

CARNETS

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Democracy: Back to the Drawing Board



PHOTO: MATHIE

Several people have had the reflex, in view of the popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain, to find the democracy in which we live rather comfortable. And, let's admit it, democracy constitutes a certain bulwark against the unbridled exploitation of nearly all the resources and wealth produced by a given nation by a small oligarchy. Yet, it's worthwhile remembering that the democratic principle in our modern societies still suffers some acute deficits, which are growing, rather than shrinking. An authentic democracy enables its citizens to make enlightened choices that have a veritable impact on things. However, three cancers are more or less virulently eating away at our modern democracies, but perhaps particularly so in North America.

The first, the capacity of its citizens to make enlightened choices is founded upon their access to relevant information, which constitutes an essential prerequisite to the possibility of choosing. In the Province of Quebec, in Canada, and even more so in the United States, media concentration and the power thus placed in the hands of profit-seeking corporations that, accordingly, politically defend very special limited interests, more than seriously handicaps this access to comprehensive information. In Europe, left-wing media, founded a long time ago and able to reach a wide public, can disseminate progressive ideas. For many cultural and historical reasons, this is not the case in North America, with the result that the ordinary citizen's access to ideas other than the standard neo-liberal soup is, to say the very least, limited. Under such circumstances, how can one believe in the possibility of viable alternatives and how can one possibly subscribe to them? Supported by an impressive brochette of prominent economists, the ideas advocated by the Social Alliance and the Coalition against public service tariffication and privatization have received but crude and shabby coverage in the Quebec media. The foregoing ideas have nonetheless been endorsed by organizations representing, at the very least, several hundreds of thousands of people, and have been extensively debated in their ranks! How can we not conclude that the media blockade observed vis-à-vis the foregoing does not constitute media bias? How can one conceive of an authentic democracy not providing complete access to the circulation of alternative proposals?

The second problem concerns the ever-narrowing political arena. To grow and survive, political parties need money, and donations will inevitably and undeniably come from people who have the money to give and even more so from those who benefit from perpetuating an economic system that caters to them. At such a point, the political space "that can be funded" tends to shrink. This goes a long way in explaining why, in the Province of Quebec, the Parti Québécois and Liberal Party, outside of the national question, resemble each other so much. Another by-product confirming this state of affairs is the timidity of the reforms that Democratic President Barack Obama is able to enact. Constrained by the imperatives of political party financing, the latter cannot boldly go too far in upsetting the status quo.

Finally, one must mention the citizens' growing estrangement from the real powers-to-be. National governments operate today in a global context, where economic heavyweights tread on local political authorities, which distances the individual's ballot from genuine governance and power. This winter, as a prelude to the magnificent March 12 demonstration, we feel it's important to draw attention to the formidable work being done by the Alliance and the Coalition in raising people's awareness and informing them of the situation. Several FNEEQ Unions are working wholeheartedly at preparing this mobilization with a host of activities designed to disseminate this very basic notion that other alternatives are indeed possible: for now, this is somewhat of an underground mission, but it's more than worthwhile. Confronted as we are with such a democracy deficit, one might easily throw up one's

hands in defeat, but such work on the front lines is what really counts, and it's the only way to truly keep hope alive.



Jean Trudelle,
President, FNEEQ

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FNEEQ-CSN
1601, av. De Lorimier, Montréal (QC) H2K 4M5
Tel.: 514 598-2241 – Fax: 514 598-2190
fneeq.reception@csn.qc.ca – www.fneeq.qc.ca

Editor in Chief: Micheline Thibodeau
Coordination and Edition: France Désautniers
Proof reading: Ariane Bilodeau
Contributions: Isabelle Bouchard, Dominique Dubuc, Odette Lefrançois, Carole Morache, Gérald Pageau, Laval Rioux, Kathryne Savard, Caroline Senneville, Claire Tremblay, Jean Trudelle, Claude Vaillancourt
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An Increasingly Dynamic Regroupement

The arrival of five new Unions, since the fall 2007, the more vibrant mobilization during negotiations, including votes for one-day strikes, the publication of a *Carnet* for the *regroupement privé*, the Union visibility campaign, the increasingly active involvement of members in the Federation's various decision-making bodies and committees and finally, the adoption, in spring 2010, of a proposal to harmonize all our Unions' collective agreements; what better proof could there be of the increasing dynamism of the *regroupement privé*!



PHOTO: NATHIE

Odette Lefrançois

Delegate to the coordination of the *regroupement privé*

Between the fall 2007 and the fall 2010, the *regroupement privé* added five new local Unions, namely, teachers from the Collège Champagneur of Rawdon, the Campus Notre-Dame-de-Foy of Saint-Augustin des Desmaures, the Collège Mont-Saint-Louis in Montreal, the Queen of Angels Academy in Dorval and, finally, the music teachers from Villa Maria, in Montreal.

Mirroring the *regroupement privé*, these Unions are characterized by very diverse cultures and environments. However, they all share the need for adequate union guidance and action. For these teachers who had never been unionized before, the challenges are even greater. Accordingly, there is little union



PHOTO: CATHERINE LEFEBVRE

activity that is possible in the absence of a collective agreement; and hence, the negotiation of the latter will generally monopolize almost all the new Union's time and energy.

Mobilisation

The arrival of these five new union groups itself is not the initial source of the dynamism of our private sector Unions. Already, the

coordination had undertaken several initiatives to create greater solidarity within the *regroupement*. By providing the less "well-off" Unions with various bargaining tools, notably, collective agreement comparisons, they decided upon goals to improve their working conditions. During meetings of the *regroupement*, a lot of discussion focused upon this question: the gains made by one group must pay dividends for the others. But



PHOTO: CATHÉRINE LEFEBVRE

negotiating better conditions will almost always encounter management resistance. And vigorous mobilization will very often make the difference. Indeed, it's no longer the exception to have general meetings vote one-day strikes as job actions, which didn't occur very often in the past, if at all. Without always having to go out on strike, the fact remains that each time the vote was positive, breakthroughs occurred at the bargaining table and agreements in principle were reached.

Involvement in the Federation

The members of the *regroupement* are also showing an increased interest in the Federation's activities. Active local Unions who enjoy better working conditions can now more easily get involved in various activities organized by the Federation. The 19 members and 13 Unions who attended the FNEEQ convention in the spring 2009 and who participated actively in the discussions, describing the reality of elementary and high school teachers in their sector, vividly demon-

strated this new dynamic union vitality. In addition, all the positions designated for members of *regroupement privé* were filled, thereby ensuring their representation at the Federation. These local Unions are also now registering for many of the various training sessions being offered, either by the *conseil central* or FNEEQ.

The spring 2010 resolution

Survey on violence in the workplace, visibility campaign to promote member awareness of the fundamental role played by their Union, very active participation in regroupement meetings, bargaining tools, mobilization strategies; all these activities led the *regroupement privé* to undertake a major barnstorming tour in spring 2010. To fully grasp the impact of the foregoing, let's recall that there exists one distinct collective agreement for each local Union; that each establishment is different, is located at a distinct geographic site, with different sized student bodies and different levels of financial health, and that one must take into account all

these factors when it comes time to negotiate. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the members of the *regroupement privé* decided to adopt a proposal that stipulated:

“That the members of the regroupement privé mandate the coordination group to implement a process to develop common demands, in cooperation with union staff representatives, addressing the following subjects:

- *parental rights;*
- *union activities, including time off;*
- *different types of leaves (personal leaves, sick leaves, deferred leaves).”*

This new orientation represents an important step towards a greater harmonization of their collective agreements. Obviously, this process will require wide-ranging coordination between the Unions and their union staff representatives, but we believe that sharing information and the dynamism that characterizes our Unions today, is a harbinger of a new-found solidarity and greater unity. ■

A Collective Agreement doesn't Solve all the Problems

Although our negotiations are over, the *regroupement cégep* will be busy over the next few months following up on these negotiations. Take stocking of what happened, updating the collective agreement guides, training sessions on the modifications to the provisions of the agreement, etc. However, beyond this job at hand, the work of the collective agreement committees will pick up and other dossiers, including some that are described in this article, will be monopolizing our time and energy. Afterwards, over the next few years, we'll have to undertake more extensive deliberations more on our profession as a whole, in order to prepare for our next round of bargaining.

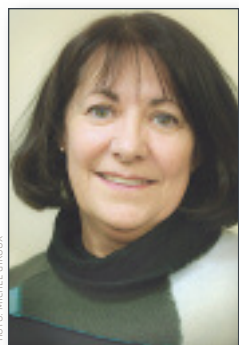


PHOTO: MICHEL GIROUX

Micheline Thibodeau

Vice-President, FNEEQ
Responsible for the *regroupement cégep*

A new collective agreement...

