

CÉGEP INTERNATIONAL: GATEWAY TO THE WORLD FOR CEGEPS

An interview conducted by Julie ROBERGE, French teacher at *Cégep André-Laurendeau* and a member of the Editorial Committee of *Pédagogie collégiale*.



Over the last few years, given the growing trend toward the internationalization of education in colleges, the name of one organization is mentioned more and more often in the college network: *Cégep international*. So, what exactly is the role of this organization? How does it support the efforts of colleges and individuals with regard to internationalization? And, why should Quebec colleges be concerned with building bridges to elsewhere?

To answer these and other questions, within the framework of our “Colleges of the world” theme, *Pédagogie collégiale* met with Evelyne Foy, Director General of *Cégep international* since 1999. She has extensive experience in the field of international cooperation and community development.

JULIE ROBERGE:

Can you talk to us about *Cégep international*?

EVERLYNE FOY:

Cégep international is first and foremost an organization at the service of its members: colleges, CEGEPs and institutes. It facilitates their international activities by supplying them with information and training sessions and by putting them in contact with partners in other countries. *Cégep international* also plays a role of advocacy with ministries and institutions that have an influence on the internationalization of CEGEPs, the mobility of students and teachers and also on the recruitment of foreign students. Finally, *Cégep international* helps to enhance the college network by collaborating with Canadian organizations such as the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) and the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), as well as by participating in international and North-American organizations.

Can you tell us about the evolution of *Cégep international*?

ef *Cégep international* was established in 1993, on the initiative of representatives from a few CEGEPs – notably *Maisonneuve*, *Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu*,

Rivière-du-Loup and *Outaouais* – who wanted to join forces to carry out international projects.

In 1999, when *Cégep international* first received financial support from the MELS (*Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport*), the 48 member CEGEPs of the *Fédération des cégeps* joined *Cégep international* and have benefited from its services. This has also been the case in the last few years for two private colleges, *Laflèche* and *Méridi*, as well as the *Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec (ITHQ)* and the *Institut de technologie agro-alimentaire (ITA)*.

In addition to its training activities, to its production of tools and guidebooks on student mobility and to what it does to facilitate the welcome for foreign students and the export of collegial know-how, *Cégep international* organizes symposia and specialized seminars and it manages programs entrusted to it by the MELS. Also, since 2003 it has been managing Phase II of the internationalization program of Quebec education (*Programme d'internationalisation de l'éducation québécoise, PIEQ*).

Since 2008, *Cégep international* has also managed student and teacher mobility programs, bursaries for

academic excellence and tuition-fee exemptions for foreign students.

And do you think that it is important for CEGEPs to be on the international scene?

ef There is no getting away from it! CEGEPs are an integral part of higher education. It is crucial to be aware of the trends in education that are occurring worldwide. The international situation being what it is, with countries that are interrelated and interdependent, presupposes that our students will turn towards the world and that teachers will have the opportunity to participate in international networks. That, it seems to me, is one of the essential conditions for developing the network and ensuring its relevance in the world. It also falls within the educative mission of CEGEPs. Young people must be trained to be able to work here as well as in other countries. We can see that Quebec has made agreements on manpower mobility – with France for now, and soon with Canada and Europe. If we do not ensure that our diplomas are recognized, that the training of our students is equivalent to that of students in other countries, then we will have neglected a fundamental aspect of education.



Are all the CEGEPs involved in international activities?

ef Some CEGEPs are more active than others. There are three or four CEGEPs that have offered international services for over twenty years. Others have very wide-ranging activities including, for example, international cooperation, student mobility and accepting foreign students. Still others have more specific activities. For instance, some CEGEPs focus only on student mobility, while other CEGEPs have concentrated more on international development and cooperation.

A survey conducted in 2005 revealed that most CEGEPs, over 80%, carry out international activities. Individual colleges select the activities that they deem to be appropriate for them. *Cégep international* is there to provide support and many CEGEPs have contacted us with a view to developing their own international policy.

