

Response of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network to the Public consultation on the reinforcement of the teaching of Québec history in elementary and secondary school.

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1. About QAHN

The Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) / Réseau du patrimoine anglophone du Québec (RPAQ) is a non-profit, non-partisan umbrella organization of over 75 local historical societies, museums, and other heritage organizations. QAHN/RPAQ members are engaged in preserving the built, natural and cultural heritage of Quebec. The Network aims to:

Advance knowledge of the history of English-speaking communities across Quebec

- Improve communications and promote information-sharing among historical societies, museums and other heritage organizations
- Assist members in acquiring resources and expertise they need to carry out their operations
- Raise public awareness of heritage-conservation issues
- Serve as a voice for member organizations in such areas as government relations

While much of QAHN's focus is on Anglophone heritage, including those now defined as "cultural communities" with historical affiliations with the Anglophone community, membership in QAHN is open to anyone with an interest in Quebec history, heritage and culture. Francophones have sat on the board of QAHN, and some 15% of participants in our most recent Annual General Meeting were Francophone. QAHN is an active member of Fédération Histoire Québec (Fédération des sociétés d'histoire du Québec).

2. Why QAHN is participating in this Consultation Process

For the most part, the museums and historical societies exist to promote the understanding of their local regions, towns or districts. They do not make arbitrary distinctions between the Anglophone and Francophone dimensions of their communities, though of course differences existed, and exist today, and are recorded. As a group, QAHN's member-organizations tend to carry out activities that represent their English-speaking origins and many of their participants and activities would be classified as Anglophone in nature – but again this is an assertion with many exceptions. While members' activities are local in nature, they see themselves as part of the larger Quebec – and Canadian – context. QAHN is their vehicle to express opinions.

3. The Consultation Schedule:

For the Reinforcement of the Teaching of Québec History in Elementary and Secondary Schoolwas published on November 11, 013. Organizations and individuals were given until December 13 – only 33 days to prepare submissions. This consultation period will be followed by recommendations published three (holiday season!) weeks later. While this schedule has not given QAHN the time to consult with member organizations, nevertheless we feel that the opinions expressed here represent our members and the larger Anglophone community. But we have to ask: why is this consultation / recommendation process so rushed? The authors of the Consultation paper note that, "... when the current program was written, the contributions of professional historians and teachers' associations were given less weight (than educational theorists)." (p.7) Will this be the fate of these submissions? Are we participating in a Potemkin village process, with the recommendations already drafted? Having raised these suspicions, we would also like to express our gratitude that the Consultation

Document was translated into English, a sign that diverse opinions are sought and (hopefully) will find expression.

4. Summary of the Consultation Document:

The History and Citizenship Education curriculum for Secondary 3 and 4 was promulgated in November 2006 as part of the *Programme de formation de l'école québécoise* / the Québec Education Program (QEP, also commonly called the Reform). Since then the curriculum has revealed many flaws, both in its design and in its implementation in the schools. These flaws stem from a pedagogy that is inappropriate for the study of history as a science at this level of schooling. The pedagogical foundation of the Reform is a radical form of constructivism, popular 15 and more years ago but now fallen out of favour. This radical form of constructivism led the Reform designers to stress the development of general intellectual competencies as the goal of students' educational project. The history and citizenship courses were forced onto this Procrustean bed of inappropriate educational theory. As a result, Quebec history was not taught in a scientifically-coherent manner within the national framework; students were deprived of the opportunity to develop knowledge and intellectual tools specific to the discipline.

By focussing on competencies and downplaying the narrative structure of a scientific national framework, Secondary 3 and 4 courses have "[corralled] the students into a fictional space where the actual transmission of knowledge from teacher to student is poorly thought out."

