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# Curriculums Plural: The case of English at the English CEGEPs

## Abstract

*English language and literature at Quebec's English-speaking CEGEPs has been characterized as "curriculums plural," with each department having its own curricular history and methods. Such a practice is quite different from other CEGEP disciplines where the Ministry of Education sets forth explicit syllabi for unified curricula. This anomaly results from a series of arguments and agreements between the Ministry of Education and the English departments, as well as within the departments themselves. Most often, argument has centred not so much on what should be taught as much as who will decide. This article presents a brief history of the forces that have produced the present "curriculums plural."*

## Résumé

*La langue et la littérature anglaises dans les cégeps anglophones du Québec ont toujours été marquées par le "pluralisme", chaque département appliquant sa propre histoire et ses propres méthodes. Cette façon de faire diffère radicalement des autres disciplines enseignées au cégep où le ministère de l'Éducation fixe les programmes d'étude pour assurer l'unité des enseignements. Cette anomalie est le fait d'une série d'arguments et d'accords entre le ministère de l'Éducation et les départements d'anglais et au sein des départements proprement dits. Le plus souvent, on ne se demande pas tant ce qui doit être enseigné que qui doit en décider. Cet article présente un bref historique des forces qui ont abouti au "pluralisme" actuel.*

The creation of a curriculum is never neutral. There are always interested parties, promoting either their own well-being or – what often amounts to the same thing – what they see as the well-being of the world at large. Of course, we have to know a curriculum's official statements, its public declarations about itself. But it is at least as important to know its unofficial statements

and history. Only then can we begin to identify its assumptions and their consequences. A curriculum always has intentions, stated or otherwise: It can intend to serve society, the individual, a discipline, a version of universal truth. More generally, of course, if less grandly, a curriculum serves the interests of whatever group can enforce its vision and will. It is always worth knowing whose interests are served, as the story of the English CEGEP curriculum shows.

### **The Parent Report and Its Effects**

Any account of the English CEGEP-curriculum begins with the report of the Parent Commission. Because that story has been told in greater detail elsewhere (see, for example, Edwards, 1990; Gallagher & MacFarlane, 1975; Whitelaw, 1971), it can be summarized here. As both product and engine of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, the Parent Commission's curricular goal was to bring together the study of technologies and humanistic education. Its social goal was even more sweeping: It sought to democratize higher education and make it available to all Quebecers. The traditional elites who had been trained by the church at the classical colleges (*collèges classiques*) were to study with the "working classes" at the CEGEPs. And the place where they were to meet most often was in the core curriculum, of which *langue maternelle* was a crucial part.

However, whatever the social reasons for creating CEGEPs in the French sector, the necessity for creating English CEGEPs was more questionable. English education by the 1960s had achieved many of the Parent Report's goals. It was relatively modern in pedagogy and curricula; it was pluralistic and essentially secular; and it had a good percentage of students who went on to higher education, particularly in science and business. The system of four years of high school followed by four years of university worked reasonably satisfactory. English-speaking students completing their bachelor degrees generally did as well as students from elsewhere in terms of entry into graduate schools, awards, and places in the work force. This is not to say that English-speaking students did not need greater access to higher education, especially vocational and professional training; but it is to underscore that Quebec's two solitudes extended even to educational goals. However, because it would have been politically impossible to create French CEGEPs but not English ones, parallel English colleges were created. And because language and literature were at the centre of one, they had to be at the centre of the other.

### **The Role of the Universities**

The huge logistical problems in setting up a completely new and unique educational level inevitably meant that less attention could be given to the curriculum, at least in the early years. For core English curriculum, the government first turned to a university advisory committee, which by June

1966 had sketched out a curriculum (Quebec English Departments on the Institutes [QEDI], 1966). Citing the Parent's assumptions about students with widely varying abilities, the committee proposed a single basic course with a wide choice of texts "which will immediately interest students" and develop "sensitive readers" (QEDI, pp. 2-3). The report was quite specific in places (for example, how many and what kind of assignments) but did not propose a completely unified curriculum. The committee's February 1967 report spoke of a single course for all students but one whose various instructors could modify it to suit the different needs of different classes.

These early discussions show ambivalence about the curriculum, moving between a quite specific university-like syllabus and Parent's notion of a new kind of student. Given that committee members came from schools with quite different approaches to undergraduate English teaching, perhaps the ambivalence merely reflects an attempt to reach consensus. But another factor contributing to this ambivalence was that the universities had power only to recommend. This meant that, except for the transitional period when they had their own CEGEPs, the universities were to have no real say in what was going to be taught. They recognize this when they write that "certain of these proposals may prove in time to be impossible, or beside the point." Their mandate was to be a "consulting and recommending body to offer what help it can" (QEDI, 1966, p. 1).

While such comments were no doubt meant to be generous to the person who would eventually make curricular decisions, the fact remains that the universities themselves had little commitment to the CEGEPs. Regular English faculty often perceived this new level as a threat to their own positions, or at best an annoyance. University CEGEP staff came mainly from conference leaders and composition teachers – persons who, for whatever reasons, were not to be offered regular posts. They were given great autonomy to design courses with little or no direction. One might conclude that the universities were again being generous; one might also conclude, however, that they wanted little to do with a problem that would soon be transferred to the Ministry of Education.

But given the pressing logistical problems of simply starting new CEGEPs (both French and English), government energies were unlikely to be spent deciding the details of curriculum. Merely getting the schools open was difficult enough. And given also Quebec's inevitable politics of language, the Ministry of Education was obviously reluctant to intervene about the teaching of English. Indeed from the outset, its position has generally ranged from neglect to bemusement. There was to be little Ministry involvement except for logistics. From the beginning, therefore, the English departments at the English-speaking CEGEPs could do what they wished as long as they didn't openly contravene government regulations. The resultant vacuum left by both the university English departments and the Ministry would have to be filled.

### The Social Context and the Creation of Curriculum

The Quiet Revolution's nationalism and social change touched English Quebec only indirectly. However, there were still enormous changes taking place in that community when the CEGEP curriculum was being developed in the late Sixties and early Seventies. It was a time of "student power," and schools across North America went through a period of upheaval. From the standpoint of curriculum, the word heard most often was "relevance". Students demanded and often received new courses addressing what they perceived as their needs and interests. What was old was suspect, and this attitude was especially prevalent at the CEGEPs.

