Quebec

Because of rotating teachers’ strikes in the fall of 2005, our Quebec case study could not be fully completed. The information we present here is based on brief interviews at ministry and district level, and data collected from only one school—a school that had recently begun to offer an International Baccalaureate program. This school was clearly an atypical case, but at the same time we felt that it might illustrate another aspect of the wide variation in the way that global education is realized in Canadian elementary schools.

As in our other cases, officials at the provincial and district level in Quebec view education about global issues as something that primarily depends on the decisions of individual schools and teachers. There is limited support for curricular innovation related to global education at the provincial and board levels. Coordination with external partners is left up to individual schools. Thus, while the provincial curriculum in Quebec pays detailed attention to global issues and incorporates important aspects of active citizenship, the considerable variation in global education practices across schools that we found in other provinces is likely to be replicated in the Quebec context.

**Background**

The Quebec education system is currently grappling with the imperatives associated with:

- Maintaining economic strength in the face of globalized markets
- The integration of a rapidly expanding immigrant population
- Meeting the education needs of the large Aboriginal population
- An aging population

Table 7.1 offers information concerning key demographic details in terms of setting the socioeconomic and political context of global education in the province.
TABLE 7.1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: QUEBEC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>7,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Ethnic Groups</td>
<td>First Nations, European, Haitian and Lebanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>274,863 million (CDN$) (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Economic Sectors</td>
<td>Service, Agriculture, Manufacture, Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Political Parties</td>
<td>Liberal, Parti Québécois, Conservative, NDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at the Provincial Level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premier</td>
<td>Jean Charest (Liberal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public school boards and schools in Quebec are divided into Francophone and Anglophone, as well as special-status school boards serving French-speaking and English-speaking students in the Côte-Nord region and Native students in the Nord-du-Québec region. At the time of this study, there were 72 school boards (districts) in Quebec. In 2001/02 there were 1,814 public schools enrolling 574,274 elementary students with 62,899 teachers in the education system. Figure 7.1 below illustrates the research undertaken at the provincial, district and school levels.

FIGURE 7.1
SAMPLING STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEWS FOR QUEBEC CASE STUDY
Global Education at the Provincial Level

Global education in the Quebec curriculum

The 2001 Quebec Education Program (QEP) (Ministère de l’Éducation du Gouvernement du Québec, 2001a, 2001b) is the most recently revised curriculum for schools in the province. Our curriculum analysis and interviews suggested that spaces for global education in the formal curriculum exist across a wider range of subjects than in several of the other cases (e.g., Yukon, Manitoba). For example, we found global education themes raised in the Social Studies, Moral Education, and Geography, History and Citizenship Education streams of the 2001 curriculum. Importantly, the QEP seeks to stimulate more holistic and integrated pedagogies by placing broad areas of learning and cross-curricular competencies in the mainstream. In Quebec, global education-related skills, attitudes and knowledge are perhaps more easily amenable to integration in formal curricular mandates than in some of the other cases.

The ministry staff member we spoke with identified two major challenges regarding the integration of global education into schools in the province. The first is creating public awareness and an understanding of the importance and value of global education. The ministry representative felt that global education was not a priority area for parents and teachers in Quebec.

The second challenge the representative identified is the need to have more effectively structured programs. Although there are many great initiatives such as language and other exchange programs in Quebec, the ministry official regretted the lack of a centralized organization that gives “rigour” to all these initiatives.

How does the Quebec curriculum compare to the global education “ideal type”?

The QEP does not formally define global education. However, the development of attitudes and behaviors associated with the global education “ideal type” are encouraged throughout the curriculum, particularly within the “Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities,” the “Citizenship and Community Life,” the Social Studies, and the Moral Education streams. For instance, the curriculum seeks to instill the following in students:

- Receptivity to ‘other’ cultures and respect for cultural diversity
- The development of a critical world view that is “related to a sense of judgment and conscience”
- A spirit of cooperation
- Recognition of the principle of equal rights for all and of citizenship responsibilities

The QEP advocates child-centred pedagogical approaches to teaching and a holistic model for integrating global education. We found global education-related curriculum units and expected learning outcomes coalesced strongly around many of the key features of the ideal type. From the Mathematics, Science and Technology program, to Religious and Moral Education, and to Social Studies, the curriculum details multiple topics (international organizations; wealth distribution; human impact assessment; poverty; citizenship rights and responsibilities), skills (research; communication; critical thinking), attitudes and behaviours (openness; tolerance; self-efficacy; empathy; support for issues of social justice) that link up with those put forth within the global education ideal type.
However, the QEP does not make any explicit links between domestic issues and global rights and responsibilities in the curriculum. Although the curriculum indicates that students learn, reflect on and discuss international issues, issues are not framed as actionable problems that students can help change or influence, nor are there specific strategies for promoting critical thinking on global education issues.

