluation practices ?**
 - **How does resistance to changing evaluation practices differ from resistance to changing pedagogical practices ?**
 - **In what way is resistance to changing evaluation practices greater (or smaller) than the resistance to changing pedagogical practices ?**
 - **What consequences might there be to resistance in changing evaluation practices ?**
 - **What solutions could be considered to reduce resistance to changing evaluation practices ?**

Another method uses reflection on evaluation as an accompaniment process. The reflections initiated in this document essentially focus on the accompaniment of evaluation from a perspective of supporting learning and the development of competencies. One can therefore ask: how is evaluation in itself a form of accompaniment ?

Another possibility can take the shape of a collective reflection. To this end, group members could brainstorm an exhaustive list of evaluation methods, however unorthodox. They could then explain the methods listed and consider the significance of each. The individual reflection that follows serves to identify those methods that are in harmony with one's own values and those that are not, without forgetting to justify one's choices. The discussion is restricted to examining the justifications associated with each choice rather than judging the choices themselves. In this way, attention is drawn to the value of the justifications, rather than to the person associated with a choice. This is a way of better addressing the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods of evaluation discussed. This can be summarized in the following table:

List of Evaluation Methods	Meaning and Purpose of these Methods	In harmony with one's Values			Justifications
		No	+/-	Yes	

This exercise is meant to lead to the point where participants consider exploring one or two unaccustomed methods while considering evaluation as a support for learning.

In a process of accompaniment, the fundamental and instrumental values of evaluation can be discussed according to methods that serve to actualize them in

evaluation practices within a perspective of socio-pedagogical equity (see booklet 4 on socio-pedagogical equity). This can lead to confrontations, to questioning, to analyses of peer concepts and practices.

Conclusion

The content of this first document can be summed up in a few words: accompaniment of the process of evaluation from a socio-constructivist perspective is complex.

Such an accompaniment arises from the evaluation itself and from certain principles of socioconstructivism:

- Reflection on and in an action is necessary for a renewal of evaluation practices ;
- Co-construction of a collective model of practices is required ;
- Interaction with peers, colleagues, etc., which stimulates questioning, awareness, partnership and cooperation ;
- Team work that contributes to discussions on evaluation judgments that are just, equitable, open-minded, coherent, rigorous and transparent is essential.

These principles are relevant to the extent that they are transferred during subsequent actions ; the intention is to accompany school staff in the development of a process of evaluation of learning which also implies the use of reflective practice.

Other principles can be suggested to create such an accompaniment. The three following principles require the development of a “meta-observation,” which is a way of giving non-judgmental feedback that leads to action, for collective sharing and analysis. For the accompanist, these principles imply adjustments in the action, the taking of risks, and the acceptance of destabilization in others, but also in oneself.

- 1) Encourage the exchange of ideas between colleagues that can lead to confrontations, while preserving a climate of respect. This can take place by examining current evaluation practices. The practices of those being accompanied can serve as a starting point. They can be studied according to their conformity, or lack thereof, with the orientations of the educational reform. As an accompanist, one is easily tempted to accept what is proposed so as to avoid overly troubling those being accompanied ; however, this behavior does not respect the spirit of a support for learning. It is a question of finding methods which will bring out contradictions and give rise to questioning, while remaining aware that, if the imbalance is too great, resistance will automatically set in. It is also a question of reconciling accepted practice with questioning those that need to be changed or adjusted. The implementation of this principle requires a critical observation and openness to constant adjustment in the course of the accompaniment.
- 2) Highlight the richness associated with different beliefs and practices in the evaluation of learning by questioning what can be achieved through an examination of beliefs and practices. Emphasize the richness associated with

difference. This can lead to a greater acceptance of inconsistencies. At this stage, one must not shy away from a diversity of opinion ; nonetheless, it is important to insist those opinions be justified. This requires that attention be focused on the positive aspects raised, without ignoring the inconsistencies that questioning brought to light.

- 3) Develop ways of listening to arguments and to justifications. This requires knowing how to perceive what lies behind a justification. Is the justification a pretext for resistance to change or is it based on solid arguments ? No matter the nature of the justifications, they often express real fears that we must learn to listen to in order to permit any process of change.

While the process of evaluation is indeed complex, it is also attainable and achievable. To reach this objective, accompaniment is necessary because it contributes to the development of an educational culture focused on the evaluation of competencies and on accompaniment of a change in evaluation practices.

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