Changes in attitudes were not only a phenomenon of students but of CEGEP teachers as well, many of whom themselves had been students in the Sixties. When they were hired, they naturally brought with them their outlooks and ideals about what should be taught. Sally Nelson, an original Dawson English teacher, recalls the prevailing ethos of the early years:

*We all had differing visions of 'the good,' but we shared the idea that the old traditional elite education of class distinction, geared to preserve the status quo, the Establishment, was not on . . . . We believed in equality, individuality, general consensus, and mutual respect. The director general, the janitor, the teacher, the secretary, the counsellor, the students, would meet together to solve problems and make decisions. (Nelson, 1989, p. 7)*

There were, to be sure, dissenting voices about this vision, but in general, it neatly sums up the attitudes that many people brought to creating the CEGEP curriculum.

#### Dawson College Curriculum

##### *The first CEGEP English department: Selby Campus*

As the first English-language CEGEP, Dawson College created the paradigm for curriculum development that other CEGEP English departments were to follow. Dawson valued "openness" in its structures and curriculum. Sister Sylvia Macdonald, who did much of Dawson's early hiring, believed that students did not learn equally well from all teachers and that faculty diversity was therefore essential. To that end, Macdonald hired equal numbers of men and women, as well as people of different races, religions, and classes, consciously producing a very diverse faculty (Sally Nelson, personal interview, December 18, 1989). Faculty, Nelson notes, had *carte blanche* to create its own curriculum: "Everybody simply listed some courses they would like to teach and then we taught them." Whatever curriculum the university committee had earlier proposed (and whatever the Ministry thought of it) simply was not going to be put in place. Indeed, for most of the participants in the curriculum process, the university guidelines were simply irrelevant.

This is not to say that there was unanimity about **what** should be taught. But there was widespread agreement about the **process** of deciding: What would be taught would be chosen by whoever would teach it. Indeed, there was little else that could have been done when Dawson first opened, given the conditions that prevailed. With less than six months between hiring of Dawson faculty and the start of classes, it was hard enough for professors just to design courses without entering into the usual English department arguments about the place of the literary canon, how to teach writing, how much student choice to give, and so on. The curriculum was just one more problem in a host of problems.

However, it would be misleading to say that the resultant wide variety of courses was simply a response to logistics. After the pressures of the first years passed at Dawson, there still remained very deep divisions about the nature of English studies itself, a debate that by no means has been resolved. Again, Sally Nelson comments:

*The thing about English is that you can teach English from a sociological perspective, a Marxist perspective or whatever, and you get all these people in the department who are so different and it's the nature of the beast.* (Sally Nelson, personal interview, December 18, 1989)

This perspective – what Gerald Graff (1987) has called "the humanist myth" – has dominated English studies throughout North America. Departments include all topics and all subjects in the curriculum as a way of reaching accommodation among practitioners. We will return to Graff later, but for now, we should see that one could not expect the mere passage of time to produce an agreement at the CEGEPs when such agreement was unlikely to be found elsewhere.

### ***Dawson-Lafontaine Campus***

A few years after Dawson opened its Selby campus, some of its faculty and administrators opened a second one at Lafontaine. That group sought to create an interdisciplinary curriculum and structure in all subjects. This meant, according to Douglas Rollins who did much of Lafontaine's hiring of English faculty, that they weren't hiring just literature teachers but literature teachers who were also interested in other things – like film, politics, or music. A whole new set of structures was established as well as a new curriculum to reflect that. However, it quickly became evident that Lafontaine's student population entered with decidedly weak English skills. This led to a more structured curriculum than Selby's, with much basic writing taught. Indeed, within two years, all incoming students were tested and most were placed in different levels of remedial English.

The Lafontaine department did establish a one-semester composition and literature course as its "entry" level (that is, for the remedial graduates). Douglas Rollins recalls the efforts in creating and then retaining a common curriculum and a common exam:

*We did for a while. But, of course there was all this sort of 'we're not long out of the 60s' so people began to first of all not like the text they were using; so they would choose their own text, but still they were dealing with the common exam. . . . So that fell by the wayside. The common text fell by the wayside first. And then the common exam followed a couple of terms after that. We revised the exam a couple of times and tried to make it more general [for] people using different stuff and different approaches . . . and then I guess we just decided that we all knew pretty much what it was we wanted to do and those that wanted to use the common exam would use one. And then gradually nobody used it. (Douglas Rollins, personal interview, September 20, 1989)*

While it existed, the course required all faculty to teach common topics and even stipulated the number and length of writing assignments. Although the department continued to specify general course goals, reading lists were left increasingly to teacher preference. The common goal, Rollins recalls, was to move students towards "some ideal of what we had that the collegial level reading and writing should be." But commonality proved difficult to maintain. There was a continuing movement towards greater freedom for teachers to choose what was to be taught. Again, Rollins:

*We came to believe [that] the objectives could be fulfilled without the restriction of having to deal with material that maybe they [faculty] didn't particularly care for or that they thought wasn't suitable for a particular class they had. Classes have different personalities.*

This notion – that classes differ significantly and only teachers could adequately respond – became the norm at CEGEP English departments, even at campuses where more structured curricula existed. Thus, faculty choice emerged as the major component of curriculum building.

### **The Curriculum at Vanier: Two Directions**

#### ***Ste. Croix Campus***

Vanier College was the second English-language CEGEP to open, and a significant percentage of its staff came from Dawson to its first campus at Ste. Croix. The Ste. Croix people sought to retain the freedom and flexibility of

Dawson's curriculum, although the College itself ran in a more structured fashion. The first head of Vanier's English department was Greta Nemiroff, who served as provincial coordinator for many years and is now Director of Dawson's New School. Nemiroff had been one of the people to set up the Sir George Williams collegial program and joined Vanier in 1970.