We are at the end of the bargaining process: a so-called targeted round of bargaining that was undertaken in a Common Front, the biggest operation of its kind in the public and parapublic sector in Quebec's trade union history. Sure enough, we settled certain workload problems, given that new resources will be added gradually over a five-year horizon. We also voluntarily accepted a tight deadline for this round of bargaining, and hence, we ended up referring many problems, whose solutions required complex analyses, to several parity committees, notably workloads in nursing programs and in acute health care technician training, the working



PHOTO: BRUCE TODDAS

conditions of sessional lecturers in continuing education, the impact of the arrival of many young people with learning disorders, attention deficit disorders or mental health problems upon teacher workloads, to name only a few. We also made improvements to early career salary levels. Meanwhile, bringing the agreement up to date in terms of departmental coordination responsibilities was potentially a costly trade off, if we don't remain vigilant.

The process of drafting the provisions of the agreement in principle was long and arduous. Many modifications were complex and required time to think about the implications and much complementary work, for example, the provisions regarding the calculation of seniority and experience and accelerated advancement in the bottom rungs of the salary scale. On the other hand, other problems were resolved with transitory measures,



PHOTO: BRUCE TOOMBS

such as the addition of 92 full-time equivalent teachers for 2010-2011. Finally, understanding the additions of resources for mentoring students gave rise to major difficulties in terms of their application.

The *regroupement cégep* had to apply pressure in order to accelerate the conversion of the agreement in principle into collective agreement texts. The operation was effective, in the end. We succeeded in finishing the job in time so that the process of allocating teaching resources amongst the colleges and consequently between departments could be done for 2011-2012.

Meanwhile, it took the intervention of the President of the CSN vis-à-vis the Treasury Board to resolve the thorny problem concerning levels 18-19-20, at least for now.

the fact remains there are still major delays in evaluating our job category

The purpose of the pay equity process is to ensure an equivalent salary for women who occupy jobs that are equivalent to predominantly male jobs. To achieve this goal, male and female job categories have to be evaluated in line with an agreement reached between the Inter-union group and the Treasury Board on a evaluation method. Once this operation was completed, salary adjustments were made retroactively to 2001. The Act also stipulates that every five years, the exercise must be repeated to ensure that equity still prevails. CEGEP teachers were classified amongst the categories where

neither men nor women prevailed, thus designated as a mixed category. Accordingly, our job category was not evaluated under the new agreed upon grid. This evaluation was supposed to be done after the equity exercise, then after the 2005 decree and now, the Treasury Board is telling us that it will be done after the pay equity maintenance exercise. Let's just hope that this time, it will keep its promise, because our patience is wearing thin.

the fact remains there are still problems of distortion in the salary structure

While the "article by article" exercise was taking place, the "pay equity maintenance" operation stipulated by the Pay Equity Act gave rise once again to a reduction in the difference between level 17 and those levels that cover teachers with Masters degrees and Doctorates. Seeing as teachers in the school commissions do not share the latter levels, the equity maintenance adjustments will not apply to them. Let's recall that elementary and high school teachers are designated a predominantly female job category, while CEGEP teachers are considered to be a mixed category.

The situation is unacceptable, given that college teaching is deemed to be part of higher education. It's difficult to accept being at the mercy of elementary and high school teachers, although it might be easier understood if it was university professors!

the fact remains there are still recruitment and job retention problems

The bargaining committee conducted a survey amongst *regroupement cégep* Unions in order to better grasp the hiring and job retention situation with regard to new teachers.

Amongst the causes identified, we can point to the massive hiring operation that has taken place in view of the numerous departures due to retirement and increases in the student population. Also, better working conditions and especially more generous remuneration for jobs requiring the same qualifications in several disciplines play out against us.

The consequences of this situation are numerous, and they include: a lack of departmental team stability, the postponement of evening courses or deferrals to the next semester, tasks being split up to enable either other teachers to accept work overloads or the hiring of retirees, without mentioning the hiring of people who don't satisfy the normal job requirements.

Given that the situation is grim and risks deteriorating over the next few years, we presented our findings to the *Comité patronal de négociation des collèges* (CPNC), asking that something be done to address this overall problem.

the fact remains there are still college study centres being opened arbitrarily

We have always favoured the opening of study centres when access to higher education was at stake. The immensity of Quebec's territory should not constitute, when it's a factor, an obstacle to a student's access to college studies. For more than 20 years now, we've been fighting for programs to be properly financed all over Quebec's vast territory, regardless of the number of students who are registered. We've always argued that it's not up to teachers in the regions to compensate via their working conditions the guarantee of access to college studies. Students must no longer be short-changed when it comes to receiving quality services (guidance counselling, psychologists, learning assistance, library services, etc.)

This is why we signed a first letter of agreement for a Study Centre in Chibougamau, acknowledging the unique particularities of study centres in remote regions.

This is also why we have formed a "small cohort" committee, to thoroughly analyze the situation and propose feasible solutions. Some of the latter were in fact part of our collective agreement settlement.

This is likewise why we filed grievances in La Tuque and Mont-Tremblant, because the working conditions of the teachers who were giving regular courses were those of teachers in continuing education. We will rectify the situation by way of letters of agreement.

So now, the *ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* (MELS) is authorizing the opening of study centres, not for the purposes of improving access to a college education, but to enable certain colleges to incorporate the work force of another college in the vicinity. This was notably the case of the Centre in Vaudreuil that will be opening the Collège de Valleyfield. After requesting a meeting with the people in charge of this dossier, we received an answer: the decision was made by higher ups, end of discussion.

Of course, we won't take this sitting down, no more in this dossier than in any others that we care about and that have a direct impact upon the quality of college teaching. ■



PHOTO: BRUCE TOOMBS

School success has always been a major concern in the world of education. In our modern societies, this concern has become even more pressing, given that “knowledge” has become an indispensable passport to social integration and self-realization: these days, it’s difficult to imagine a young person, without adequate schooling, enjoying a satisfying, autonomous and gratifying existence, or participating fully and productively as a citizen in his or her community.



PHOTO: MATHIE

Jean Trudelle

President, FNEEQ

Responsible for the school and society committee

To begin with, school drop-out rates (from high school) are worrisome, and this is likewise the case in terms of unfinished diplomas (CEGEPs and universities). Overall, in Québec, between 2004 and 2008, 59.1% of young people completed their high school diploma or their vocational school diploma after 5 years, and 70.5% after 7 years. This means that 3 out of 10 young people don’t have a high school diploma, when they turn 17! In our CEGEPs, diploma completion rates are barely less discouraging. Already, less than 60% of high school graduates go on to college; and two years after the allotted time, diploma completion rates hover around 60%, year in year out.

Today, if there exists a consensus in the world of education, it is undoubtedly that we must do a better job in terms of school success. But, there’s many a slip twixt cup and lip.

A complex matter

The dilemma itself is frightfully complex. It is universally acknowledged that the factors under-

lying perseverance and school success are numerous and sometimes interrelated in a complex fashion. It is of course possible to identify certain elements that are more decisive than others (the socio-economic milieu, for example), but



PHOTO: CATHERINE LEFEBVRE

the fact remains that if we are to genuinely improve things, the approach will have to be systemic, and that due to the scope of the problem, it will require a significant social investment... an investment that necessarily implies a major financial effort.

In a recent feature published by the school and society committee, it was indicated that a “*Senegis-Le Devoir*” survey, conducted in December 2010, showed that Quebecers’ first priority was health care, and education was ranked as Number One by only 6% of the respondents. This was also the case in 2008, in a similar survey. At that time, the economy and jobs took the honours, with 35% of the respondents’ votes, and health care was mentioned by 29% of them.”

The social consensus regarding the urgency of dealing with the problem is thus equivocal and, once we start to examine the “how”, the consensus breaks down. Accordingly, the social atrophy generated by high drop-out and failure rates, or

low perseverance rates, doesn’t spontaneously generate a political or social will that is commensurate to the gravity of the problem.

Worse still: the socio-political context doesn’t give rise to an open citizen-based discussion on the whole matter. One small example, the existence of a network of selective schools (private, or public with special projects), which amplifies the drop-out problem in the population segments that are the most vulnerable.

The current political environment doesn’t make things any easier. Helping more young people succeed would inevitably cost a lot more, at a time when right-wing governments are more inclined to reducing public spending. Which leads them,



in our opinion, to promote superficial solutions (such as pedagogical, structural or management reforms). Which also leads them, at times, to blaming the parents and the young people from impoverished milieus themselves. Or even the teachers, while we only have an obligation of means, which is already severely limited, given our working conditions. Which then leads them to “privatize”, by way of social public-private partnerships, the battle against drop-outs.

Meanwhile, at the same time, new problems are cropping up: the client-centric attitude of the students, the inflation of student grades, the appearance of private foundations, etc.