**Provincial-level curriculum support and resources**

Our one interview at the provincial level in Quebec yielded very little information concerning processes of curriculum development, implementation, available resources or professional development opportunities and activities related to global education. The participant identified an “inter-ministerial committee” that met at the ministry a few times a year. The participant stated that this committee created space for curriculum-related discussion and planning as well as discussion about the production of school materials. While not specifically geared to supporting global education, the participant thought that this committee represented a potential avenue for information and innovation-sharing between ministries. Importantly, while only representatives from the various ministries were originally invited, the committee is now also open to external parties. The participant explained that this initiative is in response to the “avalanche” of documents and requests that school boards and schools receive from various organizations hoping to reach a captive audience in schools.

While the formal curriculum is the main way in which the province supports global education in Quebec's schools, the ministry staff member argued that the official curriculum can only do so much by way of encouraging the integration of global education. In the participant’s view:

> Pedagogical choices belong to the teacher. There are paths, but the way the teacher will use them is something else, and we no longer have the control. (Quebec Ministry 1)

**Global Education at the District Level**

We had the opportunity to speak to representatives from two school boards in Quebec, although we only received permission to visit a school in one of these districts.

In slight contrast to the ministry official, but in line with the QEP, the district-level participants made more references to child-centred and active learning pedagogical approaches when describing global education. One of the participants described global education as about cultivating a sense of “openness to the world” among students, stressing that “given the context of globalization,” students need greater awareness of “external” events and issues. The charity aspect of global education and the desire “to teach kids how fortunate they are [compared with ‘others’]” were mentioned by participants. Missing from both participants’ responses was any substantive engagement with issues of criticality or the promotion of critical thinking among students. However, one official we spoke with, remarking on a student’s understanding of environmental issues, exclaimed:

> My daughter is in grade six...and it is quite amazing. She is able to tell me about the Kyoto protocol, and to make the link with the current elections, who I should vote for because of their positions regarding the protocol. (Quebec District 1)

District officials emphasized the “action” component of the ministry’s “competency-based” curriculum, highlighting its goal of enabling students to apply their knowledge and skills to “real life.” Many officials also mentioned the “practicalities” of life under globalization – for example, the need to prepare students to “be able to function in markets.” Similarly, officials cited the increasingly multicultural character of the
Quebec population as directly connected to the need to instill a respect for diversity among students. This growing multicultural immigrant population also means they must deal with “identity” issues closely linked to Quebec society with the aim of better supporting the integration of newcomers to the province. In contrast to other provinces, the district officials emphasized the importance of international exchange programs. One Quebec district was extensively involved in student exchange programs, including the creation of virtual on-line exchanges, although the official noted that this was possible because of the higher socioeconomic status of that community.

**Implementation of global education**

Despite the more effusive definitions of global education offered by the district officials we spoke with, when it came to talking about the implementation of global education, their responses were much less detailed. One individual lamented, “There’s not much to tell!” Officials viewed Moral Education and Social Studies as the two subject areas with the heaviest concentration of global education opportunities.

As at the provincial level, district officials in Quebec emphasized that teachers decide the extent of and approach taken to addressing global education in classrooms.

**District-level support and resources**

When we asked about support and resources for global education, the district officials gave responses that were vague and sparse in detail. One participant said that there was very little support for global education, and the other indicated that the ministry provided support for curriculum implementation. The main activity, they stated, is the in-service training of school board staff members by ministry staff.

There was very limited participation of non-governmental groups in global education-related programming and activities at the district level. Beyond UNICEF’s Halloween fundraising drive, district officials made no mention of any other development NGO. However, in the more affluent of the two districts, the participant highlighted the role of “international exchanges” in supporting global education and spoke of the involvement of the district, in collaboration with an international NGO, in such initiatives.

Furthermore, officials did not mention any formal or informal information-sharing mechanisms between the provincial-district-levels or among districts and/or schools. However, one participant indicated that the district did receive “documentation” from outside groups, and that this was in turn distributed to schools.

**Challenges**

A lack of awareness and knowledge of global education broadly defined (i.e., issues, concepts, pedagogy, assessment, etc.) at the district level was identified as the single most important challenge to enhancing the profile of global education in the school system. One participant thought that there was little leadership for global education at the district level and suggested that most of the activity and leadership came from parents and teachers.

Beyond lack of awareness at the district level, participants also felt that global education was not perceived as a priority area for parents and teachers, with limited teacher time and knowledge viewed as specific constraints on implementing global education. Compounding the lack of awareness, time and knowledge of parents, teachers and administrators concerning global education, participants also thought that the lack of a “structured curriculum for global education” further hindered its integration into regular classroom activities. Officials in both districts felt that resources and programming needed to take into account the imperatives of the formal curriculum and should have stronger links to “board-specific” activities.
Another challenge highlighted by both participants was the idea that some global education issues were too complex for young children.

Global Education at the School Level

We visited only one school in Quebec – unique in our study because it offered an International Baccalaureate (IB) education program. Perhaps because of the IB program, the definition of global education proffered by the principal and educators at this school was very much in accordance with the “whole-school approach” advocated by global citizenship educators. This was the only school in which educators referred to a formal school policy when defining global education.

