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Table of Contents

Why Should History Be Taught?	2
Launching the Discussion	5
1 The Terms of the Discussion.....	6
1.1 The Current Program and Its Aims	7
1.2 The Québec Debate and Its Roadblocks.....	9
2 The Limitations of the Current Program.....	10
3 Some Potential Solutions.....	16
3.1 History as a Science and the National Framework	16
3.2 Rethinking the Program	19
For Further Discussion	22

Why Should History Be Taught?

All societies talk about their history, but why do they have this irrepressible need to come together around a shared narrative? Is it because there is a mystery surrounding the singular nature of the collective path? By assembling the puzzle pieces of its history, a community can clearly see what its own adventure has in common with that of other communities, but the fact that its adventure is always unique and singular becomes a source of fascination and obsession. It becomes its own enigma. Why is this so? What impact has it had on our path? What are all these random events that have had such an effect on what we have become? In which of these events do we recognize the decisive moments in our history? Who are the people who have marked this path? These are open questions, but they lead us toward an understanding of our past and a desire to find meaning in it.

To teach history is to convey the fragile and ever-changing outcome of the effort to understand the past. It is both a scientific and an ethical responsibility. Method and rigour serve as guidelines for the writing of history, and should also serve as guidelines for teaching it. This would meet the requirements of science. But to convey knowledge of history also means to fulfill a duty to make sense of the past and give students an opportunity to situate themselves within their community's long-term history, and on that basis, to understand and situate themselves as subjects of that history. If the idea of social participation, to which our societies are so attached, has any meaning at all, it lies surely in a shared discussion of the past.

The fundamental frameworks of history were once considered clear, but that clarity no longer exists. What drives history? What is its subject: nations, peoples, the proletariat, or social movements? We are divided on this issue. Within what framework should our history be told, especially at a time when the autonomy of national spaces seems more relative than ever before? What should be done to include the forgotten or oppressed? Do we have a duty to render justice retroactively, and to include them in the collective narrative? And what should be done with the guilty memories of peoples who may have made terrible mistakes in the past? These difficult questions, and many others, have broken up the frameworks of history as once understood by a less tormented memory that hung onto old certainties as the guidelines for collective action.

The national framework as a “natural” space for collective history has also been called into question. Criticisms are based on a reconsideration of the idea of a subject of history and the linear narrative that ascribes a society's beginnings, and ultimately its fate, to a single, key moment in history. The national framework has also been contested on the

basis that the overriding presence of the nation as a subject may have overshadowed the existence and validity of other, equally worthy subjects, which may have played an equally formative role in the society's evolution. And so the role and importance of social movements and transnational phenomena has been rediscovered, at the same time that the idea of history being more open to pluralism and social diversity has begun to emerge. As a result, the task of writing and teaching history and devising the curriculum has become infinitely more difficult. If we are to change the way history is taught, we must find answers to the questions raised by the destruction of old certainties, and perhaps also rediscover some of what we lost in the crisis that destroyed them.

The first step in this process is to discard some of the false truths that served as foundations for the most recent history program reforms. One of these is the presumed obsolescence of the national framework as a space within which our path through history can be understood. National history and the nation as a subject were thought to have overshadowed the presence of historical actors who needed to be given more consideration. But, at the same time, democracy perhaps needs a framework within which to bring the community together and create a space for deliberation. "Nation" is not the opposite of "democracy;" it is a condition for it. Objectively, it is the space within which collective debates can be understood and rendered meaningful. Acknowledging this is not a distortion of history; on the contrary, denying it would be doing it an injustice.

However, can we perhaps also take the view that the curriculum in its present form is "directive;" in other words, it sometimes guides the narrative in order to make it support a specific moral doctrine or ideology? That it often, and too directly, reduces the relationship with history to the demands of the present day? Are the civic standards that the program claims to instill perhaps very, even overly, defined, for a form of instruction that claims to cultivate free and critical thinking? If so, we would have to admit that it is not national history that confines us (in ethnicism or xenophobia), but "history and citizenship education," which, while full of good intentions, remains evangelical in its desire to instill a kind of civic morality that is apparently too constrained within the national framework.