The situation may be ominous, but all the same, as a teachers federation, we cannot help but feel summoned and implicated. We have no choice but to support the social imperative of improving success rates and school perseverance, and

we must commit ourselves to an action plan to address this issue.

This is the essence of the mandate adopted by the FNEEQ Convention in June 2009.

How are we going to get the job done?

An initial synopsis of the problems underlying school drop-outs and unfinished diplomas was presented to the Federal Council in December. This special issue of *Carnets* will present a few thoughts on certain aspects of the question.

The school and society committee feels that it’s important to start off by laying the foundation with regard to the respective responsibilities of the various players involved in this matter: namely, the State, the parents, the teachers, the teaching institutions, civil society and, it goes without saying, the students themselves. This initial exercise

should enable us to better understand the current situation, and subsequently, examine the orientations that the federation should be taking in this dossier.

Considering the scope of the latter, at the end of April, the school and society committee will be organizing an informal consultation and discussion process with members of the three coalitions, based upon a first draft of the orientations that should inspire a union approach to school success. May will be devoted to making the necessary adjustments, before submitting recommendations to the Federal Bureau, and then the Federal Council in June 2011. ■

¹ Source : Michel Perron, a talk given at the *Institut national d’administration publique*, December 10, 2009

² Bélair-Cirino, Marco, « *La santé, priorité des Québécois* » *Le Devoir*, December 28, 2010.

College Success: an Obligation of Means, and not of Result!



Isabelle Bouchard
FNEEQ school and society committee

Once this assumption – that all students can succeed – and its corollary – that the student is the one who succeeds – is accepted, one can’t help but observe that the considerable effort invested in college success has not been translated into a universal success. Of course, we hope that all our students will succeed, but some will and many others won’t.

**“If one doesn’t accept that the people one wants to educate can be educated, then it’s high time to change professions.”
Philippe Meirieu¹**

The democratization of higher education has undoubtedly been a major achievement for our society. However, in reality, greater accessibility has not given rise to the universal success of all the students enrolled in our CEGEPs. Indeed,

even though we work with intensity, passion and professionalism, 40% of our students will not get their diploma within the allotted time.

Numerous measures to help achieve success

And yet, the colleges have implemented, by means of various school success assistance plans, a host of instruments to support our stu-

dents. This notably includes formulas such as peer tutoring, adjustments to course schedules, catch-up courses, school success workshops, industrial visits, study rooms, etc. Likewise, the individual support provided by teachers (availability times, responses to e-mails, etc.) is already considerable and those students who do make use of these measures, when all is said and done, are quite satisfied.

As excellent, practical and necessary that each one of these assistance measures may be, they inevitably have their own particular limits. Take for example the assistance centres, which have sprouted up all over the place for several years now. A student can simultaneously be invited to attend six assistance centres: in French, second language, philosophy, mathematics, methodology and, sometimes, in special training. We can readily affirm that if a young person needs help in so many different subjects, his journey is likely to be a very difficult one! Taken one by one, the existence of each assistance centre is clearly worthwhile, but their proliferation might be problematic. Special needs students then have to choose between different assistance centres whose schedules may sometimes be in conflict, and this, based upon how they perceive their own difficulties. This choice implies that they are in a position to identify their own weaknesses, which is not always the case.

More fundamentally, are we taking into account the fact that motivation is often a function of the task that one has to carry out? Are we asking too much of a student to address all his or her weaknesses at the same time? If a student can receive a customized lesson or individual assistance, might they then feel that classroom attendance is irrelevant? Do all these measures really go to the people who need it most? Should we make them compulsory?

The limits of our labour agreement

It's noteworthy that some people want to make teachers accountable for the success of their students, an approach that sometimes translates into genuine pressure on the teacher. Meanwhile, is it really

necessary to point out that the student is the person who is most responsible for their own success? We can only have an obligation of means, and the limits imposed by our working conditions must also be taken into account.

As a matter of fact, a CEGEP teacher can have up to 160 students to teach, which obviously leaves very little room for effective guidance and mentorship. Most often, the assistance provided to students is given outside the classroom. One might even wonder whether the latter is still the primary site where learning, development and success is taking place? Are the difficulties faced by students really that different from one student to the next?

The effect of the system

If all these measures designed to promote success don't produce the desired results, it might not only be due to their intrinsic limits. Other factors, such as the effects of paid work, must also be taken into account. In modern society, young people are encouraged to consume from a very early age and it shouldn't be surprising that paid work can be very appealing to them. College students increasingly hold down a job, which partially explains why the time needed to get one's diploma tends to get longer and longer. However, the real tragedy is perhaps not the time needed to get one's diploma, but rather not getting one at all!

Beyond these considerations, we should also consider the underlying factors needed for school success. Interest in one's studies, self-esteem and motivation are widely recognized as being acquired gradually over the course of a student's journey through the school system. Yet, CEGEPs come late in the game and it's difficult for

any college to make up for time wasted or lost vis-à-vis students once they've been admitted.

Meanwhile, in 2008, with a view towards greater accessibility, CEGEP admission requirements and prerequisites were relaxed, without in any way implementing a process to monitor the consequences of the foregoing. In this context, it's difficult to know whether the weaknesses in preparation are effectively compensated by "a college effect". On another level, we can see that the entrance requirements for DEC technician graduates entering the job market are also becoming increasingly demanding. The programs have been adjusted accordingly, which makes the performance criteria increasingly rigorous and the requirements for success more exacting.

The overall situation in our colleges poses some very significant challenges and risks. The current needs of the job market (as indicated by the high enrolment rates in the technical programs) are enormous. Chances are that pressures will keep on mounting on the college system to "produce" more and more. How will all this be translated in practical terms? Will we choose to slide ever more insidiously towards an obligation of result, instead of an obligation of means, via school success plans, accountability solely in quantitative terms, or even merit pay plans as some people are now advocating? Collectively, how do we really want to define success? As awarding diplomas? As awarding diplomas within the allotted time? Learning, developing, becoming a better human being? We really have to give all this a lot of thought... and it can't wait! ■

¹ <http://www.meirieu.com/DICTIONNAIRE/educabilite.htm>



Private Schools: Selection and Equity

In Québec, high drop-out rates have become a major societal concern. They are often associated with certain composite high schools located in densely populated urban milieus, poorly fitted up, where many problems converge and thus attract a lot of attention: taxing, drug use and lack of discipline. Faced with such a distressing situation, regularly magnified by the media, several parents hesitate sending their children to public schools. We have thus witnessed a notable migration from the public school system to the private sector over the past 10 years, which ends up separating the weaker students from the stronger ones even more. A change that is amplified by certain public schools who, seeking to emulate the private sector formula, have created special selective programs. Does society truly benefit from such segregation?



PHOTO: ANTAC QUÉBEC

Claude Vaillancourt
FNEEQ school and society committee

Private school has become the chosen path to success in the eyes of many people. As parents pay for their children's education, they almost feel assured of realizing considerable surplus value: their son or daughter will leave high school with a diploma and recognized qualifications. Of course, success isn't guaranteed and the students will nonetheless have to invest time and energy. But private schools, according to their own mission statements, resolve to create a positive learning and intellectual self-realization environment. The intensive marketing efforts of many of these schools clearly takes this approach: "Today and for the future", "a school of life... for life!", "An international benchmark", "respect, responsibility, autonomy, rigour and pride", cry out the slogans of various big private schools in Montreal. These schools are thus selling a brand image based

upon the notion of excellence, which is sometimes even punctuated by the success stories of certain illustrious alumni.

But the reality of private schools in Québec is obviously far more complex, as we can readily observe from the diversity of teachers Unions that belong to the FNEEQ *regroupement privé*. Accordingly, the missions of these schools are very dissimilar: although some are very selective, several others, especially outside of the metropolitan areas, will accept most applicants. Meanwhile, others focus on special needs students, or are teaching college-level state of the art techniques. The notions of success are thus varied in these institutions pursuing diverse goals.

Towards a genuinely inclusive school

But the fact remains, the existence of selective practices raises the broader question of school success. Let's repeat that private schools aren't the only ones that employ such practices: several public schools have likewise created programs with strict quotas, which make the problem worse.

Good students are thus being taken out of the regular public school stream in increasing numbers, which then ends up with even greater

concentrations of special needs students. Without the gifted students, who can be a source of stimulation for their less motivated peers, with teachers whose task becomes increasingly complex and gruelling, because they have to deal with a broader disparity of students with assorted needs, several public schools no longer enjoy ideal conditions to ensure success for the majority — even though they manage to somehow pull through in spite of everything. Meanwhile, are the gifted students really benefiting from taking a more elite path? Nothing seems to prove that this is indeed the case.

