COLLECTIVE COMPETENCY IN EDUCATIVE TEAMS AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL*

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A piston does not make an engine; a petal, a flower; a sail, a ship. Similarly, a teacher does not make a department; an advisor, pedagogical development; a director, an academic services department. The various educative teams[1] in colleges are made up of members who have been selected for their qualities and their competencies; but team success rests only partially on the personal resources of its individual members.

How can we transform an entire set of individual competencies into team competencies? What are the indicators that make it possible to appraise the level of cooperation in a team? What leverage can be used to promote the development of collective competency? So many questions for which answers are found, among others, in Le Boterf (1994, 1997, 2007) from whom we, at *Collège de Maisonneuve*, have taken inspiration in order to design activities focusing on the development of collective competency in two educative teams: one consisting of teachers and the other of educational advisors.

This article presents the concept of collective competency together with indicators that make it possible to recognize it as well as an implementation strategy to promote its rapid development.

We also hope to share enough food for thought regarding possible ways to support the development of competency in college-level teams.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COMPETENCY IN ORGANIZATIONS

INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY

The concept of competency in the context of professional practices in teaching is defined by Laliberté and Dorais (1999, p. 41) as being "[…] a stable ability for immediate and effective action in a given field of activity, based on an integrated and relevant body of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values". For Le Boterf, competency is:

- "Knowing to mobilize". It is not sufficient to have knowledge or skills in order to be competent. It is necessary to be able to put them to work when needed and in appropriate circumstances.

- "Knowing to combine". A person must know to select the necessary elements in the repertoire of resources, how to organize them and to use them in order to carry out a professional activity.

- "Knowing to transfer". All competency is transferable or adaptable.

- "Knowing to act that is tested and recognized". Competency presupposes real-situation testing. (Le Boterf, 1994, p. 154)

Depending on the case, reference points make it possible to identify the expected competencies in the exercise of the typical functions of a given job. Thus, at the college level, the teaching and educational advising[2] professions benefit from recently-developed competency reference points (Bélanger, 2007; Houle and Pratte, 2007).

OTHER LEVELS OF COMPETENCY IN AN ORGANIZATION

Individual competencies make it possible for a collective to achieve its objectives. In the pursuit of their missions, colleges, like any other organization, must however rely on other types of competencies. Krohmer (2004) makes distinctions between 'individual competency' (at the individual level), 'collective competency' (at the group level) and 'organizational competency' (at the institutional level). For example, the act of carrying out a college-wide consultation testifies to organizational competency by means of action processes (St-Amant and Renard, 2006), whereas that of cooperating in a departmental project falls under collective competency.

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* This article, begun in 2007 under the benevolent impetus of Michelle Lauzon, took some time to make its way to *Pédagogie collégiale*. I dedicate it to her.

[1] This term is to be understood in the sense provided by Legendre (1993): "a group of people who are called upon to work together in the field of education".

[2] Translation of the French term *conseillance*, a neologism the use of which is spreading. This is attested to, among others, in an article by Jean-Pierre Proulx (2006) when he was President of the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation*.

▶ FROM INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY TO COLLECTIVE COMPETENCY

Collective competency is greater than the sum of the competencies of its group members. It combines the individual competencies that the group was able to mobilize in pursuing its activities. We refer to a capacity for cooperation that leads to the development of common practices, the refining of tested intervention scenarios and the creation of solutions that reflect collective choices. Collective competency is not reducible to the success or performance of a group (Krohmer, 2004). In this regard, Maximin and Eymard (2008) make a distinction between 'the competency of the collective', that is to say, competencies that are manifested along a continuum going from collaboration to the coordination of practices and 'collective competency' that refers to the ability to cooperate with a view to constructing common representations and to producing shared professional learning. In this way, groups adopt three modes of action: collaboration, coordination and cooperation. Table 1 which follows presents a synthesis that includes elements of the competency of the collective (Maxim and Eymard, 2008) and elements of collective competency (Le Boterf, 2000).

Table 1			
SYNTHESIS OF COMPONENTS FOR 'COMPETENCY OF THE COLLECTIVE' AND 'COLLECTIVE COMPETENCY'			
	COMPETENCY OF THE COLLECTIVE		COLLECTIVE COMPETENCY
	continuum		
Modes*	**Collaboration** *Join forces, contribute to one action*	**Coordination** *Organize, synchronize action*	**Cooperation** *Work in unison, together*
Elements	• Establish common objectives • Share resources and responsibilities • Ensure coordination, follow-up and regulation of action • Insert periods for pooling analysis and reflection		• Construct a common representation of problems encountered • Share a code and a common language • Develop cooperation know-how • Knowing to learn from experience

* Each modality has its importance in achieving the objectives set by a group.