The task of reconciling the history program with its national framework may force us to reconnect with the principle of the intelligibility of the collective adventure; in other words, to understand the conflicts it generated, the contradictions it engendered and the actors it brought into opposition. The “nation space” within which history can be understood is the long-term space within which we entered into conflict, and ultimately, the space within which we came together. The nation is a “question,” one that is constantly revisited. The aim of a national history that is to be taken seriously should not be to manufacture civic consensus; on the contrary, it should be to expose the many different dimensions of the successive spaces shared by a specific community. It is the lens through which we are able not only to understand collective debates and choices, but also to critically assess them and keep them in perspective. The proposals made here diverge from the current program in that they reject the idea of directive history and focus instead on narrative content.

Launching the Discussion

This is a consultation document. The purpose of the consultation is to develop new History and Citizenship Education programs dealing with Québec society. The emphasis here is on the Secondary III and IV program approved in November 2006, which has long been a subject of public debate. The recommendations that result from the consultation process may also lead to the development of new elementary school programs.

This document presents a number of observations and proposals for consideration. Its intention is to elicit reaction, and it is open to criticism. These proposals must be discussed, improved or questioned. This document was written precisely so that these ideas can be debated publicly. It is also for this reason that the conclusion has been left open, in the form of a series of questions.

The document itself is divided into three sections. The first sets out the terms of the discussion, identifying the problems that would justify an overhaul of the program and the obstacles that have blocked the debate so that they may be overcome. The second section focuses on the program itself, its structure and deficiencies, while the third and last section proposes some potential solutions in the form of general principles and working hypotheses.

1 The Terms of the Discussion

The history program approved in 2006 was intended to be something new. In both letter and spirit, it broke with the general and scientific consensus that had prevailed to that point. The proposed program first began to generate controversy in the spring of 2006. Professional historians were concerned about its intellectual shallowness and the fact that the narrative was subordinate to citizenship education. Historians, intellectuals and the general public alike were also opposed to what they perceived as the erasure of the national framework, which they felt threatened not only the students' ability to understand history, but also the memorial role of history. The issue generated a flurry of activity; a coalition was set up to promote the teaching of history, studies were carried out and a petition was tabled in the National Assembly. Many secondary school history teachers also spoke out, either individually or through their associations, to criticize some of the unrealistic requirements of a program that revisited the same chronology several times in Secondary III and IV.

In short, many teachers, experts and ordinary citizens, all of whom agreed with the recommendations made in the Lacoursière report concerning an improved, more open approach to history, no longer identify with the current program. In more prosaic terms, the problems generated by the redundancy between Secondary III and Secondary IV are now well known and are sufficient, in and of themselves, to justify the development of new programs.

This consultation follows on from these observations. But the question must nevertheless be asked: What is the precise reason for these criticisms, which are shared by so many and serve to justify a review of the program?

1.1 The Current Program and Its Aims

The current History and Citizenship Education program replaced the former History of Québec and Canada program adopted in 1982, and was preceded, in 1996, by the work of the Task Force on the Teaching of History (the Lacoursière report). However, when the current program was written, the contributions of professional historians and teachers' associations were given less weight.

From an intellectual standpoint, the current program is characterized by the fact that it is based on a relatively strict interpretation of an educational approach known as the “competency-based” approach, which, for better or for worse, has a significant impact on the program's content. Under this approach, knowledge presented in the classroom, regardless of its intrinsic value, must be regarded not as an end in and of itself, but as a means of instilling specific attitudes and procedural skills. In the program approved in 2006, this general approach is paired with a method that promotes project-based learning and tends, once again, to minimize the already collateral role assigned to factual knowledge.

The competency-based approach has some real benefits. In the case of history, it allows for activities such as the interpretation of documents and comparisons of different memories, which are worth keeping in the program. In its radical version, however, it has a negative impact on the program content.

This negative impact has two main consequences:

- First, it distorts the purposes of history. In itself, the idea that history is able to convey certain civic and intellectual aptitudes is not new. It is a legitimate desire, supported by all. In the past, it seemed clear that these positive effects were derived indirectly from the practice of history for its own sake, taught in accordance with its own rules. However, the 2006 program broke with this consensus. Rather than using history as a starting point, the program predefined certain skills (or “competencies”) outside the realm of history, and then forced history to adapt to and become the vehicle for those skills.