The selective system also tends to subtly bend the very notion of success. The latter changes its colours: instead of confirming the end of one's journey in a school program, it becomes associated with an entrance prerequisite, a badge given for passing an admissions test to a prestigious school — put on a pedestal for far too long by the ranking guides published by magazines like *L'Actualité*, whose disappearance pleases us no end. These tests require special preparation and have been now transformed into a rite of passage: where the successful student will not only demonstrate their considerable intellectual talents, but will also be removed from the perceived risky alternative of huge composite high schools, so as to enter an



environment that will readily facilitate their success.

In this system, students have to keep track of their R score that will enable them, if it is sufficiently high, to access quota-restricted university faculties. This performance rating creates a hierarchy of success by determining the most deserving students amongst all the graduates. Many students obsess about their R score, which not only encourages them to succeed, but also to succeed better and sometimes at the expense of others.

Several people defend this instrument as a means to resolve the complex problem of admissions into quota-based programs. Our position is not to start a debate on this issue, despite the fact that it

might someday be necessary to do so. But we can observe the extent to which the selection process has created a two-tier school system, which frames the whole question of school success in a very different manner. On the one hand, in the non-selective public schools, where students develop in a milieu that is deprived of its best elements; success is generally seen as quite simply getting one's diploma, what is never a sure thing, given the high level of school drop-outs. On the other hand, in the selective schools, success is facilitated by favourable conditions, but gets blown out of all proportion for some students due to the intense competition that prevails.

Without a doubt we have failed, up until now, to design and build

an equitable school system, which gives an equal chance to one and all and that gives true meaning to the word "success". It will thus be necessary for us to continue, as we've done frequently in the past, to challenge the student selection system, widely practised in many private schools, even if it means that the teachers in these schools would lose the benefit of teaching classes made up primarily of privileged young people.

FNEEQ's position, which advocates the progressive integration of private schools into the public system, while simultaneously eliminating selection, would be an important step forward in establishing a more equitable school system. ■

University: Redoing our Homework



PHOTO: FRANCE DESAULNIERS

Laval Rioux

FNEEQ school and society committee

We will take a look here at the consequences of only one of these changes that has a direct link with success: namely, the considerable increase in the number of students. Gone are the days where universities only sought to educate a privileged elite, in a society that didn't require more than that. Rooted in the needs of the job market, as well as the legitimate ambitions of young people to fully take their

Can we conceive of a university today, in Québec, in the same way that we did 40 years ago? Since the Quiet Revolution, several major changes have transpired in the university milieu. For a long time now, FNEEQ has been calling for an Estates General on the future of universities so as to bring the latter's mission up to date, a mission that perhaps can no longer be seen in the same way, given today's knowledge-based society.

place in society, everything today pushes in the direction of making universities accommodate an every growing proportion of the population. In this connection, the democratization that the creation of the *Université du Québec* was supposed to achieve is far from complete. How does and should the university respond to this increasing demand? In this new context, what should its teaching mission be?

A missed opportunity

The first thing that strikes the observer is the evolution of the university milieu, towards new emphasis place upon research at the

expense, say some, of the university's teaching mission. Grappling with "funding problems", but all the same knee deep in a frenzied competition for "clients", the universities appear to be giving precedence to research, to financing and to marketing. However, the exponential evolution of human knowledge is also increasing the distance between a student's first steps in the university and sophisticated state of the art knowledge, hence the importance of giving early university training more attention and status.

Traditionally, the university student is deemed entirely autonomous and



completely in charge of their own success. This being so, nothing prevents the institutions from offering guidance services where the services provided to students, academic Heads, and teachers would have their share of responsibility.

However, in today's university setting, one can't help but observe that the resources dedicated to support and guidance have evolved haphazardly. Auditoriums crammed with dozens and dozens of students are commonplace in the big universities. Sessional lecturers, already responsible for more than 50% of undergraduate teaching time, often don't even enjoy the space necessary to meet with their own students.

Even so, sessional lecturers have been fighting for a long time now for better teaching conditions, a must for better learning conditions. Already, in the early 1990s, they began to reflect upon the conditions necessary for success, an analysis that led to the establishment of pedagogical integration programs, first at UQAM, and then in the other institutions of higher learning. The goal underlying this demand was to have sessional lecturers perform tasks related to teaching, outside of the strict framework of their courses for which they had been hired.

These programs, whose acknowledged goals were to improve the quality of teaching and the pedagogical guidance provided to students, would help different types of projects see the light of day, as a function of the specific needs of certain sectors: help in French; tutoring for new students; guidance for students in charting their educational program; organization of trainings for teachers; participation on pedagogical committees or on program reviews, etc.

Over the years, some universities also set up university pedagogy services or committees, which helped teachers by offering them trainings or forums to meet so as to exchange on their pedagogical practices amongst themselves. Sessional lecturers also became active on these committees, such as at UQAR, where the head of the committee is a sessional lecturer.

However, these assistance and support resources are often insufficient. Students with very diverse origins often arrive at the university and are not all equally prepared for the challenge, and they have to catch up in a hurry. The sessional lecturers, although dedicated to the success of everyone who enrolls in their courses, often feel overwhelmed by their workload in this regard.

We also cannot ignore the whole problem related to the financial situation of many students, who are often compelled to hold down a job to meet their subsistence needs. Tuition, related expenses and the necessity to survive often constitute an obstacle that is sometimes impossible to reconcile with perseverance, and it's thus not surprising to find many students taking more than the allotted time to complete their studies.

A new relationship with success

Parallel to this situation, which is already problematical in itself, a rather unique relationship to success is developing in our universities. The well circumscribed financing scheme, based upon the number of registrations, has given rise to perceiving students as "clients" who, to be satisfied, must receive the promised merchandise... in other words, a diploma. If we may be forgiven the somewhat exaggerated metaphor, the fact remains that pressures do exist, in many places, to relax the standards

of success. This attitude, which in no way justifies an increase in tuition, has generated perverse effects: the retributive assessment of teachers, negotiations to revise a student's grades, as well as teachers inflating the grades given for a student's work. In a short polemic pamphlet (see sidebar), J. Côté and A. Allahar describe this phenomenon, which is unsettling to say the very least.

Are we idly watching the university's mission genuinely slipping away, towards dispensing knowledge just like any other commodity? How should we make adjustments and on what foundation should we be building the future? ■

The inflation of student grades

In *La tour de papier: L'université, mais à quel prix?* the two authors, Côté and Allahar, describe a phenomenon regarding how students are doing in American and Canadian universities, over the past 20 years. They observe irregular disparities in the normal evaluation curve of actual performances: grades above A and B appear to be excessively inflated, which enables more people to get into graduate studies. This tendency should, according to the authors, be analyzed in tandem with the evaluations of teaching currently in vogue, as well as with the increases to university tuition. It's possible that this practice has also spread into Québec's colleges and universities, but no survey has yet to confirm such a phenomenon in *La Belle Province*.

Côté, James L. and Allahar, Anton N.: *La tour de papier: L'université, mais à quel prix?*, Les Éditions Logiques, 2010.

Private Foundations in Education: the FLAC Case

Some people see the lack of progress in the fight against school drop-outs and the difficulties encountered in improving academic success rates as confirmation of the Government and public sector's inefficiency and incapacity to achieve prompt and conclusive results in this area.



PHOTO: FRANCE DESAULNIERS

Gérald Pageau

FNEEQ school and society committee

In line with the strategy advocated by the World Bank and the OECD, a number of Québec businessmen have decided to get involved and directly intervene with the MELS.

Accordingly, Jacques Ménard, Chairman of the BMO Board of Directors created a "Task force on student retention and academic success" whose proposals have strongly shaped government policies in this area.

In the same vein, André Chagnon decided in 2009 to invest a portion of his profits from the Videotron sale in a school retention program, by means of a foundation. This new form of business philanthropy deserves our attention all the more so given that the Québec State applauds such initiatives and indeed promotes them by investing public funds in their activities.



PHOTO: CATHERINE LEFEBVRE

The *Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon* (FLAC) has no doubt admirable intentions. Their intentions can only be viewed in a positive light, or so it would seem. The *Fondation Chagnon* Website declares that its mission is to: "help develop and improve health care by preventing poverty and disease by taking action primarily with children and their parents." It seeks to act: "in three areas: early childhood development, the promotion of healthy lifestyles and school retention."

FLAC thus created a "School retention project" that goes under the name *Réunir Réussir* (R²). Let's note in passing that we're no longer talking here about fighting school drop-outs, but rather a lack of perseverance amongst young people. This change in vocabulary reflects, in our opinion, a shift in what is being targeted. The school drop-out phenomenon is no longer the issue (with its multiple and complex causes) but rather the personal accountability of young people and their parents.