THE COMPETENCY OF THE COLLECTIVE: MODALITIES OF COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

The modalities of collaboration and coordination make it possible to organize individual resources thereby ensuring the carrying out of activities. They stimulate the construction of collective competency without necessarily leading to it. Perrenoud (1993), dealing with coordination in teaching teams, considered that this modality varies in scope and intensity (see Table 2, on the next page). In fact, teams select a varying number of purposes of collaboration and allow individuals varying degrees of autonomy in implementing agreements made within the group.

By connecting Perrenoud's analysis with the results obtained by Lauzon (2002) in a college study on learning how to teach at the college level, we notice that these modulations in scope and intensity with regard to the coordination of practices apply to departmental life in CEGEPs.

The researcher identifies three types of functioning in departments: collegial, atomized and confrontational. The collegial type of functioning would be the one in which the most group cohesion is manifested. This study mentions many practices that fall under this type of functioning, including the establishment of "norm[s] favouring agreement on objectives and freedom of means" (p. 180). Thus, according to Perrenoud's analysis grid, the collegial type of functioning presupposes a coordination modality with a broad scope, but of weak intensity. This lower degree of intensity is hardly surprising, given the professional autonomy that is characteristic of higher education. Conversely, a 'laissez-faire' attitude, which can be associated with coordination of limited scope and intensity, characterizes departments that have an atomized type functioning. In these departments, "acquired rights prevail; common responsibilities are reduced to a minimum" (p. 181). Finally, departments in situations of conflict seem to breach the tacit contract of collaboration.

> *In this respect, groups adopt three modes of action: collaboration, coordination and cooperation.*

Perrenoud's grid provides guidelines for those who might wish to offer coaching support to a group seeking a more effective way of functioning. For example, an exploration of the number of common practices and of the degree of autonomy granted to members would be an appropriate starting point. However, our purpose is to deepen the concept of collective competency and to propose a strategy that can promote its emergence or its consolidation. Competency of the collective seems to be a prerequisite of collective competency; however, it does not necessary lead to it.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">**Table 2**</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">**VARIATION IN SCOPE AND INTENSITY IN THE COORDINATION OF PRACTICES** (Perrenoud, 1993)</td></tr>
</table>

Scope / Intensity	Limited Scope	Broad scope
Weak Intensity	Team members agree on *few aspects* of their practice and give individual members *a large degree of autonomy* in interpretation and implementation.	Team members agree on *many aspects* of their practice, but give individual members *a large degree of autonomy* in interpretation and implementation.
Strong Intensity	Team members agree on *few aspects* of their practice, but give individual members *a small degree of autonomy* in interpretation and implementation.	Team members agree on *many aspects* of their practice and give individual members *a small degree of autonomy* in interpretation and implementation.

COLLECTIVE COMPETENCY: MODALITY OF COOPERATION

Based on cooperation, collective competency consists in mobilizing and combining individual competencies in a flexible manner as a function of the experience acquired as a group. The latter develops a collective knowing to act that has been proven through repeated tests and it can transfer this expertise in order to deal with new situations. In fact, the functioning of the group is not only bounded by norms; but it rests on a joint realization that is supported by a shared frame of reference and a collective memory. Collective competency manifests itself in various ways (Table 3) that involve practices, interactions and chosen solutions.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4" align="center">**Table 3**</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4" align="center">**MANIFESTATIONS OF COLLECTIVE COMPETENCIES** (Krohmer, 2004, p. 18)</td></tr>
</table>

Types of Competency / Indicators	Common Practices	Interaction Scenarios	Organizational Solutions
Cooperation	Exchanging practices	Making complementary competencies available	Agreeing on a rule in order to bridge the gap between prescribed tasks and actual tasks
Common Reference Points	Using 'good' practices to achieve a result	Individuals agree on the proposed solution	Evaluation of a situation: "it takes many to find a solution"
Collective Memory — Declarative	Common knowledge		
Collective Memory — Procedural	Common know-how		
Collective Memory — Evaluative*		Interpretation of the common solution	Interpretation of the common situation and of the rule

* Krohmer uses the term 'judgement' which has been replaced here by the qualifier 'evaluative' out of a concern for coherence with other aspects of collective memory.

Some Indicators of the Presence of Cooperative Practices

Manifestations of collective competency can be perceived using certain indicators. Sauvé, in his account of a lecture by Le Boterf, provides the following list:

1. Shared representations (of the problem, the project, the event or the reform) that are also compatible in terms of administration, finance, pedagogy etc.

2. Synchronized action: people act with and in relation to others so that they act at opportune moments.

3. Good communication and mutual understanding: each member is able to understand the other person's logic, reasoning, priorities and constraints.

4. Reciprocal anticipation: the members of a cooperative group have acquired a high degree of sensitivity to culture, posturing, looks and voice level in order to determine whether or not a person is ready to accept a given piece of information or to enter into cooperation.