The Québec Education Program includes:

- ▶ cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning, established independently of the subject areas. Here, history is assigned a task, that of conveying “citizenship education.”
- ▶ “subject-specific” competencies, said to represent the spirit of the subject. In the current program, the competencies considered to represent the discipline

of history are the historical “perspective” and “method.” In fact, however, these competencies are defined and implemented in a way that is not in keeping with history as a science.

In other words, the program is designed to teach history not for itself, or in accordance with its own rules, but as a tool to serve other ends. In addition, it remains conspicuously indifferent to the content of the knowledge “used” for that purpose, which is largely optional.

- The program breaks with common expectations for a generally intelligible narrative, one with a continuous, recognizable narrative framework—in other words, with clear narrative threads, whatever they may be. In Secondary III, the program takes the form of a chronological narrative, although it lacks consistency; each period (1608-1760, etc.) raises a different question and is structured around different explanatory principles. In Secondary IV, however, the program is one of deconstruction, going back several times over the same history from different thematic standpoints in respect of which there appears to have been only a superficial attempt to achieve integration.

This dissected form of history, with its constant repetition, takes up a great deal of time, meaning that teachers always feel a sense of urgency, despite the two years they have to teach it. It is also problematic in terms of both memory and science. With regard to memory, greater intelligibility, clearer (and more numerous) narrative threads and a keener sense of chronology would help students make sense of history. From the standpoint of knowledge, it would be more consistent with the discipline of history to work political, economic and social events into a single narrative framework that would clearly illustrate the complexity and singularity of the past.

The program’s lack of intelligibility is due to the competency-based approach, or at least, to the competency-based approach as it is used in the program. The target competencies do not require this type of search for intelligibility, and are, in fact, better served by the fragmentation of history. The fact that the narrative has been deconstructed explains why the national and political framework has been partially eclipsed, and also explains the superficial examination of aspects of social history (women, Aboriginal peoples, the economy, etc.), which are, generally speaking, spread very thinly throughout the narrative.

1.2 The Québec Debate and Its Roadblocks

The competency-based approach and its constructivist version were in vogue throughout the world in the 1990s and 2000s. For better or for worse, it has been particularly influential in Québec. Today, the international trend is toward a major review of programs based on this approach in order to distill out its positive contributions and correct its negative effects. In both France and England, history programs have recently been rewritten to bring them more into line with the discipline of history and to include a more continuous narrative thread.

Criticisms have come from a variety of observers. In Québec, Paul Inchauspé himself, often considered to be the “father” of the reform, expressed reservations about certain didactic excesses. Criticisms have also come from the education faculties. In Québec and abroad, there is an abundance of academic literature showing the limitations of programs founded on a radical version of the competency-based approach. According to this literature, requirements extraneous to the discipline of history should be reduced, and more care should be taken in choosing the program content.

In short, throughout the world, the development of new programs has been justified by the desire for a more intelligible form of history, more consistent with history as a science. In Québec, unfortunately, this undertaking been hindered by some unforeseen factors in the public debate.

Yet, the program’s weaknesses have long been criticized. Between 2006 and 2008, a number of historians joined the debate, pointing out the program’s intellectual weaknesses. Beginning in 2009, however, the debate shifted. Academic historians lost interest, and the program’s scientific deficiencies were forgotten. Rivalries unrelated to the program brought new associations of ideas to the fore. On the one hand, the growing volume of criticism from militant nationalists generated a somewhat cartoonish view of what a new program would achieve; some people felt its sole aim would be to impose a form of history that promoted sovereignty. This suspicion, important enough not to be ignored, began to overshadow the truly directive nature of the current program. On the other hand, an unfortunate quarrel between academics linked the quest for a national framework with a view of history as a strictly political phenomenon (the history of great men, battles and parliaments), as opposed to one that included contributions from social and cultural history (history of women and minorities, mindsets, the economy, living conditions, etc.). Yet, this conflict might seem unwarranted, especially as social historians themselves would like their contributions to be placed within the broader framework of national history.

These factors focused the public debate on an unfortunate association of ideas: national history as being exclusively political, outdated and directive in nature, and the current program as monopolizing social history and the critical potential of the discipline of history. This taking of sides in the debate is at the root of the current stalemate. It encourages people to suspect ulterior motives and to set aside the positive contributions of both national history and the competency-based approach. It also ignores the fact that the discipline of history currently promotes a combination of political and social history within a national framework. But above all, it disregards the urgency of initial concerns regarding the deficiencies of the current program.