As part of the 2009-14 Youth Action Strategy, the Charest Government and FLAC reached an agreement to

support a mobilization initiative designed to foster young people's academic success. The latter would assemble together the school milieu, parents, municipalities, business people and health care providers, as well as community organizations. With an overall budget of \$50 million (including \$25 million of public funds), the school retention project is the smallest of four partnership initiatives that exist between the Government of Québec and the Chagnon family.

But, why ask questions of such charitable initiatives?

Even though some people would say that this kind of initiative should be encouraged and applauded, we believe that this intrusion of a private actor into a public domain does raise some serious questions. At this stage, we're not interested in examining the approach, but rather the phenomenon.

These questions are delicate. In the absence of a comprehensive government plan to battle school drop-outs, as well as substantial investments to achieve



real progress, how can we possibly turn our back on such philanthropy?

All the same, this support is not really “free”; in terms of the master architect and principles, it entails public responsibilities surreptitiously sliding towards the private sector. The social dimensions of the problem are thus expunged, and the front line actors, namely we teachers, are not consulted on the approach. And we can perceive on the horizon the dilemma of obligations of results, which to us seems entirely incompatible with the world of education. One may also wonder what would happen should the foundation decide to walk away from its initiative: the survival of these projects is in no way guaranteed.

The eligibility criteria underlying R² also merit our attention: any project submitted to the Founda-

tion must notably satisfy the following requirements⁴:

- fit into the intervention priorities determined by FLAC and R², which are not necessarily those of educational organizations or the Ministry;
- fit into an intersector-based “mobilizing regional body” (MRI), controlled by FLAC;
- the organization must accept “guidance” by someone in charge of the territory;
- in addition, the results of the project must be measurable in the short or the medium term.

Under such circumstances, several questions may be asked:

To begin with, who should be deciding the social orientations and priorities? FLAC is determining its

own priorities. This new approach to charitable giving clearly constitutes a new development in terms of governance, which has the private actor replacing the public authority. R², like other FLAC initiatives flout principles that we have always defended, namely, that the State must ensure the universality, direction and control over public services in general, and education, in particular.

The Government is encouraging and financially backing these initiatives without FLAC having to report back to the Government or to the community. Is accountability only something that applies to community organizations?

Even though Unions are typically excluded from FLAC projects, a FNEEQ Union was recently invited to participate in a joint regional coalition on school retention and academic success, set up by FLAC. Other Unions will eventually be solicited. In this situation, what attitude should we adopt? Participate, negotiate or boycott?

In a context where the role of the State is being debated, and even though this kind of private intervention in our educational system is relatively new and atypical for now, we feel that it is necessary to closely examine the phenomenon and ultimately, to take a stand. As a Federation, should we not ask for a moratorium on establishing these types of partnerships and publicly denounce the absence of a public debate on this change in governance? ■



PHOTO: CATHERINE LEFEBVRE

1 *Réunir réussir (R²)* is devoted to supporting regional and local school retention mobilization and action initiatives; the brokerage and sharing of knowledge and good practices; school retention with regard to First Nations; the creation of interregional spaces to build networks for exchanging practices for young people. IRM.<http://www.reunirreussir.org/volets-d-action.aspx>

2 <http://www.saj.gouv.qc.ca/strategie/index.html>

3 The three other projects are: *Québec en forme, Québec Enfants, soutien aux proches aidantes et aidants. (Québec in shape, Québec children, support for closely related caregivers).*

4 For more details on the eligibility criteria, visit the R2 Web site at:<http://www.reunirreussir.org/demande-de-soutien.aspx>

Progress Report and Outlook for the Future

The FNEEQ health, safety and environment committee has been very active this year, and will continue thus between now and the June Federal Council, for which it is preparing a very special activity.



PHOTO: FRANCE DESAUNIER

Kathryne Savard

FNEEQ health, safety and environment committee

Let's recall that in November 2008, the Federation adopted its environment policy framework. At the time, this policy employed a bold approach. It assumed that by opting for environmentally friendly practices in a sustainable development perspective, FNEEQ would be leading the way for its affiliated Unions... and perhaps even for other Federations! Later, in an effort to give shape to the stated objectives, the project to institute a Responsible Procurement Policy (RPP) saw the light of day. This new policy, which will be adopted by the June Federal Council, seeks to standardize consumption behaviour. It represents a practical tool that enables people in charge of procurement at the Federation to make judicious choices, based upon two very specific criteria categories: a good or service's social and environmental impact. Obviously, FNEEQ had already prudently selected its various suppliers taking into account the different parameters that in-

spired the RPP. For example, the Federation is constantly seeking to give precedence to unionized work forces, that comply with international norms and that ensure decent working conditions. In addition, it places increasing importance on the fact that its suppliers are working towards reducing their ecological footprint. By the same token, FNEEQ is translating these principles into practical actions that will have a positive impact on both the environment and on society.

Training session

Last November, the health, safety and environment committee conducted a training session on workplace inspections. The purpose of this initiative was to make the members of the local committees more aware of the various provisions contained in occupational health and safety regulations. In order to provide the participants with the knowledge and tools needed to properly carry out these inspections themselves, in their respective workplaces, the fundamentals underlying such inspections were presented to them.

Our future projects

On the heels of this exercise, the committee will be organizing a lunchtime meeting for the members of our affiliated Unions' occupational health, safety and environment committees, at the next

Federal Council. For the occasion, we are asking that these people be invited to be part of their Union's delegation. This will be a first for FNEEQ and the committee hopes that this meeting will help better define the role of the many activists who sit on local parity committees, as well as breathe new life into union action in this important area and revitalize our network of health, safety and environment officers.

Finally, we may note that the CSN progress report and outlook committee meeting, in November 2011, will be a major milestone for the committee. Indeed, at this meeting, all of the Confederation's occupational health and safety committees will get the opportunity to share their experiences with one another and discuss the major challenges we all face. The FNEEQ committee is planning to make use of its federal workshop to revive the whole question of mental health in the workplace. It's simply illusory to believe that things have improved in this regard in the our educational system. Notwithstanding greater awareness and more prevention in the workplace, cases of burnout continue to mount. The committee is likewise aiming to revisit the training session that was given some time ago in order to bring it up to date. Notably, we'd like to address the mechanisms for going back to work, as well as look at practical tools geared towards prevention. ■

The Struggle Against Homophobia, Alive and Well at FNEEQ

This issue of *Carnets* is being published only a few days before an important symposium that will be taking stock of and organizing action against homophobia in the education system. Under the theme **Speaking out: a shared responsibility**, this symposium will bring together more than 400 participants from the world of education; it will be an opportunity to exhaustively reflect upon the state of the struggle against homophobia, to exchange ideas on actions that should be undertaken in every milieu and to help give a resounding impetus to countering homophobic behaviour and attitudes in all its forms, an undertaking that is very, very far from being complete.



PHOTO FRANCE DESAULNIERS

Dominique Dubuc

Teacher, cégep de Sherbrooke

FNEEQ is proud to be a part of the organizing committee for this symposium and the large delegation of FNEEQ members who will be participating in it. Because it's an important social responsibility that takes all its meaning in the field of education, the struggle against homophobia is an important concern for FNEEQ, both in terms of the students who attend the institutions where we teach, and for our members who belong to a sexual minority.

FNEEQ's political resolve in this connection is clear and its actions follow through on its stance in this area. For example, Line Chamberland, a UQAM researcher, has frequently been invited to present her findings, focused upon the state of affairs with regard to homophobia and its impact in the workplace, in general, but also more specifically,

in the education milieu, both at the high school and college levels.

In the struggle against homophobia, the work that still needs to be done is immense. Legal equality in Canada has only recently been achieved, in 2005, for lesbians and gays. However, this is not yet entirely the case for transsexual or transgender individuals.

The first difficulty one often encounters with activists is the denial of the very existence of a homophobia problem in their milieu, when it's not a flat-out denial of the very presence of members of these sexual minorities in their classes or amongst their colleagues. Notwithstanding the "legal" progress that has been made, social equality is not yet a reality and the "closet" still appears to be a refuge for a lot of sexual minority individuals.

Recognizing this situation, the Ministry of Justice has introduced a Quebec policy for combatting homophobia, and an inter-ministerial group is currently working on an action plan that will be rooted in this policy. The struggle against homophobia is everyone's business, because it's a matter of fundamental human rights.

But we can and must act in our own backyard. It's the concrete responsibility of each and every Union to

clearly and explicitly speak out against homophobia, so that their members who might eventually be victims of homophobic discrimination are sufficiently secure to ask for assistance from their Union executive committee.

Unfortunately, in this regard, for now at least, it has been shown (Chamberland, 2008) that workers who are victims of homophobia don't trust their Union any more than they trust their employer.

FNEEQ is convinced of the merits of an explicit rejection of homophobia, we recommend to our affiliated Unions to pressure the Boards of Directors of their institutions to adopt a resolution or declaration against homophobia.