Are there some countries with whom it is easier to make agreements?

ef It depends on what we are talking about. For student mobility, what we notice for now is that most of our agreements have been with France. It is a question of language. But the situation is diversifying more and more as can be seen by the short-stay funding currently allocated to CEGEPs. For example, many projects are taking place in French-speaking Africa and in South America where students go to learn Spanish. There have always been a number of internships in Central America, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, among others. There is also a special grant program for Quebec students for short stays to Mexico. In China and in Asia in general, things are not yet very developed.

However, the government of Quebec has brought together organizations for youth cooperation within *Les Offices jeunesse internationaux du Québec (LOJIQ)*, an organization that has been supporting mobility programs in Asia since last year. So, working in partnership with *LOJIQ*, we are opening up other paths.

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Are the international efforts of CEGEPs comparable to those of higher education establishments in the rest of Canada?

ef When it comes to recruiting foreign students, other provinces like Ontario and British Columbia are much more advanced than we are. We must say that they have considerably more resources than we do because, generally, in other provinces the total amount of foreign students' tuition fees is kept by the host colleges, and that represents a considerable amount that they can re-use to recruit abroad. Here, CEGEPs that accept foreign students receive only 10% more than they do for Quebec students, even though foreign students require a lot of support, starting with the specific services required to ease their integration and success. With the new programs designed to support the recruitment of foreign students, this situation should improve.

I do not have the exact numbers to compare student mobility here with what happens in other provinces, but I can presume that we are advantaged. They do not have youth organizations like the *LOJIQ* that we have here in Quebec; nor do their provincial governments have any specific youth mobility programs.

When it comes to international cooperation, CEGEPs compare very favourably. Several projects on exporting know-how to other countries are supported by the ACCC. In general, CEGEPs stand out in French-speaking countries. Some CEGEPs have also developed their ability to intervene in countries where the language is Portuguese, in Mozambique for example. Thanks to *Cégep international*, several projects have also been carried out in Chile.

Do CEGEPs have branches located in other countries?

ef Some CEGEPs offer programs abroad; they have a partnership with an establishment in another country. For example, for at least the past three years *Cégep Marie-Victorin* has offered a program in administration in China, this in partnership with a Chinese university. At the end of their training, students receive a double diploma, from China and Quebec. The program is offered in English because this CEGEP has bilingual status. Also, *Cégep de Jonquière* has just concluded agreements with an establishment in Morocco, while *Cégep de Matane* now offers a pre-university *Diplôme d'études collégiales (DEC)* and a program with Ubisoft. Some CEGEPs have been offering *Attestation d'études collégiales (AECs)* in Morocco and Algeria for a long time, in computer science and in administration, for example. These





are examples that come to mind. There are, of course, some attempts that have not been successful; it all depends on how serious the partner is or on the complexity of the program to be relocated.

With whom do CEGEPs have the most partnerships, given that CEGEPs exist only in Quebec?

ef Often they partner with universities or different technical training centres that are part of a university.

For example, *Cégep international* invites CEGEPs to engage in projects in Chile, with technical training centres that are associated with Chilean universities. In France, the *Instituts universitaires de technologie (IUTs)* offer what we consider to be college-level programs, but because they are part of the French university system, they tend to develop their relationships with Quebec universities, even though we accept several hundred IUT interns every year. *Cégep Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu* alone welcomes close to 300 of them every year! Still in France, there are also *lycées techniques* that offer *baccalauréats technologiques spécialisés (BTS)* that are equivalent to our DEC in technology. In Belgium there are the *Hautes Écoles*; in Mexico there are technological universities. To establish partnerships we must do a lot of research and make sure we have a good understanding of the education systems of other countries in order to determine the academic level that corresponds to ours. It is obviously easier to do exchanges in technical programs than in pre-university programs.

When we get involved in exporting services, it is most of all to support the creation of technical programs within a competency-based learning

approach: Quebec has the reputation of being at the forefront with regard to this approach. The MELS has done a lot to promote it on the international scene via the *Cahiers de l'ingénierie de la formation professionnelle et technique* for which the translation and distribution rights have been awarded to UNESCO which is now circulating these documents throughout the world. They have already been translated into Spanish and will soon be translated into Arabic. This expertise in the subject is a Quebec trademark. Also, CEGEPs are in demand to train teachers and to develop tools from the perspective of the competency-based approach.