She brought with her a very different kind of thinking than what prevailed at the universities. Her starting assumption was that university students were really not responding to the traditional material and were instead learning by rote what kind of answers to give. Her own students, she found, responded much better to genres like the short story. Nemiroff points to a changing student population which necessitated a diverse curriculum:

*I also felt that very often we had at Sir George many students who were second-generation Canadians whose first language was not English; it was not the language spoken at home, and that somehow they felt that their own roots were devalued. I was also concerned about the fact that there were, especially after the computer incident at Concordia, increasing numbers of West Indian students who felt totally remote from what they were learning. So, I began to think what is the motivation? . . . One of the things I wanted to do was to find a way of validating their own roots. So one of the things I looked for [at Vanier], for example, was someone capable of teaching West Indian literature. (Greta Nemiroff, personal interview, October 18, 1989)*

This is obviously different from the university advisory committee's notions of a CEGEP literature curriculum. Literary texts were important at Vanier, of course, but so was a particular perspective on social issues. Although the Vanier curriculum included much "exemplary literature," there was far less emphasis on the transmission of the "traditional canon" or its values.

Like Dawson, Vanier was shaped by the people who brought with them their own notions about literature. Like Dawson again, the Vanier faculty had the power to implement those notions. There was no visible Ministry involvement in the process – nor even much involvement by the College's academic deans. For example, Nemiroff discusses the guidelines used in setting up the curriculum:

*I think that our guideline was to cover genre, to give a chance to focus on writing and reading skills for people who needed them, to give diversity, and to make available for people a diversity of literature in terms of its roots, of English literature written in English. . . .*

Who was telling this to faculty? Nemiroff replies, "I was telling myself that." Again, individual teachers built their own curricula. There was, to be sure, debate and disagreement; but those debates were not resolved as much as postponed by permitting individual teachers to teach what they wanted. There was no body above the department curriculum committee seriously affecting those choices. Although the Vanier courses changed over the years, the process by which the decision to offer them remained the same. Like Dawson, this meant that there was a very wide variety of courses offered, traditional and non-traditional both, reflecting whatever happened to be the particular interests of the faculty at any given time.

### *Vanier-Snowdon Campus*

The Snowdon Campus of Vanier opened in the fall of 1973 as an autonomous unit. Although in many other Snowdon departments faculty came from the Ste. Croix campus, the entire Snowdon English department was new to the College. This meant that the Ste. Croix model was not necessarily going to be followed, either by administrative *fiat* or by departmental inclination. During its first year, Snowdon curriculum did in fact follow a "cafeteria" model with a wide variety of courses designed by teachers acting alone. Once again, most hiring was done just three or four months before classes began, leaving little time for curricular discussion. The courses in the first year, therefore, were typical of other CEGEPs, often emphasizing theme and genre. During that first year, however, several teachers became dissatisfied with what was being taught. What most department members wanted – though by no means all – was a curriculum that would introduce the student to the major works of English in a more structured, sequential way.

The following year, therefore, the department required a two-semester introductory course for all first-year students. Second-year students could continue to choose, cafeteria-style, from anything offered. The second-year courses shared no common ground beyond their being designed by individual instructors choosing to teach what they wanted. There was also a remedial program. An "average-ability" student started with the mandatory introduction before choosing courses in the second year. A weak student began with a remedial course, went next to the two-semester introductory one, and then chose freely.

Although the syllabus was significantly modified over time, this essential structure was maintained until the department was merged with Ste. Croix in 1989. At its inception, the introductory course had a clear historical objective. There was a common text and common reading lists from which teachers could make their own selections. The reading lists were necessary for both pedagogical and logistical reasons. The department wanted all students to study the traditional canon (although which parts varied from teacher to teacher). In its first year, the course was taught by combining a large lecture (of about 100 students) with small groups meeting with conference leaders. The



presence of conference leaders made coordination important, since they would meet groups of students taught by several different teachers. In addition, a self-instructional programmed writing course was instituted to concentrate on the mechanics of writing, also requiring cooperation among teachers.

However, the course was generally unpopular with students, faculty, and conference leaders, each group having different complaints. Students did not like the lack of choice (which was given at Ste. Croix and elsewhere) nor the relatively large class sizes. Faculty did not like the necessary coordination among sections. And conference leaders did not like their workload nor their poor pay. The structure of the course was therefore changed back to regular class sizes, but the syllabus remained in place. Over the years, with fewer and fewer logistical constraints, the course lost most of its common characteristics. There was a specific list of topics, organized by semester, but not all teachers followed it. Indeed, different sections of the courses could be very different.

The Snowdon experience was similar to Lafontaine's in that common texts and approaches gave way in time to demands for greater teacher choice. Not surprisingly, as more faculty joined Snowdon, it became increasingly difficult to reach consensus. With faculty often disagreeing about content, the first-year course was increasingly modified not to pursue a particular vision of English studies but to achieve compromise. Administration involvement remained minimal. Despite debate about the syllabus, however, there continued to be wide-spread agreement about giving students choice only after a basic, introductory course.

### **Champlain-Lennoxville: The Difficulties of Commonality**

Champlain-Lennoxville began full operations in the fall of 1972. Unlike at Dawson or Vanier, the Lennoxville administration had clear ideas about English studies, essentially, wanting more traditional courses and structures. The administration used the initial hiring to affect curriculum, looking for sympathetic teachers who could also cover the various genres. In addition to wanting traditional "coverage," they also put in place a mandatory composition course. The resulting program looked very much like first-year university programs in the pre-CEGEP days.

But by October of the first year of operation, faculty recognized problems with this arrangement. Lennoxville drew students from a wide variety of backgrounds, many of whom were not native speakers of English. For them, one semester of writing was not enough. Faculty soon began to lobby for changes to the structure that had been put in place by the administration. And indeed, once faculty was hired, it largely took over curriculum development. Almost unanimously, faculty wanted a variety of course categories to give as much freedom to teachers to do what they felt most competent in doing. From

early on, Lennoxville faculty questioned curricular decisions made at higher levels, but the impetus behind curriculum development was not solely instructor preference for teaching particular areas of literature.

In their first year, Lennoxville faculty wanted to replace composition with an introduction to literature that would also include writing. They felt strongly that they could teach only so much composition without compromising the literature. By the mid-seventies, Lennoxville had developed such a course, taught by all faculty, using a common text. This later became a two-semester course, which incoming students took. The course was organized generically—everyone, for example, teaching short stories in the first semester, poetry and drama in the second, and a novel somewhere along the way. A common text and a common exam were established so that faculty could come to an agreed-upon understanding of what students should be able to do by the end of the first year of CEGEP.