It would now seem necessary to remove these roadblocks and refocus the discussion on the program itself, its strengths (explicit consideration of “historical thinking” and the concern for critical questioning), its weaknesses and the steps that can be taken to consolidate the former while eliminating the latter.

2 The Limitations of the Current Program

The development of new History and Citizenship Education programs should make the narrative more intelligible and bring it into line with current historical knowledge. How, then, from this standpoint, should the program be read and assessed?

The program is divided into two main sections. The first consists in a series of preambles setting out the aims of the program and stating how it should be read. These preambles define the three “competencies” on which the educational aims are based:

- The first of these is citizenship education. In the preambles, citizenship education is openly directive. It presumes a narrative with only one interpretation, an epic tale of rights and institutions that encourages students to adhere to a specific moral doctrine – or, to quote from the text, to “identify the foundations of democratic citizenship,” “understand the purpose of public institutions” and “establish the contribution of [certain] social phenomena to democratic life.” As stipulated in the program, by studying history, students will learn that “human action is the motor of social change,” that “the principles associated with democracy evolved over time, taking the form of citizens’ rights,” and that “the diversity of identities is not incompatible with the sharing of values.”

- The other two competencies are cognitive in nature. They are described as representing “historical thinking;” in other words, the use of skills and attitudes specific to historians. The first of these is the “historical perspective,” which is supposed to generate context and appropriate questions. In reality, however, the approach taken in the program is primarily a form of presentism; in other words, an examination of the past that uses the immediate present as its sole starting point. The second competency focuses on “method” or “interpretation,” i.e. the rigorous questioning of sources and the founding of beliefs on solid factual arguments.

In the preambles, these latter principles are imprecise and poorly explained, thereby confirming the structuring role of citizenship education, the foundations of which are much clearer and better developed. In addition, it is obvious that the cognitive competencies serve mainly to teach general concepts (e.g. liberalism, industrialization), rather than to help students understand the unique way in which those concepts are embodied in the Québec experience.

The preambles suggest a form of directed history that is not really consistent with the discipline of history. In response to this criticism, it has often been suggested in the media that the competencies do not have a direct impact on the content taught in the classroom. However, this is not true. The “program content” presented in the second part of the program is strongly influenced by the orientations set out in the preambles.

The program is taught over a two-year period. In Secondary III, it presents a chronology of Québec’s overall history, divided into seven periods, each addressed through a specific issue or “designated focus”:

- the era of the *first occupants* (around 1500), addressed through “the connection between conception of the world and social organization”
- the *emergence of a society in New France* (1608-1760), addressed through “colonization programs” and their impact on society and territory
- the *change of empire* (1760-1791), addressed through the “Conquest” and its consequences for society and territory
- the era of *demands and struggles in the British colony* (1791-1850), addressed through “the influence of liberal ideas on the affirmation of nationhood”
- the *formation of the Canadian federation* (1850-1929), addressed through “the relationship between industrialization and social, territorial and political change”
- the *modernization of Québec society* (1929-1980), addressed through “the relationship between changes in attitudes and the role of the state”
- *Issues in Québec society* (since 1980), focusing on the “public sphere,” and left to the teacher’s discretion

The Secondary IV program then goes back over this history, using different theme-based approaches, and is divided into five “social phenomena” that may be studied in any order:

- *Population and settlement*, focusing on demography, immigration and settlement of the territory
- *Economy and development*, focusing on the “constantly changing” nature of economic activities “from the Native world around 1500 to the present”
- *Culture and currents of thought*, focusing on “the influence of ideas on cultural expression”
- *Official power and countervailing powers*, focusing on the relationship between the state and “interest groups”
- an “issue in society today,” left to the teacher’s discretion and combining aspects drawn from the other theme-based lessons

Each of these segments (period or theme) has its own civic and conceptual aims, a descriptive text exemplifying the type of narrative required, along with optional content that the teacher may or may not use to achieve the prescribed aims.