Obviously, we also invite the Union's general meeting to adopt similar resolutions and to periodically draw attention to this stance via activities to raise people's awareness. The Unions who have done so are invited to become a member of the *Réseau des alliées-CSN*, a gesture that will be highlighted as part of the CSN LGBT Committee's presentation of their progress report, next May. ■

A New Labour Contract in Rimouski!

The members of the sessional lecturers Union at the *Université du Québec à Rimouski* (SCCCUQAR) ratified an agreement in principle reached between their representatives and UQAR, last February 21st.



PHOTO: MICHEL GIROUX

Claire Tremblay

Delegate to coordination of the regroupement université

The new labour agreement sets out salary increases of a little more than 16% spread out over the four-year contract, namely, until 2014. The average remuneration for a UQAR sessional lecturer will then be \$9,380. In addition, the lump sum payment for equipment purchases will go up from \$70 to \$75 per course, as of 2012. The agreement also stipulates severance pay for dual employed individuals, for whom the main employer is not UQAR, as well as the addition of compassionate care leaves. The distance necessary to be paid for one's travelling time has been reduced to 50 km, where it was previously 150 km, and remuneration will henceforth be paid to people on probation for their participation in university pedagogical activities.

In addition to improvements to certain non-monetary clauses, the parties have undertaken to discuss in a sub-committee the issues of

leaves with deferred pay, modifications to the article on teaching eligibility requirements, patterned after a model being built at the *Université du Québec à Chicoutimi*, as well as the use of the Intranet for assignment of courses.

The University has also undertaken to work with the Union to improve the pension plan, as well as to discuss setting up a long term disability insurance plan.

According to Louise Bérubé, SCCC-UQAR President, this agreement achieved the goals decided upon by our general meeting, while still maintaining the prospect of continuing work on many other important issues that require concerted action with other sessional lectur-

ers Unions, such as pension plans and disability insurance plans.

It should be recalled that the SCCC-UQAR is the second Union in the current round of coordinated bargaining to reach an agreement, after the sessional lecturers Union at the *Université de Montréal*. At we write these lines, the sessional lecturers Unions at the *Université du Québec en Outaouais*, the *Université Laval* and Continuing Education at Concordia University are still in discussions with their employer to renew their collective agreements. Meanwhile, the sessional lecturers at the *Université du Québec à Montréal* are in the preparation phase for their upcoming negotiations. ■



PHOTO: MICHEL GIROUX



I Teach at the University and... A Visibility Campaign for the 21st Century

The FNEEQ *regroupement université* took advantage of the National Day of lecturers, celebrated for several years on November 22, to launch a new visibility campaign. To publicize the diversity of expertise and experience of lecturers and their impact on the quality of education offered by universities, the campaign is conducted primarily through social medias. Interview with Claire Tremblay, delegate to the coordination of the *regroupement université*.



PHOTO: JULIA DAUS

France Désautniers
Communications advisor

Why such a campaign?

Well, let's say that we felt the need to testify to the richness of sessional lecturers, tutors in distance learning, internship supervisors, training lecturers, practical training lecturers, clinics lecturers and music coaches. We believe they are still little and poorly known in the general population and even sometimes in the academic community.

They are the ones who deal in a large proportion with undergraduate students, as a result they are often the first contact with the university. It is estimated that nearly 60% of university lecturers have over 15 years of work experience outside the university and the same percentage have more than

15 years of experience as lecturers, it is not surprising to note the diversity of their expertise and their professional activities! Some make this their sole profession, others twin it to another job or research activities and creation, but all have one thing in common: they love to teach.

What means are used?

Of course, we have produced traditional visibility tools: posters, banners and bookmarks, but we also wanted to give it a decidedly current vision and we made sure to include electronic medias in the campaign. We created a dedicated website, *chargesdecours.com*, in which one can, among other things, watch video clips of four spokespersons, Nathalie Ebnoether, tutor at the *Télé-université* and lecturer at UQAM, Nicole Tardif, a lecturer at UQAR and Laval University, Caroline Martin, a lecturer at UQAT and Thomas Collombat, lecturer at the University of Montreal, who all show their commitment!

In addition, the site is an evolving platform and all the lecturers who wish may contribute by sharing

their experiences in improving their teaching.

We also designed a Facebook page to share the campaign and to mention publications, awards, citations, and other positive actions.

What are the goals?

We hope this campaign reflects who and what we are. If we have chosen to embark in the mainstream of social media, it is because we believe it will promote wider dissemination of our message and a better understanding of the role of lecturers in Quebec universities.

It is important, especially since the launch of this campaign also symbolises the beginning of a cycle of negotiation. The issue of working conditions for lecturers is directly linked to the recognition of their contribution to university education. We want to express without embarrassment that the contribution of lecturers in universities is essential – they will be present for a long time ...! ■

On the Road to Meet Activists

Since the fall 2010, the members of the Women's Committee are on a fact-finding tour, where they have visited, or will visit, some 15 Unions. We want to sketch a portrait of female activism in our union organizations, to ascertain what motivates women to get involved and likewise identify any obstacles to their participation.

Via these meetings, we're trying to identify the measures that FNEEQ could develop or foster, and hence, eventually increase the presence of women participating in our federal decision-making bodies and local Unions. This tour, as well as a lunch-discussion exercise organized on June 7, 2010, during the FNEEQ Federal Council, is a result of one of the mandates in our work

plan, which "seeks to increase and reinforce the presence of women in our local Unions' and Federation's structures and decision-making bodies," because although women make up half of FNEEQ's membership, this ratio of female participation has never been attained in our decision-making bodies.



GRAPHIES: NATHALIE BLOUIN



Carole Morache
FNEEQ Women's Committee

The whole question of the equality between men and women is still very much on the table at the CSN. Indeed, during the March 2010 Confederal Council, the latter updated the CSN's Equal Opportunity Program (EAP), which was renamed Equitable Opportunity for Female Representation Program (EOFRP). The CSN adopted an action plan to publicize this program, which notably includes, as of the fall 2011, a campaign to raise the awareness of the CSN's affiliated Unions. The Women's Committee is planning to meet with the Heads of the CSN's status of women group at the next Federal Council meeting.

Our current activities

Already, on June 7, 2010, our discussions with a number of female

activists revealed several significant elements regarding the motivations underlying their activism. Several women mentioned having caught the bug when they were very young! Daughters of activists, of trade unionists, they came into contact with progressive social values in their families. Many were already quite active in student associations and their union involvement was an outgrowth of the latter. All of them consider themselves inspired by a desire to defend individual and collective rights. Others indicate that they got involved because they had been solicited (some of them much more than once) and most often, they had to be convinced that they had the required skills to hold office in the Union!

With regard to the obstacles, the balancing of family-work responsibilities is one of the major elements identified by the participants. Many of them indicated that their union involvement only became possible once their children "were older". This obstacle takes on even more importance when this involvement means travelling and meetings outside of normal working hours, or over several days. Ignorance regarding the nature of trade union action and the perception of trade unionism as be-

ing a confrontational arena where women will feel very comfortable were also mentioned as brakes on their involvement.

The current tour has had us meeting with Unions from our three coalitions in several regions across Quebec. Although many of the same observations emerge from our discussions, a host of others surface, and a complete report will be written at the end of our tour, and presented to the FNEEQ Federal Council.

However, we can henceforth assert that this initiative of the Women's Committee to meet with FNEEQ activists is most edifying. They have enabled us to gauge the challenges involved in activism and point us towards measures and actions likely to develop and support Unions and women in their union action. ■

The members of the Women's Committee are: Raymonde Simard, sessional lecturer, *Université du Québec à Rimouski*, *Regroupement université*, Annie Pomerleau, teacher, *École Pasteur*, *Regroupement privé*, Carole Morache, teacher, *Collège Montmorency*, *Regroupement CE-GEP*, Caroline Senneville, FNEEQ General Secretary

First Women's Conference

“On the Move for Equality” was the theme that drew nearly 400 women from 87 countries to Bangkok for Education International’s (EI) first World Women's Conference.

Although always committed to the issue of gender equality, this was the first time that EI assembled its members to discuss, amongst other issues, access to education for girls and women, as well as the participation of women teachers in their Unions. These discussions will serve as a foundation for the formulation of resolutions and an action plan that will be presented to the 6th World EI Convention, to be held in July 2011.



PHOTO: NATHIE

Caroline Senneville
General Secretary, FNEEQ
Responsible for the Women's Committee

In terms of gender equality, progress is definitely noticeable, but slow and uneven. Although many countries have, or are in the process of implementing legislation to ensure gender equality, we can't help but observe that all too often it is not reflected in the daily lives of many women

and girls. Hence, and still today, 70% of the world's illiterates are women.

