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As a teacher and now as a college educational advisor, I have always believed that my role was not limited to training competent workers or future university students. In a world where all our norms are shattering, where individualistic and materialistic values prevail, I am more convinced than ever that teachers and staff who work in education have been granted a noble and exhilarating mission: that of contributing to the development of human beings who are socially engaged, critical thinkers, curious, emancipated and happy. I believe that each of us constitutes an essential cog in the wheel of this large-scale project. How then can we explain the fact that, collectively, we have so much trouble keeping this ideal alive?

After reviewing the state of a certain general malaise associated with The Reform in college education, I will address the issue of the educational objectives to which we could accord more importance within the framework proposed by this pedagogical reform. Finally, I will propose a number of pedagogical intervention strategies that would contribute to the training of accomplished, socially-committed citizens, whatever the roles we may play in our college establishments.

SAND IN THE GEARS

The more impoverished the environment in terms of culture, the harder it will be for young people to find out who they are and what aspirations they can have within an infinite range of possibilities.

Leroux (2006)

We have more need of additional spiritualism than of additional technology.

Dalai Lama (1996)

Some say that, undermined by our focus on training competent workers, the traditional humanist aims¹ of schooling have been consciously eliminated from programs or at least distorted. Some, those who are more acerbic, would even say that the education system is obsessed by constructivist dogma, that it is

more than ever selling neoliberal values, and that it is tending to become a 'knowledge industry' at the service of the job market. However, in actual fact, official documents published by the *le ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS)* do not exclude culture, much less the transmission of knowledge, from the disciplinary content of courses. On the contrary, these documents insist over and over on the importance of basic education, knowledge and citizenship values. So what is the problem? Are the competency-based approach and humanist educational objectives really so antithetical? Is it true that the utilitarian movement, which permeates all spheres of society, has relegated knowledge to a secondary object of study?

In fact, we can already affirm, in light of a very eloquent article published in this journal (Tremblay, 2008), that it is still possible to incorporate broader educational objectives and to transmit general knowledge (elements of general culture and cross-curricular competencies) within the context of the competency-based approach, as long as "we do not seek to limit the training content to practical expectations only, to competencies that are 'profitable' in the workplace only; but rather that we allow a lot of room for freely acquiring knowledge for the simple pleasure of learning, for the development of a humanist culture and for the comprehensive training of the whole person and of the citizen". Nevertheless, we cannot help but notice the current ideological desert which, according to some, is linked to the contemporary school context and its obsession with qualifications:

[...] the competency-based approach discriminates between types of knowledge based on their usefulness for accomplishing a task. [...] We believe that the manner in which the competency-based approach is implemented in the college system fosters an "instrumentalization" and a Taylorization of knowledge. [...] In other words, the new process for the development of programs favoured knowledge that is useful, to the detriment of general and scientific knowledge (Lorimier, 2001).

¹ "Philosophical position that sees mankind as representing the highest value." (Source: *Bordas Encyclopedia*): "Intellectual movement that gained prominence in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries, and which, by returning to ancient sources and reacting against scholasticism, aimed to re-establish critical thinking and personal reflection, and to define a new concept of beauty and art. All doctrines (philosophical, ethical, political conception, etc.) whose supreme objective is the development of essential human qualities and respect for human dignity." (Source: *Grand Larousse de la langue française*)



For their part, Baillargeon (2006) and Petrella (2000) deplore the fact that the emphasis on useful knowledge (as opposed to universal subjects such as culture) is intimately linked to the present world context: what qualifies as worthwhile “learning” when it comes to knowledge and competencies is to be determined by technological innovation and the marketplace. Marsolais and Brossard (2003) summarize the situation well: rightly or wrongly, some criticize the current school reform, which is centered on developing competencies, for having embraced the demands of the marketplace, of neo-liberalism, and for having abandoned the objectives of human development. Echoing Georges Leroux, Marsolais and Brossard (2003) are much less alarmist. The latter affirm in a more nuanced way that:

[...] the orientation of the current reform establishes the school, more firmly and more clearly than before, as a landmark of social values and a place where they are modeled, without departing from the objective of development while obsessing about qualifications. It distances itself from the former selective predominance of formal competencies (linguistic and mathematical) and emphasizes discoveries, capabilities and life skills that are more substantial in relation to science, society, citizenship, local and world history and geography, the arts and technology.

In spite of their differing evaluations of the situation that prevails now, all the authors we have just cited or evoked agree on one point: teachers (and the entire staff of the school) do more than develop competencies. They are also cultural mediators whose mandate is to lead students to become informed, engaged, critical thinkers and, as Deslauriers and Jutras (2006) point out, to open themselves to the world through culture, through human heritage.