The other serious flaw in the course is to yoke it with the development in students of competencies pertaining to the "foundations of democratic citizenship". The authors are categorical in their condemnation of this dual role of the History and Citizenship Education course. By forcing the history course to promote "understand[ing of] the purpose of public institutions" and "establish[ing] the contribution of [certain] social phenomena to democratic life," the course is turned into "directed history" that "often moves the narrative away from the idea of history as a science, forcing it into a form of civic preaching or the pursuit of disembodied concepts." (p.12)

5. Comments Concerning the Consultation Document:

The Quebec Education Program is indeed a radical re-design of the entire public school curriculum extending from kindergarten to the CEGEP level. Meant to confront what was perceived as the challenge of knowledge growing exponentially, the Reform was intended to provide Quebec students with the tools to handle whatever learning challenges were presented

to them by developing intellectual "competencies" instead of an accumulation of facts in different subject areas. Rolled out over a period of years, the Reform has undergone a number of adjustments, perhaps starting when then-Premier Lucien Bouchard claimed he couldn't understand his children's competency-assessment report cards. "Broad areas of learning" have been abandoned as functioning categories, and the two-year cycles are tending to get divided into single years again. The "subject- specific competencies" have been promoted, along with "progression of learning" tables to ensure that the contents of subjects are taught. Two of the most controversial subject areas of the QEP were Religion/Morals courses and the secondary history course. We need only to recall the cry raised by some parents, religious groups and private schools when the Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) courses were implemented. The challenges to the secondary History and Citizenship Education course are referred to obliquely in this document. In fact, these challenges, raised by nationalist groups such as la <u>Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal</u> and by columnists like Gilles Proulx and Mathieu Bock-Côté have led directly to this reform-of-the-reform[1].

Actually, this Consultation Document is more than reformist in intention. It is a frontal attack on the QEP, with its competencies and "student-centered" (constructivist) orientation. History, for the authors of the Consultation Document, is teacher-, not student-centered. The "sage on the stage" is back, the "guide on the side" has been shown the door. This document, presumably endorsed by Premier Pauline Marois' government, is powerful ammunition for the demolition of the Reform launched two decades ago by then-Education minister Pauline Marois.

The authors assert the value of narrative over analytical history, a contemporary judgement that we at QAHN agree is more in tune with the needs of elementary and secondary textbooks. We are thus somewhat surprised at the constant references to history as a non-directive science. Narration has traditionally been seen as part of the "art" of history, in the ancient "history: art or science?" debate. We can assume that the intention here is to blunt the more strident calls for ultra-nationalist curricula and textbooks, this perhaps being the meaning of the expression "patriotic novel' inherited from the 19th century" (p.17). We approve this intention as well.

Given this endorsement of non-directive scientific approaches to the teaching of history, we note that the Consultation Document argues for "the national framework," as "a space within which our path through history can be understood" (p.3). The nation is "the most obvious framework for the historical narrative" (p.17). This "national framework" is almost exclusively Quebec-oriented, with only a few fleeting references to the Canadian national framework, within which Quebec remains a part. We would hope that the proposed scientific and non-directive course will make references to the larger framework that Quebec inhabits and

benefits from – otherwise, how in any sense can the new curriculum be considered "scientific"?.

Early in the Consultation Document reference is made to "clear narrative threads, whatever they may be" woven into the "recognizable narrative framework" (p.8). Later on in the Document the authors note that "the national framework would seem to be the most obvious framework for the historical narrative. However, it is not the only possibility; other narrative threads, such as the transformation of social classes or gender relationships in society, should also be included. Even so, the nation is the framework within which these various threads are usually woven." It is not possible to discern from the Consultation Document whether First Nations, Immigrants and Anglophones are an inherent part of the framework, or will even be considered among the "other narrative threads". QAHN would like to emphasize to the consultation process that a homogeneous picture in the framework without these "various threads" is simply a false picture, one that can make no claim to being scientific. Such a curriculum would be merely an update of, to use the metaphor of the Consultation Document, the "19th century patriotic novel", and a tool for indoctrination.