5. Relevant and flexible work organization: the group is able to adapt its organization depending on the type of context or problem it is dealing with based on situations, priorities and events.

6. Cohesion and solidarity: there is a relationship of mutual assistance between generations or between people with different levels or types of expertise.
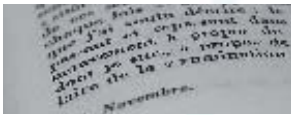
7. Acceptance and management of conflicts at opportune times: when facing conflicts or divergent points of view, the group is able to establish priorities.

8. Taking account of details that could have an effect on cooperation by either evoking or, on the contrary, impeding it.

9. An analysis of how the group managed to resolve a problem in order to improve its cooperation when the same type of problem presents itself again.

10. Lucidity and a feeling of "collective effectiveness" in order for the group to be confident in using its resources to achieve its objectives. (Sauvé. 2005, p. 4)

Establishing a culture of cooperation in educational teams is not a given. The group's maturity, its size, the degree of mutual confidence and the stability of the educative environment are many of the factors that can influence the development of a spirit of cooperation. However, collective competency can be the object of a formal exploration project for the purpose of promoting its development. In this respect, competency reference points exercise powerful leverage for achieving this goal.

▶ WORKING ON COLLECTIVE COMPETENCY

Having traced the contours of collective competency, we notice that the abilities it presupposes require that we count on the complementarity of competencies and on the synergy that is established between them. To ensure its development, it is worth paying special attention to its implementation. However, the question arises: where to begin?

ONE STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPING COLLECTIVE COMPETENCY

First Experience with a Teaching Team

In the winter of 2007, one department at *Collège de Maisonneuve* wanted to establish new guidelines for its procedures for supporting new teachers. The thinking had to do with, among others, the qualities of the supporting teachers and on the needs of those being supported. It was the opportunity to adopt competency reference points that could serve as benchmarks for the teaching team. This led to the further idea of developing collective competency by proceeding in two steps: 1) taking a reading of the individual levels of development of the elements of the competency framework for the teaching profession, and 2) putting together all the individual profiles in order for a group portrait to emerge.

The next stages consisted in making observations regarding the diversity of strengths and the complementarity of competencies within the team. In the end, if this exercise had been continued, the group portrait would have enabled the team to adopt action strategies to increase its collective competency, either by promoting peer teaching, or by identifying areas where external help, such as a special one-time training session, would benefit the team. This aspect remains to be achieved in the framework of this experiment. The issue consists of covering all the competency components that the exercise of a function requires by combining the strengths of each person.

An Illustration with a Team of Advisors

As a follow-up to the publication of the competency reference points for the functions of an educational advisor at the college level (Houle and Pratte, 2007), the exercise was repeated with a team composed of professionals. In order to further explain the procedure undertaken to promote the development of collective competency among educational teams, we use this context as an illustration.

As part of their professional development activities, a team of six advisors chose to explore the development of collective competency in the group. The first stage consisted in studying all the reference points of professional competencies relating to the functions of an educational advisor in order to construct a common representation of these competencies. Next, each person provided a personal assessment of his/her own level of competency for each element of the frame of reference (see a synthesis of this frame of reference in Table 4), and this by relying on Le Boterf's scale (1994, p. 154) which has three levels: expert, mastery, beginner.

Expert

This level is defined by certain qualities: synthetic vision, speed in mobilizing resources, regularity of the quality of execution, total autonomy, etc.

Mastery

This level characterizes the person who has a global and coherent vision of situations, an ability to intervene appropriately and with assurance, an autonomous interpretation of the rules, etc.

As for the Beginner level, we subdivided it. In effect, the experience gained while

supporting teachers during their professional journeys shows that the Beginner level is more functional if it is subdivided into two stages:

Competency to Acquire

This indicates a precise need to complete learning that is prerequisite to the satisfactory carrying out of operations.

Competency to Consolidate

For its part, the degree of consolidation is an indicator of a competency under development and the execution of which is unstable. It can result in occasional successes, but it includes variations in time or is a function of the presence or absence of certain situational elements. These people would require training; they need to test their abilities in a variety of contexts and to pursue their learning about different facets of the job.

The process continued with the advisors sharing their self-evaluations with the goal of drawing a portrait of the team (see Table 4 on the next page).

The act of drawing up a team portrait is in itself a useful exercise for the group. However, taking into account the changes in the composition of this team of advisors, it was not possible to explore its full potential. Above all, this experience made it possible to construct a common and nuanced representation of competencies required by the job, all the while promoting cohesion as well as communication.