Women's participation in their unions

Like our federation, EI is also concerned about the place of women in their affiliated Unions and in its own structures. The conference released the results of a vast consultation amongst EI affiliates and observed that, as one climbs up the chain of command, there are fewer and fewer women. For example, the number of women Vice-Presidents is still greater than the number of women Presidents. Likewise, it's not surprising to observe that all over the world, women are over-represented in pre-school and elementary school



PHOTO: INTERNATIONALE DE L'ÉDUCATION

teaching, and much less present in higher education and research. Hence, only 29% of researchers around the world are women.

Union responsibility

Finally, the conference recognized the role and responsibility of Unions in helping create a world rooted in gender equality, but also stressed that this role would be more credible, if Unions themselves worked towards and succeeded in establishing such equality in their own ranks. ■



The 63rd Convention, Right Around the Corner!

A convention, for any organization, is almost always a watershed moment. A defining moment for recharging our batteries and rethinking our collective action going forward. The CSN convention is no exception, and this is all the more so in 2011, where the labour movement is being summoned to step up. Claudette Carbonneau, outgoing President of the CSN, and Jacques Létourneau, assistant to the executive committee, outline the preparations that go into such an important endeavour.



PHOTO: JULIA DAUS

France Désautniers
Communications advisor

The CSN convention is right around the corner...

CC.: Yes, and the situation dictates that we take note of the incredible cynicism that prevails in Québec society! At the CSN, we believe that

we are a dynamic organization that has the capacity to instigate significant change. We want to put forward ideas, plan for the future, outline the kind of society that we want to live in. I especially hope that we'll have an ultra stimulating convention for our delegates. We would hope, that at the end of the convention, we will have reached a very robust consensus, regardless of the industry sector, the union's size, that we'll take up the torch with a strategy in mind and all together, move forward in the same direction.

Major themes?

We hope to redefine certain elements that make up the social pact,

via two or three key themes. We want to be practical, certain dimensions along which we will be able to have an impact.

Our underlying theme is the struggle to correct inequality. It's at the very heart of our mission as a trade union and this question is even more pressing in the current situation. We see it in the workplace, with people's status of employment disintegrating before our eyes. We see it in globalization, and in the more recent global economic crisis. We see it in society where there are massive attacks against the State, its role in redistribution, and against public services.

A second theme involves a development model for our society. We want to have an integrated approach, something close to the sustainable development concept. We have challenges to meet. For example, in the manufacturing sector, there's a major crisis, but there's also room to think about what the manufacturing sector of tomorrow should look like. What do we do to make jobs "greener"? How do we point production towards sectors that hold promise for the future? How do we develop quality jobs?



There must also be room for raising awareness in such a development model. We want to imagine development projects that involve all of society, that are consistent with our values and that are a source of collective wealth. We have to champion a new vision, a new development model that is more in line with our social and environmental concerns, and that is capable of consolidating things while still being creative. We have to likewise begin thinking about Québec's energy autonomy.

The third theme is trade unionism itself. We have to flesh out the whole question of unity, and I'm not referring here to organic unity! There's a movement afoot within the trade union movement to reinforce our links and to agree upon a certain number of things. To this effect, the establishment of the Social Alliance is a good example. I feel that we should be transcending the framework of the trade union movement and moving more towards the community movement. We'd also like to take stock of our own "performance" in our bargaining, our approaches, our clout, our mobilization, our international ties...

Examining these three themes should help us redefine ourselves as an actor dedicated to change, a dynamic and inclusive force, not only for CSN members, but for all Québec society, as well.

JL.: When one analyzes the current situation, a word we hear very often is the word crisis. There are a multitude of economic, environmental and food crises – and to a lesser extent at home – a political crisis, if we look at how things are going all over the world and observe the Right's ascent in many countries in the West. One could easily be discouraged, but I believe that all this points, on the contrary, towards a convention that can provide us with hope. What we say, somewhat following in the footsteps of the International Trade Union

Confederation's convention in June 2010 is that one needs to have positions upon which we can act, build and propose a certain number of practical and accessible union initiatives. We want to check with our activists whether what we're advocating is feasible or not! We will be putting forward new resolutions, we don't want to vote again on resolutions we've already passed! At the last con-



vention, we talked about the financialization of the economy, we questioned the social responsibility of businesses, we also looked at the environmental question. What we want in 2011 is to move beyond all this. We want our Unions to take charge of these questions and we'll be there to guide, to organize, to fit up the way forward. That's the challenge, and it will require working together. At the end of the convention, it will be clear. We don't want to pass a smorgasbord of resolutions that will remain a pile of pious wishes!

CC.: Honestly, in Québec society, trade unionism is increasingly perceived as an analytical instrument, linked to the renewal of the trade union movement. We have a vision, we think differently. Joining forces



with the younger generations is vital. Pragmatic measures are appealing and essential. We have a wonderful opportunity within our reach!

For example, if I think about the fair trade debate. This is one kind of vision of the world, one where wealth is shared, there's a good dose of idealism in it. Well, more than a third of CSN member-Unions have committed themselves to this principle! This will change the world, one small step at a time. I see this as a vision of the world, a way to live one's ideals and effectively bring about change.

Why participate in the convention?

This is a crucial question! The CSN, without its Unions, and without a presence in the field to change things, would be an empty concept. The participation of our delegates is an indispensable bond that underlies union action. There is a dynamic relationship between the CSN and its Unions! We want to take stock of the appropriateness of certain positions we defend, we want to listen to suggestions. We will be making recommendations and tabling resolutions for adoption, that will have been formulated by all the delegates in plenary sessions and workshops. And this becomes the lever by which things will be transformed.

JL.: If the trade union movement is to be an agent of social change, the relationship must be cultivated and put into effect with the Unions at our convention. Otherwise, there's a problem! I think that it's necessary to appeal to the delegates to the convention to express themselves openly. Are our demands on target? The convention is a fundamental exercise.

Unions, a force for change

CC.: We must ensure that our resolutions are translated into action. Some people claim that the labour movement is too strong, these people generally don't like our opinions. Meanwhile, others perceive that we don't have the muscle that is ascribed to us... This all leads me to assert that our resolutions have to materialize into something concrete. Are we as efficient in what we do as we are in our analyses? This is the question that I want to ask and the convention is where it should be discussed!

JL.: For example, sooner or later, how we produce our energy will have to be changed. The stakes are gargantuan. So, will we have the issue take control over us or can we propose alternative models? Of course, administering our collective agreements is necessary, but day to day union vitality could be stimulated with practical deeds. For example, we could measure the ecological footprint of the work we do. We have to take the time to think and act differently. We have to think seriously about our union action.

CC.: An important way to reduce inequality consists of defending our public services, notably the whole matter of education in our society. This element is one that can shape and holds the most promise for generating more equality in any society, particularly as a means to enable individuals to develop their potential and to able play an active role. FNEEQ and the CSN have worked hard to ensure that educa-

tion be a national priority. There is room at the convention to discuss this matter. Whereas 70% of the new jobs created will require post-secondary, college or university training, and this in a context where we are considering increases in tuition, which will have an impact upon the children of the middle class, all this must be examined. An OECD study demonstrates that co-education is vital to academic success. This isn't a blame that we wish to address to people who send their children to private schools, that's not the debate. But there is all the same a worrisome phenomenon, and serious thinking has to be done in this regard. ■

So, we'll see you there!

Note: on March 11, Claudette Carbonneau announced to the CSN Confederal Council that she would not be seeking another mandate as President of the CSN.



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Anti-Globalization Activists Rally Together

Anti-globalization activists think that another world is possible. They are numerous, they come from diverse left-leaning currents, and believe that political action should transcend traditional political parties and conventional political authorities.

Micheline Thibodeau

Vice-President, FNEEQ

Responsible for the International Action Committee

Since 2001, the year of the very first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Social Forums, be they theme-based, regional or international in scope, all comply with the World Social Forum Charter of Principles. Let's recall some of them: opposition to neoliberalism, open to all ideological currents advocating alternative projects, formal absence of political parties. These forums represent open spaces for discussion. Of course, some speeches are given, but primarily these exercises involve self-managed workshops that encourage dialogue amongst the participants. This approach meets the goals of fostering as much dialogue as possible over people's experiences and the approaches taken by anti-globalization activists from all origins, geared towards generating convergence and new strategic alliances.

World Education Forum in Palestine

In October 2010, a delegation of more than 50 Quebecers, including some 20 FNEEQ teachers, participated in a World Education Forum in Palestine. This forum had two goals: exchange on our practices, reflect upon educational orientations with teachers from all over the world and enable Palestinians to participate in these exchanges, given that they are imprisoned in their mili-

tarily occupied territories. The second goal was to show our solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for the recognition of their country, stolen from them.