6. Responses to Questions Posed in the Consultation Document

- ♣ Do you think the current program is consistent with the requirements of the discipline of history? QAHN agrees that the history course was tied to a Procrustean bed of an educational theory "du jour". While the program can be improved, we are concerned that "directive" agendas, masquerading as a "scientific" framework will replace it.
- } Do you think the competencies that serve as the program's aims influence what is taught in the classroom? If so, how? The competencies are supposed to be the platform on which examinations are made they had better "influence what is taught in the classroom"! The question is: do the competencies subordinate the study of history to the needs of present-day issues? The answer is probably "yes" if "social phenomena" are exclusively present-oriented. COMPETENCY 1 Examines social phenomena from a historical perspective COMPETENCY 2 Interprets social phenomena using the historical method COMPETENCY 3

Constructs his/her consciousness of citizenship through the study of history

} Do you think this influence is compatible with the requirements of history as a science? Putting the question "History: Art or Science" into the Google search engine brings up 557,000 hits. History is considered to be a soft science, because of the value of such artistic elements as narrative — and because history is often subordinated to contemporary issues,

trends and agendas. Declaring *ex cathedra* that history is a science obscures the multi-facetted appeal of "this irrepressible need to come together around a shared narrative". Unfortunately, this "irrepressible need to come together" often leads to distortions and outright lies concerning "the singular nature of the collective path" – which is hardly science. This is the challenge the creators of the new history course will have to face.

- } If the program is to meet these requirements, what characteristics should it have? The new course should try to be https://example.com/honest-about-the-nature-of-settlement-here-by-the-First-Nations, by invasions of the "neo-Europes" [c.f. Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900] and by immigrant groups. The new course should also aim to be inclusive-about-all-groups-living-here.
- Do you think the aims of citizenship education, as set out in the current program, are compatible with the requirements of history as a science? Leaving aside naïve considerations about the nature of history as a science, there is indeed a danger inherent in assuming that the study of history will support citizenship education. What if the "science" leads to the conclusion that the policies of the nation are incompatible with social justice, environmental sustainability, or national security? History would be soon dropped from the curriculum.
- *}* Do you think the aims are compatible with a true process of reflection on citizenship? See above.
- } What should history contribute to citizenship? A sense of ourselves as biological and social beings who through a series of family, tribal and national events over the centuries have found ourselves in particular parts of the world. Our need to find or create meaning in our individual and social lives leads us to employ various narrative devices, such as "Us" and "Other", good guys (Us) and bad guys (Others). A true study of history would help us, among other benefits, realize the dangers of our narrative proclivities.
- * What should the Québec history program convey to students? Ultimately, that they are living in one of the most fortunate areas of the world, as judged by life expectancy, income, environmental and cultural qualities, and individual opportunities of all kinds. This is a difficult goal when the unit of measure is the "national framework "only.
- What knowledge, or types of knowledge, should be shared by the community as a whole? The community should be aware of the diverse groups who live and have lived here. Special attention should be paid to First Nations, who have the longest history here.

- What skills are intrinsic to the practice of history? How should they be conveyed? Beyond the methodologies (including new digital ones) and techniques used by historians, an important skill is the ability to "inhabit" a different time period, to understand what was happening in the past, and why. This ability may not come naturally to students, and should be cultivated.
- What should a history program include? What approach should be used to reconcile the requirements of history as a science and the requirement of developing a sense of shared memory? Setting up "history as science" in opposition to "shared memories" is a false dichotomy. In fact, "memories" in the form of oral history and public history, is as contemporary and trendy in historiography as narratology and gender studies. The real issue is to be able to analyze and deconstruct (and appreciate) memories in their proper contexts.

7. Recommendations

The histories of Quebec's minorities should be seen not merely as supportive or antagonistic to the dominant group, but as having their own autonomous and free-standing narrative force within the national framework – "other threads".

QAHN therefore recommends that the role of Quebec's minorities be recognized within the "national narrative".

What has been under-emphasized in the secondary curriculums in recent years is the opportunity for students to become "interested and active learners" (*MELS – History and Citizen Education Program*) by learning more about the "spaces" where they actually live, and to use these real spaces as the platform for understanding wider frameworks. School experiences of this nature, called Community-Based Learning, have been developed by LEARN, which is an important educational resource in the Anglophone community that QAHN has partnered with.

Community Based Learning in schools uses the local community as a classroom learning resource, and allows student activities to be a potential resource for the community. Community Based Learning helps schools and communities get better together. QAHN has partnered with LEARN in promoting Community-Based Learning projects. Giving space to Community Based Learning in the secondary curriculum, including in the assessment process, would make CBL a valuable resource in developing an interest in history.

QAHN therefore recommends that changes to the curriculum include an approach based upon Community Based Learning, allowing students to have a better understanding of the history of their own community.