What do you mean by “professional mobility”?

ef It is the opportunity for CEGEP personnel to participate in professional development internships, exploration or research abroad.

For now, professional mobility, as supported by a specific MELS program, is only for teachers. They can stay for a minimum of two weeks in another teaching establishment or research centre. There is really no maximum duration, although the maximum amount of a grant is \$3,000. The colleges in question must also agree to grant the teachers leave to go.

What the teacher mobility program aims for is really, within a perspective of professional improvement, to allow teachers to go elsewhere to establish connections, to carry out research, to meet colleagues in their disciplines, to offer seminars at different universities or in a technical training centre. There are also some rare examples of two teachers who exchange their positions for a term or a year.

Moreover, through the *Programme d'internationalisation de l'éducation québécoise (PIEQ – Volet II)* we can also support the projects of teachers who go to other countries to prepare the way for student mobility or to participate in conferences and also in symposia.

In terms of statistics, how many teachers have gone abroad?

ef The teacher mobility program is still very new. In 2008-2009 we sent out two calls for projects and there were maybe around thirty teachers who went abroad. This program will surely be developed further. With an annual budget of \$150,000 we can certainly expect about fifty grants to be awarded each year.

It is a beginning and we hope for a bigger budget if we can demonstrate the seriousness of the program. It is a program that is judged to be very important: it is thought that teacher mobility can support student mobility and the recruitment of foreign students. All this is interconnected.

Are students also “mobile”?

ef Yes, what we call “student mobility” involves full-time CEGEP students who are going to do either an internship for credit in a professional milieu or a study session in a foreign country. For the moment, there are more internships in work environments. In time, we believe that stays lasting for a full term or a whole year will develop. The grant program for short stays managed by *Cégep international* applies to Quebec students only. Foreign students who come here for an internship get support from their countries of origin, or they come at their own expense.



How many Quebec students travel abroad in this way?

ef I cannot give an exact number because we don't know! We must develop a tool for collecting this information, something we hope to do this year. But I believe there must be around 2,000 students in all. A few hundred students get grants for short stays. There are also many students who do internships in international solidarity or other projects; but even in the CEGEPs, we do not really know how many students were "on the move", because often it is a question of personal initiatives on the part of students and teachers. We really must tabulate these numbers in a more rigorous manner so that we have a better idea of the reality at each of the CEGEPs, the types of internships undertaken, etc.

Otherwise, 2,000 students on mobility out of a total of 158,000 college students is not many. Europeans aim for 10% on mobility; so Quebec is still a way off. In 2020, Europe is even hoping for 20% student mobility. It must be said that on the other side of the Atlantic there are many programs that promote mobility and Europeans provide the resources for students to travel from one country to another and for their training to be recognized. Here, going abroad and having one's courses recognized or obtaining a double diploma is not as easy. We have work to do in this area.

If a student wants to do a term abroad and wants this term to be credited, the program offered in the host establishment must be analyzed to ensure that the training received abroad is truly compatible with the student's CEGEP program. A term abroad should not result in prolonging the duration of students' *DECs*.

Are there programs that allow foreign students to complete part or all of their studies here?

ef There are programs that allow students to come and do full-time studies here. There are two types of programs: the one that allows students to be exempt from paying tuition fees and another that offers excellence awards for students who register in specific technical programs.

It is the CEGEPs that recruit the students, but *Cégep international* can assist them in this task by participating in recruitment fairs. We do a few of these in France with the *Services régionaux d'admission*. It is an important facet of the international activities of CEGEPs. Presently there are about 2,000 foreign students in our colleges and that is clear progress: there were approximately 500 three years ago. It is very enriching for everyone involved to have foreign students, be it for one term or for an internship. However, it does require a concerted effort from various employee groups and service departments: from personnel in charge of student life and academic progress, from the office of the Academic Dean, from teachers...

There must always be someone to facilitate the steps the students have to take and to support them in their efforts. For example, someone has to be on hand to answer the telephone during the summer because, for example, students might call to say they did not receive their visas and that an intervention by the college is necessary!