The general arrangement of the periods and the choice of themes are entirely defensible, in and of themselves. However, the proposed content and prescribed aims are problematic. Each period or theme must be addressed through a specific “designated focus,” which 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. The descriptive texts are sometimes an eloquent reflection of this. These deficiencies have an impact on learning in the classroom, because they influence the content of textbooks and the ministerial examination.

These deficiencies are structural in nature; in other words, they are a logical extension of the foundations of the program. They are divided into three categories: civic preaching, the presentation of general concepts instead of Québec’s singular experience, and the absence of clear, continuous narrative threads. It is worth looking at some concrete examples, although the list presented here is by no means exhaustive:

- Citizenship education imposes a directive form of history designed to instill moral values through selected but debatable interpretations of the past. This directed form of history is detrimental to national and political history, and also to social history, as the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française pointed out in 2006.
 - For example, in Secondary III, Amerindian societies are not studied as such, but are used simply as an introduction to diversity and cultural determinism. They are therefore presented as a single, culturally frozen block.
 - For example, in Secondary III, the rise of the welfare state is explained mainly by the evolution of ideas. However, very few historians would defend this standpoint; most would emphasize the social and economic factors that help explain the political balance as it came to be defined in the first half of the 20th century. The standpoint taken by the program does not seem to be based on strong intellectual reasoning, but on the civic requirement that consists in convincing students of the power of ideas and the virtues of involved citizenship.
 - For example, in Secondary IV, the theme of “settlement” is addressed almost exclusively from the standpoint of immigration, based on the presumption that history should be approached in a way that fosters the active reconciliation of cultural differences.
 - For example, in Secondary IV, the theme of power is addressed almost exclusively from the standpoint of the relationship between the state and lobbies. This choice appears to be justified not by the current state of historical knowledge, but by the civic requirement to promote state-arbitrated forms of deliberation as being an obvious prerequisite for the “public good.” This choice also takes the focus away from other forms of power relationships that are important in understanding the past, including Canada’s national duality and the existence of transnational powers from the very beginning of Canada’s history.

- The fact that the narrative is structured around general and sometimes outdated “concepts” blurs its logic. This leads to the neglect of the specific aspects of the Québec experience, which can be difficult to understand as a result, and the overall focus on general aspects simplifies the narrative by removing the singular elements of Québec’s history, starting with national duality.
 - For example, in explaining the general concept of the welfare state rather than how it has developed specifically in Québec, the Secondary III program ignores the role of the national issue as the province evolved from Duplessism to the Quiet Revolution. Although there is nothing to prevent this aspect from being raised in the classroom, the role of nationalism in Québec’s refusal and subsequent development of a welfare state is not presented in the program as an important key to understanding the period 1945-1970.
 - For example, in Secondary III, the period 1791-1850 is used to illustrate the general concepts of “nation” and “liberalism” rather than the specific way in which the two Canadas experienced them. The descriptive text minimizes the importance of specific national factors (such as the role of the Church), focusing instead on vague notions about the relationship between liberalism and the state.
 - For example, in Secondary IV, the segment devoted to culture is based on vague, ill-assorted concepts. This vagueness enhances the structuring role of the (much clearer) aims of citizenship education; specifically, the past in this case is regarded as a “heritage” (which, in itself, is hardly a historical approach), and students are encouraged to protect “cultural wealth from the threat of standardization.”
 - However, the program offers some interesting counter-examples. In Secondary III, for instance, the segments devoted to colonization in New France and the Conquest are built around specific socio-historical subjects rather than general concepts. They offer a more solid approach that is better suited to the national framework and that clearly explains the mechanisms specific to those periods.

- The program is indifferent to the narrative threads offered by the national framework and also to certain influential concepts of social history, such as social classes and gender relationships within society. The result is that the overall structure is not all that coherent.
 - ▶ The Secondary III program is centred around political history from 1760 to roughly 1900, then on social history from roughly 1900 to 1980. A break occurs in the segment on the Canadian federation; the descriptive text starts as a political and economic narrative covering the period from 1848 to roughly 1900, which focuses extensively on nationhood (the path toward Confederation), then diverges into a socioeconomic narrative focused on industrialization and trade union history that conspicuously ignores the political reality and national duality of the period from roughly 1900 to 1929.