To continue the exercise, members would be asked to explore together the most interesting professional development paths for the group. The competencies that appear to be the most widely developed among them, like in Table 4 the second competency dealing with professional ethics, invite a pooling of their best practices. In the case of developing this competency in the team, we could consider a seminar for exchanging practices for delicate situations that raise ethical questions in carrying out the job. In the case of competencies that can be found distributed throughout the team between the higher and lower levels, they would be conducive to cooperative learning practices and the transfer of expertise. For example, this is the case of competency 15 that deals with coordination, something that a single member of the group feels it necessary to acquire.

Finally, we could identify themes for collective professional improvement based on competencies that seem underdeveloped in the majority of participants. Now that the experiment has been carried out, in light of the small number of participants, it is not possible to identity any clear trends in this regard.

> [...] *the difficulties experienced by teams are not necessarily due to the lack of competency of individual members, but rather to a lack of cooperation.*

CONCLUSION

CEGEPs consist of many collectives in which the work of individual members involves an educational responsibility that is assumed collectively (Laliberté and Dorais, 1999, p. 25). This applies as much to teaching teams as to teams of professionals, management personnel, etc. The effectiveness of collective work relies on the technical competencies of collaboration and coordination. However, the difficulties experienced by teams are not necessarily due to the lack of competency of individual members, but rather to a lack of cooperation. The development of collective competency requires this cooperation and presupposes assuming greater risk in the commitment by each person towards the group.

Competency reference points enable us to open up a fertile ground for dialogue. The work of exploring the reference points from a perspective of developing collective competency nourishes reflection on the composition of the team and brings out the diversity and complementarity of colleagues' strengths. Yet the absence of recognized reference points does not necessarily put the brakes on this reflexive work among groups other than teachers and educational advisors. For example, other teams of professionals, management teams and technical support teams could identify the competencies they judge to be essential for carrying out their functions as a way of later drawing a general portrait of a team's strengths.

In order to work on collective competency, in our interventions we adopted the position that no single person alone can master all the competencies involved in a particular function. On the other hand, by considering the distribution of competencies among all the team members, there is a greater chance of covering all the required competencies. From this point on, it is up to each group to make choices which will enable the more experienced members as well as new members to share and exchange their successes, to take advantage of opportunities for the transfer of expertise, to choose instructors from their own ranks to direct team development activities, in short, to explore all the possible areas of cooperation. ◗
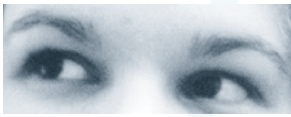
Table 4: GROUP PORTRAIT OF THE LEVEL OF COMPETENCY IN A GROUP OF EDUCATIONAL ADVISORS, ACCORDING TO THE COMPETENCY PROFILE DEVELOPED BY HOULE AND PRATTE (2007)

COMPETENCY CATEGORY	ROLES	TYPE OF FUNCTION	COMPETENCIES	NUMBER OF ADVISORS (n=6)			
				E	M	C	A
Basic Professional			1. Situate the functions of an educational advisor.	2	3	1	
			2. Act in a professional and ethical manner in exercising the functions of an educational advisor.	4	2		
			3. Become involved in a professional development process.	2	3	1	
Cross-curricular			4. Communicate orally and in writing in the various contexts relating to the functions of an educational advisor.	3	3		
			5. Work together with teams of teachers, multifunctional teams, peers or in forums within the framework of the functions of an educational advisor.	3	1	2	
			6. Derive orientations and action strategies from a systemic analysis of pedagogical situations.	2	3	1	
Particulars	Expert in the field of pedagogy, the professional development of teachers and curriculum development and Expert in interventions in this field	Information	7. Put together a collection of theoretical resources connected to various frames of reference in the field that is accessible, available and anchored in the reality of the milieu.	1	4	1	
			8. Inform the milieu about the resources (programs, activities, developments, experiments, projects, research).	2	3	1	
		Advice	9. Advise the teaching and non-teaching personnel, management personnel and authorities in matters concerning the field.	2	4		
		Support	10. Conduct counselling interventions with individual teachers to further their professional development.	2	1	3	
			11. Coach a group of teachers in the implementation of projects or pedagogical changes.	1	3	2	
			12. Contribute, according to one's own expertise and field of responsibility, to the resolution of pedagogical problems.	1	5		
		Training	13. Instruct teaching and non-teaching personnel from a perspective of professional development.		4	2	
		Evaluation	14. Evaluate the quality of pedagogical resources or of processes, of training activities or of programs.		3	2	1
		Project Management	15. Coordinate resources, files, pedagogical projects, activities or teacher training programs.		5		1
			16. Take charge of resources, files or pedagogical projects, activities or of teacher training programs.		4	1	1
		Research and Development	17. Develop or contribute to pedagogical and curriculum development and to the professional improvement of teachers.	1	2	2	1
			18. Exert pedagogical leadership.	1	2	2	1

LEGEND

E: Expertise in the Competency;
M: Mastery of the Competency;
C: Competency to be Consolidated;
A: Competency to be Acquired.

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