Our stay was short, but very intense. Talking about education, peace, justice, explaining the importance of a Charter of Human Rights in the context of a military occupation, violence and bald-faced apartheid is a signal for this people to take control of their resolve to prepare a future based upon the principles of justice, equity and equality between all people. Well beyond resentment and revenge. Far beyond hatred. Both our exchanges with Palestinians and what we saw there: theft of a land through ongoing settlement initiatives, the rationing of water on only one side of the wall, violent persistent intimidation. Indignation was a feeling shared by every member of our delegation.

World Social Forum in Dakar

In January 2011, FNEEQ participated in the World Social Forum in Dakar. Some 10 people formed the CSN delegation and about 200 Quebecers participated in the forum. This too was a very worthwhile experience. On the one hand, we became much better acquainted with the political situation and especially the economic situation on the African continent. The imposition of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) by the IMF and the World Bank have spread devastation far and wide. The gap between rich and poor is unashamedly widening, generating wide-ranging processions of human suffering: violence, inequality between men and women, illiteracy, health care reserved for the elite, to name only a few of the deleterious consequences.

The workshops assembled participants from all kinds of horizons. We primarily participated in workshops on the status of women, access to education, often focused on access to elementary schools, and the numerous crises that are stalking our planet: financial, ecological, food, etc. We also participated in workshops dealing with Palestine, more specifically on the BDS campaign, where we tried to persuade all the participants (a lot of African representatives) about the importance of globalizing this campaign. Let's mention that a Social Forum dealing with Palestine in 2012, in Porto Alegre, is expected to take place.

One of the workshops, organized by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), to which the CSN, is affiliated addressed the relevance of having union organizations participate in these kinds of events. Echoing several other speakers, Louis Roy, CSN Vice-President, affirmed the necessity of participating in WSFs to build this other world that is possible with all interested social movements. Union isolation is not the CSN's approach, here, as elsewhere. A philosophy that we share.

The Next World Social Forum in Montreal?

Finally, it is possible that the next World Social Forum will be held in Montreal, in the summer 2013. This would be a first in the Northern Hemisphere. In Québec, we have often demonstrated our commitment to anti-globalization: demonstrations against the war in Iraq, People's Summit of the Americas in 2001, regional social forums, etc. ■

Let's Think Today About Education Tomorrow!

Conscious of the vital role and importance of education for the future of Québec society, the CSN rolled up its sleeves last fall to bring its platform on education up-to-date. The fundamental principles underlying this platform, adopted in 1991, are still relevant, but they did deserve to be revisited, not only to link the Confederation's positions more closely to the current situation, but also to enable them to be more effectively shared, analyzed and entrenched. It should be recalled that the multi-sector-based makeup of the CSN provides teachers Unions with an exceptional forum to make people aware of their vision of education and to make the most of their particular expertise in this regard, due to their daily contact with the reality on the front lines.

Jean Trudelle and France Désautniers

As part of this updating exercise, the Task force on education policies organized two days of reflection (last March 15 and 16) on the major challenges that we are facing, inviting activists from all sectors to think now about education tomorrow. More than 140 people, amongst whom there were several dozen FNEEQ delegates, responded to the invitation and the feedback at the end of the exercise was more than enthusiastic.

The two-day session began with some opening remarks from Claudette Carbonneau, President of the CSN, who re-affirmed the principles that underlie the CSN's position on education, more specifically, equality of opportunity and the importance of a public system that provides its citizens with a universal, free and quality education.

In order to encourage the participants to actively speak up and participate, the two days of reflection were primarily spent in workshop discussions.

Two very appreciated presentations

Nevertheless, to start things off, two researchers were invited to share their thoughts with the participants. The first speaker, Maxime Ouellet, a sessional lecturer in the UQAM Sociology Department and associate re-

searcher at the *Institut de recherche en information socio-économique* (IRIS) pointed out the paradox in the term "knowledge economy." In his opinion, the expression embodies two antinomial notions in the sense that knowledge is not an exclusive asset, as is the case for example with a tool that a person cannot use if someone else is using it. Unless one allows for a lot of leeway, knowledge, in essence, has no exchange value. But current trends observed in the university research milieu, towards which more and more private companies are turning so as to decrease their innovation costs and risks, provide much food for thought in this connection. Does the recourse to this form of outsourcing, where the benefits from any commercializable applications generally profit private companies, not constitute a hijacking of the university's mission with regard to research?

The second speaker was Paul Bélanger, a professor at the UQAM *Faculté des sciences de l'éducation* and a well known individual around the CSN, who presented his vision of the challenges involving education throughout the course of a person's life. This researcher believes that the factors determining school perseverance go well beyond the school walls and include several socio-economic factors that have to be taken into account... indeed, at the very latest, once the child is born! He argues that self-development and knowledge begin

to take shape in the womb, as well as in early childhood; this observation, when added to the recurring disruptions in the world of work, argue in favour of conceiving the right to an education as stretching all the way through an individual's life. Mr. Bélanger insisted upon the importance for workers to include provisions in their collective agreement that deal with training and professional development on the one hand, and the establishment of parity training committees, on the other.

The foregoing gives concrete shape to people's right to develop throughout their lives, an orientation that, in his opinion, derives from the respect and dignity that all human beings deserve. He ended his talk with a critique of accessibility to continuing education in our CEGEPs, which he denounced as very inadequate... an observation that we share entirely.

Denise Boucher, CSN Vice-President, in her concluding remarks on the presentations, indicated that "for the CSN, education is a crucial pole in any society. We have always fought for its accessibility and democratization and the demands formulated in our education platform mirror this position."

Vigorous exchanges

Following this sumptuous appetizer, 14 workshops were held, focused on four themes: the disruptions and challenges affecting Québec schools,

The CSN Task force on education policies is made up of representatives from the Central Councils and Federations that have members in the education sector, namely, the *Fédération des professionnelles (FP)*, the *Fédération des employées et employés de services publics (FEESP)*, as well as the *Fédération nationale des enseignantes et des enseignants du Québec (FNEEQ)*.

colleges and their renewal, and finally, the role and challenges facing the modern university.

Several subjects were discussed under the theme of the equality of opportunity for one and all: school drop-outs and access to diplomas, for example, the integration of disabled pupils or students with learning disorders or mental health problems. But many concerns were also the subject of exchanges and debates: the underfunding of the education system, the needs of technical and career training, retention vis-à-vis college and university success, privatization and new forms of competition, up-and-coming personnel, tuition, regional and economic development, the future of university research... a full plate for the framers of the future platform; there will be no shortage of content!

The discussions also permitted the identification of new strong points, in terms of how the CSN should focus its new platform. The workshops witnessed many rich and productive dialogues between different levels of teaching staff and members from different private sector federations. Today, in light of these exchanges, it seems clear that the value and status of public education needs more than ever to be emphasized and promoted in the public arena. Several participants vigorously denounced the utilitarian vision that increasingly guides decision-making in today's educational institutions. If it's all that obvious that workers will need to access training throughout their lives, education is all too often seen through the lens of what the job market needs and not the other way around.

Two well filled days

In his closing talk, Christian Nadeau, a professor of philosophy at the *Université de Montréal*, took a critical and



captivating look at the conception of education defended by the Moral Right in Québec and in Canada, inviting the trade union movement to more articulately affirm its beliefs and to strive, in the field of education, as elsewhere, in response to ubiquitous populism, to systemati-

cally steer public debate towards addressing the genuine substantive issues. The discussions were productive and will surely nurture and assist the thinking and deliberations of the members of the CSN Task force on education policies, that will soon be embarking upon the next phase of the process, namely, drafting a new platform, whose launch is scheduled, after a validation process notably with the federations, for the Confederal Council, next December.

"We are persuaded that these two days helped shed new light on our attitudes and thinking with regard to the present and the future of our education system," summarized Denise Boucher. ■

Les fneequeries

A Few Nominations

Marc Rochette, teacher at *cégep F.X.-Garneau*, has been elected to the *bureau fédéral*. **Éric Kirouac**, from the *Syndicat des professeur-es du Collège François-Xavier-Garneau* has been elected to the *Comité confédéral des lesbiennes, gais, bisexuels, transgenres (LGBT)* of CSN et finally, **Guillaume Fournier**, teacher at *cégep de Saint-Laurent* is now a member of FNEEQ school and society committee.



FNEEQ goes Social Media!

Recognizing the immense potential of social networks, the Federation has decided to be present on Facebook. The page that has been created is not intended to replace our other information tools, but rather to offer new, more timely and current information, from here and elsewhere. If you already use Facebook, please add the page FNEEQ to the list of those you «love»! If you do not, this is a good opportunity to get started!

www.facebook.com/FneeqCSN



We're also on Twitter. This medium allows the rapid dissemination of timely information in 140 characters.

www.twitter.com/FneeqCSN



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