In some respects, this is tantamount to “denationalizing” not only the 20th century, but also social history, which is, in contrast, completely absent from the segment on the 19th century. The program does not consistently seek to interrelate the social and political aspects of history within the ongoing context that the national framework would provide.
 - ▶ Duplicating the Secondary III narrative in Secondary IV, and returning to it several times in Secondary IV, serves to produce a disconnected narrative. In 2011, the program coordinators removed portions of the overloaded Secondary III narrative and repositioned them in the theme-based segments of Secondary IV. As a result, Secondary III teachers must now address the subject of New France without considering the seigneurial system and the 19th century without considering the relationship between Church and state. This choice deprives students of an integrated view of history and promotes oversimplification for the purpose of competency development.

Because of all these deficiencies, the program has become removed from the requirements of history as a discipline. If it is to meet these requirements, it should focus on valid interpretations, lay down clear factual foundations and follow continuous narrative threads. Moreover, the program does not meet the requirements for a sense of shared memory. The shared content is drastically reduced by the denationalization of large parts of the narrative, and by the optional, and hence unshared, nature of the knowledge conveyed. Lastly, it is not likely to produce citizens who are accustomed to thoughtful discussion because of its directive approach to citizenship education.

3 Some Potential Solutions

The disconnected nature of the history program has an impact on the collective memory. However, the roots of the problem lie primarily in the program's scientific and ethical orientations. As a result, would it not be better if the development of the new program were guided as much by the need to reconcile the program with history as a science as by the imperatives of memory? Would reconciliation not require a more continuous narrative structured around clearer themes, all within the context of Québec's national framework?

3.1 History as a Science and the National Framework

The long debate on the teaching of history has been an interesting one in some respects. Proponents of the current program have proposed an interesting vision of the "competencies" included in the curriculum. For example, in their opinion the cognitive competencies are fully representative of the current status of the discipline of history. Competency 1, on the "historical perspective," simply denotes a concern for contextualization and the notion of duration. Competency 2, on method and interpretation, comes closest to the scientific foundations of history and is a core element of the program structure. As for Competency 3, on citizenship education, it is based solely on the use of critical thinking and debating skills and does not direct the narrative.

These goals are laudable and should be kept in the new program. However, is the program in its current form not a betrayal of these noble intentions?

In the current program, there is a certain amount of confusion regarding history as a science. Whether implicitly or explicitly, the program, and much of what has been written in its defence, promotes a vision of history similar to that of the Annales School, a scientific movement that dominated the field of history in France for several decades in the mid-20th century. Innovative in its time, the School rejected the idea of historical narrative to some degree, believed that there was a fundamental conflict between political history and social history, preferred to study general concepts and showed relative indifference to national frameworks. Its contribution was huge. In the last 40 years, however, many historians have attempted to qualify the heritage left by this School. If it is to reflect the progress made by history as a science, should the program not follow the example of scholarly efforts to restore the narrative, reconcile the social and political aspects of history, and better integrate the general and specific aspects, taking into account national experiences?

Are the program's failures not also due to the radicalism of some of its pedagogical ideas? That the program content should reflect the current state of knowledge goes without saying. That the exercises should give students a foretaste of the critical process in history also seems like a good idea. However, is it not doubtful, for example, that classroom simulations will place students in the shoes of professional historians, or that students will be able to give meaning to the past by instinctively reactivating the precepts of science, or that the "competencies" used will truly reproduce the discipline's epistemology? These claims are strongly criticized in the field of education today. Not only does the program not seem to fulfill its promises, but it also seems to corral the students into a fictional space where the actual transmission of knowledge from teacher to student is poorly thought out. Here again, have we not ignored the need for a narrative, as well as thoughtful selection and clear account of the facts?

In short, can it not be said that the program's critics agree on the need for a more continuous, robust narrative framework that is more in line with history as a science?

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. This is the case for historians: both their general works (*Quebec: A History 1867-1929*, *Quebec Since 1930*, *A Brief History of Women in Quebec*) and their studies of social history [*Histoire de la librairie au Québec (history of bookstores in Québec)*, *Histoire du jeu en France (history of games in France)*, *Formation of the English Working Class*] are usually placed within a national framework. Is this not also the case for collective memories and, if we are honest, for most history programs throughout the world?