In time, however, as we've seen in other colleges, the common text and common exam were eventually abandoned; more and more, teachers wanted to select their own material. Further, more non-native English speakers came to the college; by 1978, a placement test was introduced to direct students into appropriate levels of literature and remedial courses. This latter group of courses was necessary because the department felt it could not use literature to teach language skills to its weak students. Thus, at least in part, the department returned to its original curriculum that separated literature and language. But at the same time, the Department also strengthened teacher choice as the key element in designing the literature curriculum. Thus again, one sees how difficult it is—even for relatively small departments—to maintain the consensus for a common course.

### Traditional Curriculum at Two Smaller CEGEPs

#### *Champlain-St. Lawrence*

A very different sort of CEGEP program came into existence in 1971. Champlain-St. Lawrence grew out of St. Lawrence College, a four-year, English-language institution whose degrees were granted by Laval. When St. Lawrence became one of three campuses of Champlain Regional College, its English faculty moved *en masse* to the new school. This was, of course, very different from Dawson and Vanier where entire new faculties were hired. (The third Champlain campus, at St. Lambert, generally followed the Dawson model of teacher preference driving curriculum development.)

The Champlain-St. Lawrence English curriculum began as a hybrid—partly something new, partly a continuation of the former St. Lawrence curriculum. The department redefined its goals when it became a CEGEP; obviously, going from a four-year to a two-year program demanded major changes. But another factor was the CEGEP division between core, concentra-

tion, and complementary courses. Donald Petzel (a faculty member at Champlain–St. Lawrence from its start) notes that despite these structural changes, "the guiding principles of the English program were those of the college at St. Lawrence" (Donald Petzel, personal interview, November 20, 1989). English at the old St. Lawrence College was obligatory, with little choice permitted. Composition was required of all freshmen, and sophomores took a compulsory and traditional *Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf survey. It was, generally speaking, what was then the norm for a college curriculum across North America. In the few years following St. Lawrence becoming a CEGEP, faculty recognized that incoming students were weaker than those of the old four-year college. This led to a redefinition of Core English, based on genre, requiring students to take a sequence of courses in the short story, in poetry, in the novel, and in drama. The result was far more structure than at most other CEGEPs.

The process of curriculum building at St. Lawrence was very different from other English CEGEPs. To begin, the relatively small staff (about six or eight persons) started with quite similar professional backgrounds. Moreover, they were, by temperament and by geography, removed from the foment of Montreal. The process of consultation among faculty could proceed, for better or worse, with a fairly widespread agreement about the boundaries of discussion already in place. Hiring reinforced this common philosophic approach since it was a process of finding people who were sympathetic to the basic tenets of the program. This is not to say the St. Lawrence curriculum was necessarily static. But the department operated by being able to agree on its first principles. And this philosophic base has remained constant and very much different from Vanier or Dawson – or indeed, the other Champlain campuses.

St. Lawrence's different curriculum could have led to problems with the rest of the CEGEP network. Donald Petzel recalls his disagreements about principles with Greta Nemiroff:

*Greta and I first came head to head on this question. And both of us sat down one day and said, 'Look, we're going to work this thing out so you can do your thing, and we can do our thing,' and that's what we've done. We've lived that way.*

Despite profound differences about curricular philosophy, one side was not trying to tell the other what to teach. In fact, the very opposite was true. Petzel recalls an early meeting at the Provincial English Curriculum Committee:

*We realized after one session that. . . we have a problem. She [Greta] says, 'You seem to believe in absolutes and I don't.' I said, 'Yes, it seems that way. And so we, well, we have to make some kind of accommodation here and there in the house of*

*literature in Quebec'. . . . We tried to understand, we tried to make our positions clear. Her position was that, well, we have too many people from different areas and so forth, and we need to do different things. (Donald Petzel, personal interview, November 20, 1989)*

Indeed, the period of rewriting the *Cahier* (which began in the early 1980s) was one in which the different English departments recognized large differences among themselves. The object of writing a new curriculum was to accommodate these differences, rather than come up with a single, unified curriculum.

### *Heritage College*

Heritage College began as part of the CEGEP de Hull in the early seventies and then became part of CEGEP Outaouais, until getting its own charter. The original curriculum, according to Terry Keough (former chairman and a member of the English Department since 1971), was put in place in 1969 by a staff of three English teachers who taught a mixture of topics, the small number of students being a limiting factor on what could be offered.

Heritage's curriculum has remained very stable, maintaining a mandatory two-year structure from its start. Originally, first-year students did a chronological survey of English literature, followed in the second year by a survey of Canadian writing. These survey courses stayed intact until 1983-84, when some faculty expressed concern that the material was causing relatively high failure rates. As a result, the Department introduced a genre-based first-year course, teaching more modern short stories and poetry. Although failure rates did not drop, those instructors who wanted the genre approach maintained it for their sections. The majority of the six faculty members, however, continue to teach from a historical point of view.

Clearly, Heritage differed from most other colleges in the system in terms of the range of offerings and in terms of teacher preference in designing curriculum. The Department as a whole specified what things students should be able to do after two years and worked out a rough sequence for teaching them. There remains substantial agreement about what skills should be taught at each level. The department has monitored itself informally, depending partly on the good will of each person and partly on peer pressure.

Like Champlain-St. Lawrence, size has had a great deal to do with Heritage maintaining its cohesion. Part of that is because, as Terry Keough remarks, they are a small group (most of whom happen to be medievalists) which has been together for a long time, reinforced by hiring people who were evidently "traditionalists." This permitted a forceful articulation of the mission

to teach both fundamental skills and what faculty consider to be the cultural bases of society. Again, as is the case at Champlain-St. Lawrence, maintaining a particular curricular structure rests on faculty sharing values and being small enough to maintain itself as a coherent group.

### **Marianopolis: Curriculum and Rapid Growth**

The Marianopolis CEGEP began in the early 1970s. Like Champlain-St. Lawrence, Marianopolis previously had been a four-year, private Catholic college. Affiliated with Université de Montréal, it gave degrees in Arts and Sciences. Like St. Lawrence, the faculty who was in place became the core of the new CEGEP. Unlike St. Lawrence, however, enrollment quickly grew, as did the number of faculty. That very growth led Marianopolis to put in place a very different curriculum.