In your mind, is it important to go abroad, for teachers as well as for students?

ef If we could support all the categories of CEGEP employees, I am thinking

about educational advisors, or about those involved with student life, for example, it would be even better. For now, one of the programs that we manage targets teachers. However, via the *PIEQ*, other employee groups could take advantage of these opportunities. Educational advisors, are often involved in projects dealing with the export of know-how, for instance.

In the past, international projects were often based on the good will of a only one person, in one CEGEP. Often, this person was at a loss to find a project, a partner or funding. How is it now? Overall, are things a little more structured?

ef CEGEPs are aware that institutional support is needed in order to develop international activities. Along these lines, many CEGEPs entrust specific responsibilities to people and to services that cover all the international activities. I think we are coming out of the period where only individual responsibility prevailed. It is certain that there will always be a large personal investment required of teachers and other people, but this is not enough to ensure the sustainability of activities...

It is complicated to organize mobility, to welcome international students or to export our own know-how; but the result is so enriching! We must make sure that all individual efforts are recognized and that we focus on the benefits and the follow-up in the milieu. We must also transmit information. Some CEGEPs for that matter have bulletins or Intranet access to inform people about their international activities. Websites can also be put to good use. It is essential to have well-coordinated action within CEGEPs and good communication with the overall college community.





What would be the greatest challenge for a teacher who wants to develop an international project?

ef It all depends on the project and its magnitude; however, it is certain that finding the right partner is important as is finding a purpose for the exchange that would be mutually interesting for the teacher from here as well as for the people who will be welcoming the teacher abroad.

We also have to plan for a certain number of days or weeks of release time for the teacher and this requires an agreement with the teacher's college. Of course some teachers decide to leave during the school holidays, but if the project is carried out during the school year, it requires good internal organization, an openness on the part of the college administration and of colleagues as well so that everyone is aware that this is not a fantasy, that it is not a privilege, but that today education necessarily involves travelling abroad.

I would also say that the first personal quality to have for opening up to the international scene is curiosity. After that, it is a good sense of organization: as much before leaving, because one must foresee everything, as on site, because things do not always work out as planned. One also needs to be able to persevere: it is one thing to have an idea, it is quite another to bring it to fruition.

There is also a personal challenge: the excessive number of tasks. So one must be motivated. However, almost all the teachers who return from an international project dream about taking another one. We are going to try and to provide information about the projects of teachers who have received grants as well as support for others who want to submit projects. It seems complicated

to some people, but it really isn't that complicated: the quality of projects presented within the framework of the *Programme de mobilité* attest to this fact! What is needed is a partner, a study theme, the duration of the stay, a program and a demonstration of how the project fits in with the CEGEP's activities.

What does the college take away from an international experience?

ef Better educated students who are more open to the world. Teachers who will inject greater motivation into their teaching, motivation that will also rebound on their colleagues. New projects too: teachers who go abroad always return with quite a sparkle in their eyes. The students do too, in spite of the shock of their return: they have acquired a new maturity, they have seen something different and they have had to come to terms with their limits. Moreover, for CEGEPs located in the regions, welcoming foreign students is not nothing. In some cases, these students guarantee that a program will be offered... They also bring a cultural diversity to areas where there is no immigration. Even in Montreal, where immigration is significant, foreign students bring a lot to a college, if only for the intensity that they bring to their studies or to their integration, even though it is temporary.

Since 10 years ago, what has changed with regard to the internationalization of CEGEPs, with regard to mobility?

ef Everything has changed! All the programs that I have just mentioned have only existed for a short time and already, for example, the number of foreign students welcomed to

Quebec has quadrupled... Thanks to CEGEP willingness to work hard with an international perspective, thanks to the resources provided by the *MELS* and thanks to a concerted effort within the network, CEGEPS are now part and parcel of the international movement. And it is not over: many other projects with an international flavour will be able to be carried out over time. *Cégep international* is looking forward to staying involved! ♦

For more information, you can visit the *Cégep international* website.

[www.cegepinternational.qc.ca]