Clearly, the national framework is no longer that of the "patriotic novel" inherited from the 19th century. On the contrary, it is a space within which the various components of the past come together and intertwine, combining the contributions of political history and social history to form a single narrative. In this respect, it leaves room for both standard political history focusing on historical facts and figures and a more recent style of political history interwoven with the history of mindsets or the economy. Moreover, using the national framework entails examining the singular aspects of the Québec experience, whether they concern trade unionism, interethnic relations, religiosity or the women's movement. Because of its relatively permanent nature, this continuous national framework would help students view events from a long-term perspective, be it with regard to Amerindian claims or Canada's national duality. Yet, thanks to its

changing nature, it would also allow students to see the evolution of the nation and citizenship.

Could the nation therefore be regarded as the normal framework for a historical approach that is both respectful of current knowledge and intelligible? Both here and elsewhere, many supporters of a modern, scientific form of history, open to social history and to the competency-based approach, have no difficulty in acknowledging the validity of the national framework as a basis for the historical narrative. In this respect, it could be said that one would have to know nothing about the work historians have been producing to confuse national history with a strictly political, ethnic or anti-scientific form of history.

Lastly, if the program is to be reconciled with the discipline of history, would there not have to be a change of direction in the competency-based approach, or at least in its implementation? Learning activities should focus only on those intellectual skills that are specific to history. Can it not be said that these skills would, by definition, exclude civic preaching and the systematic reference to the present? They should undoubtedly include a number of intellectual skills already mentioned in the current program and in the broader literature, namely:

- critically analyzing sources (using a variety of sources, thoughtfully assessing their origin and significance)
- comparing different interpretations (considering the role of interpretation and the changing nature of knowledge about human beings)
- comparing different societies or different groups within the same society (reflecting on different experiences and on the contribution of general and specific elements to the Québec experience)
- producing summaries and expressing a long-term awareness (producing chronologies, putting things in context and perspective, understanding long-term phenomena)

One advantage these activities would have in common is that they promote the development of thinking skills through the practice of history in and of itself. In the classroom, they could be supported by explicit prior explanations of the requirements of the practice of history. The constructivist pedagogy promoted by the current program does not necessarily allow for this.

However, activities such as these should always be occasional elements, secondary to the transmission of knowledge by the teacher, which is the most important element. The transmission of knowledge should no longer be left to chance in the program, but

should be taken seriously. To this end, should the future program not provide an explicit selection of principal “facts” and events to be taught in the classroom, along with interpretative issues for consideration by the students? This focus on content would be consistent with many of the proposals made by education faculties. Would this not also better serve the need for a sense of collective memory, which is based not on a consensus, but at the very least on a shared set of reference points conducive to discussion?

3.2 Rethinking the Program

It therefore seems necessary to develop a new history program. This would involve modifying the foundations of the existing program, preserving the most positive aspects and addressing its weaknesses. The following questions could help guide this effort:

- Should the preambles be rewritten to defend the teaching of history for its own sake, in accordance with its own rules? This might involve:
 - ▶ eliminating all references to citizenship education or, at the very least, any directive aim likely to influence the program content. Should the contribution of history to citizenship be limited to the use of the critical method and the acquisition of valid knowledge about Québec society?
 - ▶ reformulating the cognitive competences (“perspective” and “interpretation”) to bring them more into line with the discipline of history, so that they can be more readily applied within the context of knowledge transmission, an aspect that has not been addressed in the current program. Should systematic reference to the present, as in Competency 1, be eliminated or at least reduced? Should the reformulated competencies influence the rewriting of the program content?
 - ▶ promoting the occasional use of activities designed to develop skills specific to the practice of history, such as the ability to critically analyze sources, compare different interpretations, establish chronologies and synthesize information.
- Should the “designated focuses” of the program content be reformulated in order to replace general concepts with specific historical subjects (e.g. “Nations and bourgeoisies in the Canadas” rather than “Nation and liberalism”)? In the process, should the descriptive texts be rewritten so as to respect the singular nature and specific logic of the phenomena concerned? However, the existing format of content presentation, with competencies and designated focuses, should undoubtedly be preserved so as not to call the entire curriculum into question.