According to Judie Livingston (an early faculty member and later the English Department's representative to the Provincial Committee), the English curriculum began as a hybrid between parts of the old four-year curriculum and something new, based on the Dawson model. For the first couple of years, Livingston recalls, curriculum was developed by the department chair talking informally to Dawson people; the chair then handed the results to faculty. Livingston notes that Marianopolis' curriculum essentially was Dawson's.

By the fall of 1971, Marianopolis began a restructuring, English remaining an autonomous area. There was little contact at that time among CEGEPs, and so Marianopolis developed along its own lines. The major task by 1973, however, was hiring: about eighteen people were hired by 1975, according to Judie Livingston. To a large extent, curricular decisions were made by the constraints of having to hire rapidly and then accommodate those new faculty.

The curriculum was formed, therefore, partly by the academic interests of available candidates and partly by the Department's sense of the need to cover important areas. Livingston recalls the process:

*We are talking about three or four women sitting down with this booklet of 299 possibilities, or suggested possibilities; and what we, to be very honest, what we did in terms of interviewing was assess people that we felt would be good in a classroom. They were enthusiastic, they had a Master's; they in some cases had some teaching experience and in some cases they hadn't. We talked in the interview of what they thought, what they would be comfortable teaching. We tried to give a selection in terms of the genre, maybe more than anything else. One of the members of our group was very concerned that history, historical periods, be covered. And so we tended to try to find people who could teach*

*Shakespeare, who could teach the Romantics, who were interested in teaching the traditional survey. . . . It was very much. . . going with personalities and then attempting to develop a curriculum from very grass roots. But the basis was people that we thought would be keen teachers.* (Judie Livingston, personal interview, November 1, 1989)

By 1975, Livingston recalls, hiring discussions had effectively stopped being about filling gaps (like finding an Eighteenth-Century specialist); that "became less of an issue once we started interviewing because the personality of the person we were interviewing became more crucial than looking for that particular quality on the CV."

As individuals established themselves in the College, curriculum naturally changed, the common experience for most English CEGEPs. Over time, the curriculum more and more developed from the individual pursuits of faculty. "As a result," Livingston says, "the curriculum inevitably reflects the interest and the variety reflects the kind of faculty that we have." This does not, of course, enforce a particular notion of **what** students should be taught but (again) only the **process** by which decisions are made. The Marianopolis experience of curriculum building has generally been the norm throughout the CEGEP network.

### **The Public Curriculum: Cahier Descriptions of English**

The different curricula we have looked at clearly are the products of different philosophies. Despite this, however, there still exists a curriculum to which all CEGEPs are legally bound. The yearly *Cahiers de l'enseignement* constitute the official descriptions of what is taught across the CEGEP network. Because the *Diplôme Études Collégial (DEC)* is signed by the Minister of Education, there is – on paper at least – a degree of common ground and common standards among colleges. But English studies is an anomaly in that quite different programs exist despite a single legal statement.

And indeed, it was not until 1973-74 that there was any formal statement of English curriculum in the *Cahier*, even though the CEGEPs had been operating for several years. The 1973-74 *Cahier de l'enseignement collégial*, with contributions from the Provincial English Committee, provided the first official description of English language and literature courses. Beginning with a statement of general objectives, it avers that study in English courses gives the student the chance "to develop as an individual in a verbal society." Three categories of courses (*rattrapage* or noncredit classes, core, and options) exist to achieve this, but there is not a curriculum in the classic sense of a path – literally, a course – from one point to the next. The description of categories is

broad enough to include virtually hundreds of different literature courses, some (like media studies) bordering on other disciplines. The evident goal of such a curriculum is not coherence but flexibility. Colleges can offer whatever courses their departments wish, and students can take whichever ones of those they like.

The first *cahier* description for English studies thus sets a precedent for how curricula would be officially described. With the colleges operating under the assumption that faculty would teach what they wanted to teach, the legal descriptions of the curriculum were to be broad enough to ensure this. Implicitly, this process affirms the pluralism of English CEGEPs and assumes that English studies flourish when many different interests are present. Implicitly again, the process rejects a unified curriculum. But equally implicit is the tacit understanding that *Direction general de l'enseignement collégial* (DGEC) would have little to do with the specifics of the curriculum. The behavioral objective movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s – so much in evidence elsewhere in *cahier* descriptions of other disciplines – simply is not part of the English course ethos. There is no statement in the 603 section of the *cahier* of what students should be able to do after they complete the curriculum; indeed to specify that would be to go against the very spirit of what was written.

The statements of English curriculum were not changed for two years; the *cahier* of 1975-76 continued to speak of a "varied curriculum with a diversity of methodological approaches" (DGEC, 1975, p. 0-114). Again, individual departments were to interpret that diversity – how much of it to represent in their courses and how much of it to require students to take. Departmental autonomy, or at least great flexibility, continued to be central to curriculum-building. For example, there was an increasing sense that student problems with writing were becoming more severe. In response, the 1975-76 *cahier* introduced the "integrative approach to the teaching of English" (DGEC, 1975, p. 0-114) which stressed the need for students to be provided with "models of exemplary writing." Although departments would focus on writing more than before, there was to be no imposition of composition or indeed any statement of requisite skills. The teaching of writing was to be a part of core literature and done in ways the departments themselves saw fit.

The *Cahier*, however, contains a number of inherent curricular contradictions. It wishes to provide greater structure while retaining flexibility. It introduces the notion of "cultural heritage," implying the existence of a more traditional syllabus than what was in place. At the same time, however, it insists that the study of that heritage requires a varied curriculum and diverse methodology. Similarly, it restricts student choice by placing maxima on the number of courses taken in any one category. It then allows content in those categories to be so far-ranging as to permit the student to study the same material in more than one place. Finally, although the *Cahier* is increasingly sensitive to the problem of writing, it does not insist on writing courses *per se*;

rather it puts the major responsibility for writing on literature courses taught in very different ways. The overall intention is clear: The *Cahier* is a political document, not a curricular one. It tries to accomplish two quite distinct goals—permitting the colleges to do things in their own ways while simultaneously satisfying the bureaucratic demands of the government.

### *The Context of the 1984 Cahier*

A major revision of the *Cahier* descriptions of English courses appeared in 1984, based on work formally begun during the 1980-81 academic year. This document is still the official statement of the English curriculum, and therefore deserves particular attention. Its first emphasis was logistical rather than curricular, and one of its working documents makes this point: While there was no question that each college offered a balanced program of courses well suited to the particular needs of its student population, the coordination of numbers used for various types of courses was something less than perfect (Palumbo, 1983).