When asked how they defined global education (translated from the French “éducation dans une perspective mondiale” as “education in a global perspective”), educators and the principal gave precise descriptions of what they thought global education involved and what its purposes were. One participant paraphrased from a formal school document, stating that through:

... structured questioning, learning is based on searching for ideas ... a process which in turn leads to a child who is more international in his attitudes, in the way he perceives, accepts and understands differences. ... encourages the acquisition of a sense of responsibility. ... (Quebec School 1a)

Participants made repeated references in our interviews to using child-centred pedagogies to open up critical discussions of current events and global education-related topics and issues. Rather than viewing global education as a separate subject area, the educators we spoke to at this school stated that it was integrated across most subjects. Enhancing the profile of global education within their school required a “whole school” approach that brought everyone, all educators and staff, on board in support of global education activities.

Overall, the participants all posited that global education is about promoting a culture of tolerance in a pluralist society such as Quebec and in an increasingly interdependent world. They emphasized the importance of critical-thinking skills and making local-global links among social, political, economic and ecological issues. One of the educators also emphasized that global education was as much about the “development of the individual situated in the world and not in Quebec and not in his [sic] parent’s home.” (Quebec School 1b), as it was about raising the cultural awareness of students. Developing critical awareness of environmental issues was also explicitly highlighted by educators in this school.

The participants were fully aware of the curricular guidelines established by the ministry of Education, and spoke very favourably of the new QEP, although they noted it did not explicitly address global education. However, participants suggested that there are spaces for the integration of global education, and there is definite flexibility in the extent to which teachers choose to exploit these spaces.

Challenges

At the school level, educators described receiving only minimal support for global education from the district and provincial levels. Specifically, the ministry is responsible for training staff at the district level to support the implementation of the curriculum. Educators at our school site felt that while such training is necessary, it is insufficient to adequately address the challenges of implementing education reforms, such as those that constituted the revised QEP.
One participant pointed out that the further schools were away from major urban centres, the more difficult it was to implement global education. For example, this participant’s school had experienced difficulty in arranging for guest speakers.

Another participant spoke of the often prohibitively high opportunity costs associated with applying for funding from the ministry or district in support of a global education initiative when there was already a lack of time to fully and effectively implement the formal curriculum.

The lack of evaluation strategies or assessment requirements were also perceived as a constraint on improving the profile of global education in the education system. Participants viewed global education as weakly positioned to compete with the imperatives of covering, for example, the Math curriculum – a subject area where formal evaluation is mandated.

**Innovations**

Three years ago, the school we visited chose to give itself a special mission, and under the leadership of the current principal, joined the Quebec Society of International Baccalaureate Schools. We consider the implementation of an IB program an innovation because the school made the decision in response to parental pressure for “a school with an edge.” The principal had also previously been head of another IB school and felt that it demonstrated the superior quality of the IB program in preparing children for responsible citizenship in an interdependent world.

**Partnerships**

Participants spoke of some external organizations that had sent resources, following the school’s requests or as part of school-initiated projects. Participants felt that it was only when the school had money for a project that NGOs appeared. Because of the one-off nature of past collaborations with external partners, participants perceived that the community link was quite weak. However, it should also be noted that participants frequently spoke quite highly of the parental support they received, particularly concerning fundraising events.

**School-level support and resources**

Participants offered very little information on which resources they accessed regularly in support of their global education work. One participant identified a key resource as “Le Monde en Marche,” a publication from Western Canada which rewrites news events for students. The Internet was also cited as a key resource, with specific mention made of the UNICEF website.

None of the participants cited district or provincial-level support and/or resource material that they used or had access to for global education.

**Advice from educators for external partners**

Our school-level participants emphasized the need for stronger vertical and horizontal relationships in support of efforts to enhance the profile of global education in the system. They made frequent mention of the need for in-service training for teachers so that they would be better prepared to address global education in the classroom. The capacity of teachers to effectively use the available resources (e.g., multimedia resources) also needed to be improved.

All participants identified the need for stronger engagement of NGOs in efforts to raise teachers’ awareness and understanding about the importance of global education. To make the greatest impact, participants
advised NGOs to plan for and commit to a longer and stronger presence in global education-related activities and programming in schools.

And the last piece of advice that the participants wanted to share? More guest speakers! In particular, participants would welcome assistance in finding and inviting appropriate people to talk to students about various issues.

**Summary**

Despite having no formal definition of global education, the QEP curriculum reflects the global education ideal type in a significant manner. However, as with our other cases, there was weak support for the implementation of global education at the provincial and district levels: officials at both levels view this as primarily an area left to the discretion of teachers and schools. However, at the school level, the lack of ministry and school board supports for global education, and particularly in-servicing of teachers, was highlighted as a major challenge to enhancing the profile of global education in classrooms.

The gap between the detailed attention to global issues in the official curriculum and limited ministry- and district-level supports means that opportunities for strengthening global education are left under-exploited. The lack of systemic support and coordination for global education in Quebec is consistent with our other cases.

**ENDNOTES:**

1 Unless otherwise noted, the information presented here is from Institut de la Statistique Québec (n.d.).
2 Statistics Canada (2006)
3 Faith-based schools are part of the private school system that is subsidized in part by the Quebec Government. Independent schools enroll 5 percent of total elementary and secondary enrolment in the province. (Ministère de l’Éducation, Loisir et Sport Québec (2005a)