- Could political and social history be brought together and presented within a more continuous national framework? This might involve:
 - ▶ devoting more attention to social history in the period 1760-1900 (already structured around the national issue) and to the national framework and political history in the period 1900-1980. Could the extra teaching time required by these additions be obtained by spreading chronological history over two years instead of just one (see below)?
 - ▶ identifying the main narrative threads that provide some measure of continuity between the various periods.
 - ▶ identifying a core of shared compulsory knowledge (to be tested in examinations), as opposed to optional knowledge. This compulsory knowledge would not necessarily take the form of dates or political events, but would serve to confirm the existence of a common body of factual knowledge whose acquisition is necessary for a proper understanding of history.
- Could the “theme-based” Secondary IV program be eliminated and replaced by a chronological history spread over two years? Not only would this reorganization address the recurrent complaints made by teachers, but it would also remove duplication, thereby providing the time needed to study social history, political history and the national framework in all the historical periods covered by the program. As a result, teachers would have more leeway to decide how to use the additional time devoted to history in recent years. This might involve:
 - ▶ rethinking the successive periods into which the program is divided. In this regard, the current Secondary III course structure provides a good model: a small number of periods would make the program less dense and the periods studied would be long enough to allow teachers to address both the short- and long-term aspects of history. However, the period 1929-1980 could be further subdivided.
 - ▶ presenting the period “1980 to the present” as an actual historical period with real program content.
 - ▶ thinking about how Québec history courses fit into the overall curriculum and more specifically about the scope of the material to be tested in the official Secondary IV examination.

- ▶ taking advantage of these restructuring efforts to improve both the content and the way it is integrated, without overloading teachers. The new structure should give teachers sufficient flexibility to slow down the pace of teaching or examine certain topics in more detail when they feel it is necessary.
- Could minor changes also be made to the Geography, History and Citizenship Education program in the second and third cycles of elementary school? Because of its nature, elementary education seems better suited than secondary school education to some aspects of the competency-based approach. For example, the choice of the present day as a starting and ending point for analysis appears to be more justified. However, without calling into question the program's aims or the competency-based approach, the program might be improved by:
 - ▶ giving a less directive tone to the citizenship education component in the preambles and competency descriptions.
 - ▶ clarifying the program's narrative threads.
 - ▶ consulting elementary school teachers on the fragmentation of knowledge in the current program. The program provides lists of factual elements, but they are split according to the "competencies" to which they relate, rather than according to the periods studied. Does this type of classification not make it difficult to establish a narrative thread and consider the internal coherence of past societies? This is somewhat surprising in a program that is supposed to avoid the encyclopedic approach.

For Further Discussion

The above proposals must be discussed, improved or questioned, and their potential implementation must be debated. The observations on which they are based may be refined or contested. The issues raised in this document are too important not to be given careful consideration. The consultation framework as presented is intended to fuel the discussion, which could be based, among other things, on the following questions:

- Do you think the current program is consistent with the requirements of the discipline of history?
 - ▶ Do you think the competencies that serve as the program's aims influence what is taught in the classroom? If so, how?
 - ▶ Do you think this influence is compatible with the requirements of history as a science?
 - ▶ If the program is to meet these requirements, what characteristics should it have?
- 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?
 - ▶ Do you think the aims are compatible with a true process of reflection on citizenship?
 - ▶ What should history contribute to citizenship?
- What should the Québec history program convey to students?
 - ▶ What knowledge, or types of knowledge, should be shared by the community as a whole?
 - ▶ What skills are intrinsic to the practice of history? How should they be conveyed?
 - ▶ 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?

- How appropriate is the national framework as a key to understanding history?
 - ▶ Should the nation be acknowledged as the principal space in which to present deliberations and shared reasoning? Should other types of spaces be considered? Are there any other narrative threads that should take precedence?
 - ▶ In your opinion, what conditions must be met for the national framework to become a valid narrative thread or key to understanding?
 - ▶ What do you understand by the term “national history?” Do you think the term contradicts the requirements of history as a science?
 - ▶ Could the characteristics of national history generate a conflict between social history and political history? What should be the relationship between these two forms of history?
- Should the theme-based approach in Secondary IV be abandoned and replaced with a chronological course spread over two years?
 - ▶ What would be the advantages and disadvantages of such a change?
 - ▶ What are the advantages and disadvantages of the current situation?
 - ▶ What implications should the proposed change have for the overall structure of elementary and secondary school history programs?