The report notes that although this was "inconsequential" in literature, it was serious in remedial courses. For example, a number used for a low-level remedial course in one college could be used (and indeed was) for a creative writing course at another. Even more confusing, a college itself could use the same number for very different courses. The major thrust of the curriculum renovation, then, was to rationalize the numbering system to provide a "fuller set of language skill courses and . . . a coordinated sequence of courses" (Provincial Committee, 1983, p. 1).

However, the new curriculum was not simply a response to the perceived need to renumber courses. A second major precipitating factor was the *Gadbois Report* (Gadbois, 1979) which had suggested a highly structured sequence of courses for all French departments across the network. That report was never implemented, but, back in 1979, the English Provincial Committee was called upon to respond to the Gadbois document as part of a reexamination of its mandate. Edward Palumbo, who led the Provincial Committee during the period it was preparing the 1984 *Cahier*, describes the committee's initial reactions to the Gadbois report:

*We got the impression that this would be the model. It was written in French for Français langue maternelle, but we got the impression it would be for us to adapt very narrowly. That is, we would simply change French to English and use the same format. And it really would have been utterly unworkable here. . . . There was a course in punctuation, some of the kind of accompanying material that described things like a passing grade would mean the student would have fewer than a certain number of errors per page. It was*



*very behavioristic, very much defining behavior and models, and I think that's what the appeal to DGEC was.* (Edward Palumbo, personal interview, October 8, 1989)

The Provincial Committee responded to the *Gadbois Report* with a detailed and impassioned set of arguments, drawing on comments solicited from every public and private CEGEP (Nemiroff & Henbury, 1979). Its arguments against Gadbois' ideas can be summarized as follows:

- Gadbois' aims were already being met in the English colleges. Testing and placement were being done, twenty-five percent of students already received formal remediation, and core literature already had a one-third writing component. A wide variety of methodologies were in place to meet varied student populations, and therefore, any change would be simply for the sake of change. Where was the proof, the committee asked, that current courses (including those in the French colleges) were inadequate?
- Gadbois' "lock-step" approach was unworkable both on administrative and pedagogical grounds because it arbitrarily divided discourse into four fundamental forms. His quantified, behaviorist approach would stultify curriculum, especially for literature.
- Gadbois had spoken of "consolidation" but anglophones didn't require such a "last round up" of skills but rather a bridge between high school and university. The committee objected to the notion of *suffisance* [sufficiency] which could be tested because testing would become more important than teaching.
- Gadbois would relegate literature to a lower place since his language arts approach "diffuse[d] cultural integrity." Teachers of English didn't work only on marketplace skills but also assisted students becoming "cultivated".
- Gadbois was "quantitative, monolithic, task-oriented" and so "ignore[d] the psychology and needs of young adults" who need a wide variety of courses to explore their cultural heritage.
- Gadbois was anti-democratic since he did not allow for needs of local populations. No single approach can use the skills of all teachers or meet needs of all students. Enforcing one approach to the exclusion of all others would "limit and inhibit the academic freedom."

There was some limited agreement with Gadbois: mastery of language was crucial, indeed, the *raison d'être* of core English; a "holistic" approach was needed to improve writing, reading, oral skills; and diagnostic testing and placement were valuable – and in fact already in place in the English CEGEPs. But not much more sympathy existed beyond that.

Clearly, the Gadbois presentation engendered much anger in the English departments, virtually all of whom wrote briefs attacking it. The central issue was who would decide what was to be taught. A letter from Guy Gauthier (then the DGEC professional responsible for English mother-tongue) to Greta Nemiroff responded to the English committee's antipathy to Gadbois (Gauthier, 1980). The letter is conciliatory but does insist on clearer definitions than what then obtained. Gauthier begins by stressing the continuity among elementary, high school, and CEGEP studies; this requires that the ends, goals, and objectives of CEGEP teaching must be clearly defined in terms of both the needs of the student and society in general. The letter then makes two key points: 1) Because core English is the terminal step of obligatory courses before university, it must have "terminal objectives of learning"; and 2) The diverse background of students necessitates terminal objectives (including literature courses) in terms of linguistic competence and pedagogy. That said, Gauthier ends by assuring the Committee that DGEC has no intention of establishing provincial exams for English mother-tongue, intervening in department pedagogy, or imposing a single pedagogical strategy. What DGEC does want is to "render the framework clearer with a clear policy and objectives which are clearer as well." But no mention is made of how such clarity would be achieved or monitored.

The English colleges' response to the Gadbois report is a classic example of a clash between two opposed notions of curriculum design. On one hand, both Gadbois and Gauthier see curriculum-building as rational and scientific. For them, language and literature study is no different than other disciplines in that teaching requires unequivocal statements of objectives, strategies, and methodologies. Moreover, in theory, the success or failure of a curriculum can be measured accurately and steps then taken to improve it. This position is an anathema, however, to the English schools, whose response focuses on the "psychology and needs of young adults" and the curriculum's role in helping them become "cultivated and productive members of our society in the larger sense." Those needs undoubtedly cannot be measured, nor should there be an attempt to define what it means to be cultivated.

The debate reflects two diametrically opposed notions about designing curricula. Rendering the extreme position of both, we can say that the first assumes that all students, faculty, and schools are sufficiently alike so that a simple consensus can be had about the nature of English studies and its instruction. The second assumes that students, faculty, schools – and English studies too – are so diverse and so various that no common ground can ever exist. In the Gadbois report and the Provincial Committee's response to it, these positions are clear. But once one leaves the pedagogical high ground, it's also clear that debate is really about power and whose will is going to prevail in deciding what would go on in the classroom.