Authors, such as Petrella (2000), Boutin and Julien (2000), Caouette (1997) and, a from long time ago already, Illich (1971), have noted however that school has in part neglected these objectives, has become caught up in the laws that govern the marketplace, subscribing, at least tacitly, to its values as reflected in the new catch-phrases that are more and more in fashion: a culture of productivity, of performance, of competitiveness and of excellence. These values, which are concomitant with certain aspects of the pedagogical reform (notably the socio-constructivist foundation on which it rests), disrupt us and challenge our conception of education; in short, they force us to reaffirm or to reinstate some of these humanistic educational values which claim their rightful place at the core of our professional identity.

KEY BENCHMARKS: EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Today’s teachers are still, certainly, those who possess knowledge; but instead of serving to establish hierarchies of knowledge, their knowledge is used in the service of freedom.

Leroux (2006)

In Quebec there have been many successive reforms over the years, but none has had as much impact as the one that took place at the end of the 60s. At that time an extensive consultation led to the appearance of *The Parent Report* with its major pedagogical orientations being based on a philosophy described as “scientific humanism”. The resulting orientations, seldom alluded to in the field today, set the tone by establishing certain educational priorities that are still current: democratization and accessibility, transmission of a solid general education for everyone, the important value accorded to culture, differentiated support, active pedagogy, preparing for life and society (Collectif, 1975; Rocher, 2004).

The fact that we question our values and the educational objectives that guide our actions breathes “soul” into our interventions, guides our didactic choices and, above all, gives meaning to our work, even more so when these educational principles and values are recognized by our establishments.

From this perspective, the school embodies educational objectives that transcend the content of our programs: it is committed not only to training competent workers but also to doing everything within its power to produce citizens who are critical thinkers, and who are accomplished and committed.

All these educational objectives feed our professional commitment. The fact that we question our values and the educational objectives that guide our actions breathes “soul” into our interventions, guides our didactic choices and, above all, gives meaning to our work, even more so when these educational principles and values are recognized by our establishments. Petrella (2000), Caouette (1997) and others list a few of these objectives that should provide daily inspiration. According to these authors, the educational system must do everything within its power:

- to lead students to integrate democratic values by means of activities of information, training, debate, cooperation, decision-making and evaluation (Petrella, 2000);
- to bring about the learning of solidarity (Petrella, 2000);



- to focus education on the development, safeguarding and sharing of the “common assets” that knowledge and learning represent in order to contribute to a movement in favour of global development that is solidary in economic terms, efficient in social terms and democratic in political terms (Petrella, 2000);
- to give priority to training a generation of citizens and multi-disciplinary teams that will have the needed competencies and qualifications to work for the new enterprises of the twenty-first century, those in the fields of social economy, cooperative economy and distributive economy (Petrella, 2000);
- to train citizens who will take part in public affairs and not just workers and professionals who will put their competencies to work in a sector defined by society (Guillauteau, in Collectif, 2008);
- [to train] people to be free and responsible [...] capable of working together, of cooperating, and of being inter-dependent; people who are physically, mentally and spiritually healthy; people, after all, who want to work together toward a collective social project (Caouette, 1997).

In the same spirit, Leroux (2006) states that education must above all:

- allow everyone to “find in school the means to realize their life projects”;
- allow individuals to “escape the constraints and servitudes that result from ignorance”;
- “teach them to become free, to acknowledge and engage in dialogue with others for the common good”;
- “represent the civic home of common values”;
- allow individuals to “recognize and reach their own potential”.

Ideally, the educational objectives to which we subscribe should be clearly defined and be an integral part of the pedagogical relationship. Why did I choose to insist on this content? Why do I ask students to complete work in teams? How can I bring them to see that the main function of my course is to equip them professionally, personally and socially?

In my opinion, students become more involved when they feel that their teachers (and their programs) incorporate broader educational values, thereby echoing some of their own preoccupations: the construction of a unique identity and the

development of the human and citizenship qualities that are necessary for their adaptation to a world in constant evolution.

This quest for meaning which is decidedly about identity, omnipresent at the onset of adulthood, seems to me to have significant pedagogical leverage capable of motivating our students to become committed.