Although the Gadbois report was never implemented either on the French or English side, it nonetheless had a major effect. English departments

considered it a real threat to their programs, and it became a provocation for redoing the curriculum. Preparing to write the new *cahier*, the Provincial Committee visited various colleges, talked to people, and looked at everything from handouts for essay sheets to course plans. The question they asked was whether the English colleges wanted a single provincial curriculum, and if so, what did that mean in practice. Edward Palumbo comments:

*And it became obvious that we didn't really have a curriculum. We had curriculums plural that each college had, though they adhered to the same structure technically, bureaucratically. In practice each college had evolved a curriculum that had fundamental differences from other colleges. And it seemed. . . that those differences ensued largely from the fact that the student populations were different. . . . So it became clear that what we needed was a project on curriculum development that really was going to have as one its principle aims to keep the wolf from the door. (Edward Palumbo, personal interview, October 8, 1989)*

The Committee, therefore, took the position that there were excellent courses in every department and that renovation of the central curriculum should not obliterate them. At the same time, a renewed curriculum could encourage the development of things that were absent. From one perspective, the exchanges with colleges across the network meant curricular renovation was to be consultative rather than prescriptive. From another, however, the process merely intended to preserve the rights of English departments to continue what they were already doing, rather than initiate an examination of first principles.

What emerges, then, is a document that at once attempts to satisfy both the DGEC's demand for clarity and the English departments' insistence on their local autonomy. Again, Palumbo:

*I would say we had two goals. One of them was to have an organized provincial curriculum in bureaucratic terms. The other one was to not let that . . . organization undermine the individual interpretations of it. That it would be like a body of bureaucratic lore, let's say, that could be interpreted individually, variously by the colleges and that it would be understood that the safeguards over the standards, so to speak, would be done not provincially but locally, by departments. (Edward Palumbo, personal interview, October 8, 1989)*

To quote Palumbo again, "the project was fundamentally a bureaucratic one."

The committee wrote and rewrote course descriptions, trying to achieve a general statement about what the departments did. That meant, of course, being sufficiently broad and nonspecific. The "one-and-the-many" problem

involved trying to write course descriptions that would allow departments to continue to offer their courses and to supply numbers for them. Palumbo puts the spirit of the process very clearly as "preserving the established curriculum, or at least not undermining their normal course of evolution." The result is a bureaucratic document rather than a pedagogical one.

### *The 1984 Cahier*

The finished document emerges, therefore, from a series of political forces that sought to satisfy both the colleges' desire for autonomy and the government's desire for structure. From that perspective, it succeeds admirably. It addresses the lack of coherence in the numbering of remedial courses, a consequence of the placement testing that began in the 1970s. It also addresses the place of literary and cultural components in general education and writing instruction's key role in their teaching. The *Cahier's* framers have three major concerns: (1) the need for a program of skills courses; (2) the maintenance of the traditional core curriculum; and (3) the need to respect differences among populations at different colleges.

Thus the curriculum at once tries to ensure local autonomy, while at the same time providing system-wide uniformity in terms of course numbering.

What the 1984 *Cahier* does not do – indeed the last thing it intends to do – is specify its definition of acceptable standards or necessary texts. Neither does it attempt to articulate more than generalities about what constitutes the literary and cultural components of general education. A report on the proposed curriculum revision, for example, speaks of "the traditional mission of the colleges to offer their students a serious and high level introduction to their literary heritage and their cultural tradition" (Palumbo, 1983, p. 4). The same report speaks about *Guides Pédagogiques* that "will contain elaborate treatments of methods available." Those guides, however, remain unavailable. Nonetheless, their possible future existence renders detailing of examples in the *Cahier* itself unnecessary. Indeed, because "detailing of examples . . . might be misleading, such detailing has been eschewed" (Palumbo 1983, p. 4).

The number and scope of the 1984 *Cahier* courses are comprehensive, to say the least. The objectives of the General Literature category, for example, speak of deepening the "students' understanding of their cultural heritage." That heritage is rich and necessitates a varied curriculum with a diversity of methodological approaches. The *Cahier* also resequences earlier categories in order to provide "all of the various course possibilities of the current curriculum [i.e., pre-1984], a brand new sequence of skills courses, and a logical coherence of program that offers system-wide uniformity of number use" (Palumbo 1983, p. 5). Both uniformity of numbers and curricular flexibility at each college is achieved, as we can see by looking at what is listed:

1. National literatures (Canadian, Quebec, British, American, works in translation);
2. Historical periods (classical, medieval, renaissance, and so on, until twentieth century);
3. Thematic studies (including courses in archetypes, mythology, philosophy, society, and politics);
4. Surveys of literature (such as origins to 1900, 1500 to the present, regional literature, literary forms and groups); and
5. Literature and other media (music, art, theatre, film, mass media).

The 1984 *Cahier* thus accounts for virtually any kind of literature course one might want to teach. In addition, there are writing courses for remedial, mainstream, and advanced writers. There are also numbers for "Specific Categories" (poetry, short story, essay, novel, drama, great works, and specific authors) and "Option" (in literary motifs, periods, literary criticism, short story, novel, drama, specific authors, and world literature). There are also opportunities for independent study, creative writing, and linguistics.

To repeat, the sheer number and scope of the courses in the 1984 *Cahier* is considerable. It is hard to conceive of a literature course given anywhere in North America that could not find a number here. This, however, influenced the reception of the 1984 *Cahier*. Although most academic deans were willing to accept it, there were exceptions, notably from Champlain who argued that the document's major goal was to provide sufficient numbers for courses already being taught (Alex Potter, personal interview, December 14, 1989). Its framers intended the course titles to be the raw material from which individual colleges – read individual teachers – would form their own curricula.

The *Cahier* obviously is vulnerable to the complaint that a simple aggregation of courses does not constitute a curriculum. One can (and should) dismiss as absurd demands for simple-minded quantifiable statements about student ability at the completion of studies. That said, there still remains a need to articulate what we want students to learn, even allowing for differences. Such an articulation does not have to enforce bureaucratic neatness or a lockstep curriculum. It can, for example, foster for teachers themselves a clearer and more coherent idea of what they themselves do. The *Cahier* description of English deliberately avoids this.

Nonetheless, it was a bureaucratic and political success, the proof of that being its formal acceptance by all parties. It is obviously much less specific than course descriptions in other disciplines – or even its counterpart in French as a mother-tongue. Still DGEC endorsed the *Cahier*. The politics of that decision, one can only think, were tied far less to the Ministry accepting a differing curricular philosophy than to Quebec's ongoing language confrontations. DGEC did not want to become embroiled in debate with English colleges

about what they should teach of their own language and literature. The intense hostility English colleges showed to the Gadbois report made it clear they were not passively going to accept government demands for curricula whose objectives and outcomes could be quantified – or even very much specified. And given that the government considered the state of French-language teaching to be perilous, there was little reason for it to expend energy on improving the very language that threatened French. DGEC, whatever its opinions on how curricula should be designed, simply retreated from the fray.

### *The 1991 Conseil Report*

We've spent considerable time examining the 1984 *Cahier* because it remains the statement of CEGEP English curriculum. However, program review does take place periodically. As recently as February 1991, the *Conseil des Collèges*, which recommends policy to the Ministry of Education, concluded that twenty percent of students at English CEGEPS have "full-fledged, serious problems", proof of "significant flaws in the system" (*Conseil*, 1991, p 21). Although stopping short of suggesting a complete overhaul, the *Conseil* expresses reservations about "the quality and coherence of education and equity for all students." The wide range of courses with their poorly defined specific objectives leads, it says, to "largely differing scenarios" for students. It then asks the following questions, all entirely rhetorical :

How can we affirm that students have – or have not – acquired the necessary English skills in the absence of precise, generally acknowledged objectives? How can we ensure students of a coherent, quality education, given the plethora of courses which allow for extremely diverse learning paths? (p. 23)

Not surprisingly, we read that no affirmation is possible, and no assurances are forthcoming unless "the objectives of college-level instruction of English, mother-tongue be clearly defined." The *Conseil* further recommends, moreover, harmonization with other levels of schooling and the outlining of objectives in the *Cahier*.

This is, of course, not-so-old wine in not-so-new bottles. Objectives are possible, the *Conseil* says, as is coherence, reiterating what was in Gadbois and in Gauthier. There is, however, far more awareness of the possible objections, curricular and political:

During its hearings, the *Conseil* observed, in the English-language college community, a certain fear of having an educational model imposed on it which would be incompatible with the dissemination of a cultural heritage. . . . Whether such fears are justified or not, the Conseil sees no reason to modify the general nature of English courses. . . . On the contrary, as long as the

objectives pertaining to language skills are achieved – once they have been defined – this system seems perfectly valid. (*Conseil*, 1991, p.22)

It fastidiously declines to offer specific advice. But defining those objectives – even those as apparently as innocuous as language skills – would, in fact, change a system that depends on objectives **not** being defined with any precision. For what the *Conseil* seeks would (without question) constrain faculty. The Ministry of Education and local administrations would have the means to force departments to teach a single curriculum. Such coercive power is theoretical, of course, since the issue of the political will to see it through would persist.

The *Conseil* does soften its proposals in a number of ways. It speaks mostly of language skills, separating them from "cultural heritage" (a distinction, however, easier made on paper than in practice). It offers, although not baldly, a *quid pro quo*: more money for noncredit remedial courses, limits on class size, and money for learning centres. It reiterates that "local education management is entrusted to the colleges." But all these steadfastly remain part of a package: terminal objectives and coherence must be clearly defined.

The *Conseil*, one must recall, has power only to recommend. At this writing (June 1991), DGEC has not moved nor have the English departments responded. But there is no reason to suppose that faculty now would be any more sympathetic to a call for clearer objectives than before. Moreover, given the ongoing state of Quebec politics, it is unlikely the government could insist on the clarity and coherence the *Conseil* suggests. For English curriculum, we can expect that what is, will be – that what we've got is what we're going to get.

### The Politics of Curriculum

Discussions of English curriculum – not just at the CEGEPs – are frequently political. English departments are well-known for their disagreements about how much writing, how much of the literary canon, or how much of feminist and minority literature to teach. It follows then that CEGEP English departments reach their decisions politically – according to which segment within a department can insist on its will, or if no single group can prevail, which compromises to make. This, of course, distinguishes them from other CEGEP disciplines where the *régime pédagogique* is quite explicit about course content and over which the government authority prevails.

As we've seen, the *Cahier* – the official statement of curriculum – lists so many courses that "curriculums plural" become inevitable. Such pluralism, moreover, is the norm throughout much of North America. Yet this apparent openness has its critics, E.D. Hirsh and Allan Bloom being two well-known

(some would say "notorious") examples. But there are other criticisms by those who do not share the Hirsh-Bloom world view. Gerald Graff (1987), for example, has described North American English department pluralism as the "humanist myth": Departments include all topics and all subjects in the curriculum as pieces in the mosaic of truth and literature. Everything and everyone has a place at the table. The most common rationale for this is "coverage," including periods, national literatures, genres, themes, as well as (increasingly) class, ethnicity, and gender. Yet more often, Graff argues, the true objective is merely department peace that has been threatened by influential and/or noisy members. There is, after all, a disturbing paradox at work if departments teach so many different things. How can one find such collegiality at a time when there are so many sharp disagreements about what constitutes English studies?

As Graff argues, the appeal to coverage simply lets everything in without necessarily attempting to make connections. Curricula don't change but instead expand. No one has to change behavior or confront critics because faculty members do not have to define themselves or their courses. Confrontations are held to a minimum, and live and let live prevails. However, students are left to make their own intellectual sense of the miscellany of courses. Curricular coherence is not a goal.

What Graff sees in North America is particularly evident in CEGEP English departments. The philosophic argument for pluralism and its curricular consequences can be made, but it needs to be made again, along with the arguments for other views. The current *Cahier* reads all too much like a document that simply wishes to avoid confrontation, not merely with the Ministry of Education, but with its own practitioners. Yet CEGEP English departments can, in part, rest easy. Their wars with DGEC are over. No government whose first priority is the defense of the French language has much interest in telling English colleges how to teach English. There need not be a second and internecine war amongst English professors; there should, however, be far more debate of first principles and about what constitutes CEGEP English. That will no doubt be wearisome. But it cannot help either the profession or – much more importantly – its students when consensus is only apparent, masking a reality rather than reflecting it.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The interviews cited in this article were transcribed from sessions conducted by myself and Dr. Anne Blott – my gratitude to Dr. Blott and to all those people who spoke to us. Sally Nelson generously gave access to the Provincial Committee's files. Unfortunately, materials about John Abbot and Champlain-St. Lambert's history were unavailable; perhaps other researchers will recount those narratives. This work represents part of a DGEC-funded research project on renewing CEGEP curriculum that was carried out from 1989 to 1991.



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