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The involvement of CEGEP students in various causes, especially having to do with environmental and international issues, as well as their manifest renewed interest in social and civil questions (Gauthier, Gravel and Brouillette, 2004) confirm this reality. Some leading authors in psychology have also highlighted these existential and moral identity issues which are specific to adolescence and early adulthood (Erikson, 1980 in Bee and Boyd, 2008; Kohlberg, 1976 in Bee and Boyd, 2008). In fact, preoccupations with **moral** issues (choices of values, questioning of parental models), **identity** issues (self concepts under construction, roles in society to be defined, sexual maturity that affects psychological development) and **social** issues (relationships with parents that are sometimes conflictual, influence of peers) are all part of the mix. These preoccupations combine to form a fundamentally human overall drive that consists in wanting to better define our relationship with the world and to give our lives meaning (Frankl, 1988). Considering these issues on a daily basis colours our interventions very differently and invites us to fully assume our roles as educators and mediators.

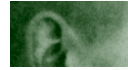
OBJECTIVES THAT GIVE MEANING TO LEARNING

*The more we understand the meaning of our interventions,
the more we are able to help our students to understand
the meaning of their learning.*

Deslauriers and Jutras (2006)

As we just pointed out, students are in search of a frame of reference that will provide the basis for the construction of their identities and will give meaning to their learning (and to their lives!).

Considering the rise in individualistic and materialistic values, is it not incumbent on teachers to act as a counterbalance to



this by supporting students in their search by transmitting universal and fundamental knowledge to them, by exposing them to ethical and moral issues, for example? To lead our students to define their values as well as their moral principles and whatever the disciplines we are teaching may be or whatever roles we may play within the establishment?

TEACHERS

Teachers can, on a daily basis, plan specific pedagogical activities.

Workshops, debates or seminars

Among teachers and students as well as among students, to share discoveries and reflections generated by readings, to articulate a point of view on a given subject, or else, to clarify values better by drawing on disciplinary knowledge.

Extra-curricular activities whether or not for credit

To value citizenship involvement, all types of extra-curricular activities, volunteer work.

Internships in the community

To expose our students to the everyday reality of families, children or the elderly; to foster action research when that is possible (in final tests for a course, in those courses which include the Comprehensive Program Assessment).

International and domestic internships

“Orientation” activities

Company visits, interviews with professionals followed by group exchanges, Internet research, Micro-Internships.

Capsules réflexives related to a topical subject

Critical reflections in small groups, links to discipline-specific theoretical concepts or ethical issues.

Keep a journal

Guided reflections, development of a critical point of view regarding discipline-specific issues.

Thematic assignments or exercises

To share different points of view in the form of discussions or debates, for example.

Discussions on ethical questions whether or not related to the job market

Assignments related to current events (various themes)

Social economy, ethical funds, the environment, local issues, impact of policies in everyday life.

Disciplinary de-compartmentalization

Co-teaching (for example, asking a teacher of philosophy to come to the class to talk to the students about an ethical question), thematic lectures involving teachers from various disciplines, multi-disciplinary activities (such as philosophical debates or a social sciences week).

Lectures dealing with ethical, existential and philosophical issues

Social economy, citizenship values, local and global issues.

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION AND EDUCATIONAL ADVISORS

They too have roles to play, on a daily basis, with teachers and students.

The embodiment and expression of certain educational values

Encouragement of pedagogical innovation

Daily support for teachers

Creation of spaces for reflection

Within the framework of pedagogical days or other events (for example: noon hour lectures).

Valorization of general education

In the institution’s strategic plan, by holding lectures, special events or by attributing value to works produced during general education courses.

In fact, all college professionals and members of the college administration can foster moral development, a sense of identity and overall development in students by favouring concerted efforts, by valuing student commitment in all its forms and by linking their daily interventions to humanist educational objectives.

Leading our students to define their values as well as their moral principles by exposing them to various points of view seems to me to constitute an integral part of the educational objectives of teaching.



TOWARDS A SCHOOL WITH A SOUL

Never doubt that a small group of individuals who are aware and committed can change the world. This is how it has always been done.

Margaret Mead, in Ryan and Cooper (2008)

Just knowing that we have been granted a particular mission within broader educational aims makes our work both very meaningful and very satisfying at the same time. However, the possibilities of embodying the role of “cultural mediator” and of acting as agents of social change call for us to exercise caution and restraint. The development of any student on a quest for identity and meaning requires more than ever the contributions of teachers who are blessed with ethical judgment, humility, open-mindedness, empathy and enthusiasm. There is no doubt that respectful and consistent mediators will always know how to make the best use of their powers of influence within a pedagogical relationship that is characterized by rigour and objectivity.

Cynicism and the utilitarian currents that prevail these days should above all not distract us from our fundamental mission. School will always be a place for the transmission of knowledge and, in particular, “the civic home of common values” as Georges Leroux (2006) put it so well. The scientific humanism brought forward by *the Parent Report* remains today our best defence against the deviations of our sadly pragmatic world.

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