



# LEARN FOR LIFE

## Essential Knowledges In My Classroom

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What essential knowledges do you possess, not only as a professional, but as a person in the context of your life? You might take a few minutes to make a short list of the essential knowledges that have served you well in your profession and out there in the world.

Take a look at your list. How would you describe the knowledges you have listed? Are they the outcome of discrete subjects or experiences? Or are they a synthesis of a lot of learning in many different subjects and settings?

Most people find that the essential knowledges they rely upon are a synthesis of cross-curricular content, strategies and processes, together with a good deal of experience in the world. They are ways of knowing that have both substance and flexibility. This is why they are « good for life. » In our present time, it is almost impossible to be certain that the knowledge we give our young about specific disciplines, content, strategies and processes will wear well as our world experiences change at a rate where it is already impossible to say that even the most learned « know everything. » This is one key reason for the emphasis on cross-curricular competency in the Québec Education Plan.



**Essential knowledges are for going places!**

Here's the other reason. Master teachers in Québec have, for many decades, consistently connected learning in a subject, or discipline, with a more universal kind of learning. When asked to explain, these same teachers consistently identify essential learning as something greater than any one subject. In their teaching, they connected problem-solving from literature, to maths, to problems we meet in the world and focused a good deal of energy on helping students to build these important connections.

### Special points of interest:

- Deciding on your focus
- Getting comfortable with the QEP
- The Emperor Has No Clothes: cross-curricular means little without a discipline/subject
- Taking the time to become conscious of what has been learned

## Learning In Focus

As you know, the Québec Education Plan (QEP) includes both cross-curricular and disciplinary, or subject-specific, competencies. These two families of competencies are interdependent and, therefore, have a close interrelationship. However, essential knowledge about problem-solving does not develop automatically by solving problems in maths, anymore than essential knowledge about communication can develop when one only uses language in English Language Arts. It's not that the disciplines are unimportant. However, the practises of master teachers show us that the disciplines will not automatically lead to the development of essential, cross-curricular knowledges by themselves.

Each of the disciplines in the QEP is presented in response to the question: **What does this discipline contribute to cross-curricular competency?** The cross-curricular competencies are a **synthesis** of the essential knowledges in all of the disciplines in the QEP. It's a matter of **learning in focus**.

## Knowing Your Focus — And Sticking To It !



There's always lots going on in a classroom ... but what's the focus?

Classrooms are busy places. Your classroom is no different. When you begin to work with the QEP, the most important decision you make is the **focus for teaching, learning and evaluating**. It doesn't mean that you are rigid. Knowing your focus helps you to plan and to help your students become powerful and confident learners!

If you are working on information-based texts in English Language Arts — let's say that you

and your students are studying advertisements aimed at children — then your **focus is competency within a discipline**. In order to do that, you might have students discussing ads, making ads, arguing a point-of-view (i.e. ads are really persuasive arguments) and looking at the values and beliefs ads bring into play. It may be that your content draws in more than one discipline. **But your focus is still within the discipline itself.**

**On the other hand, once your students have learned about ads, you might focus on transferring this knowledge to a cross-curricular area, such as ICT (Information & Communication Technology).** Perhaps you are going to study ads on the Internet, and then set up a website that includes ads. **Your focus is on the cross-curricular, since your students already know how to construct and analyze ads.**

## Now You Try It: A Short Quiz

Deciding whether your focus is either disciplinary (ELA) or cross-curricular just involves asking the right question !

For each of the situations below, decide whether the focus is either disciplinary (ELA) or cross-curricular. Have the QEP handy to check your answers. You might even do this quiz with the members of your cycle team!

1. Your class is working on the plight of the wolf in North America and you would like
2. While your students are working on a story with their writing partners, you are teaching pairs of students how to support their writing partner through the revision & editing process.
3. During Career Week at your school, you arrange to have a number of students interview
4. Your students have written a play about solving an argument with a friend and want to present it to a class in another school.
5. You are examining how a textbook is structured in order to present information, eg charts, illustrations, graphics, Table of Contents, Index, etc.

them to research and present their findings.

adults with different professions.

## What Did You Discover ?



You don't have to be a magician to decide on your focus

Was there one right answer to most of the situations above ? Probably not. But what you decided depended on whether or not you asked the right questions: have my students already learned what is required to do this activity or not ? What is the focus here?

Let's have a look at some possible responses.

1,3, 4. Whether these activities are disciplinary or cross-curricular depends on whether students have the necessary knowledges, strategies & processes to do what is required.

2 Unless your class has never written a story, your focus here is on working with others cooperatively (cross-curricular). On the other hand, if your students are only

beginning to learn about revision & editing, your focus might be within ELA.

5. Although it appears to be cross-curricular, textbooks are part of the information-based texts in the ELA program. Your focus here might be either one, depending upon what your students have already learned about information-based texts.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS: ELA + CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

In a very real sense, **the cross-curricular competencies are examples of « the Emperor who wore no clothes » since they are empty without the content of the disciplines.** In other words, a cross-curricular competency like « demonstrates a sense of ethics » means little unless there is a situation or a circumstance that requires an ethical sense. Furthermore, to use a sense of ethics competently, we need **many opportunities** to look at things from an

ethical perspective.

**In the QEP the idea is that students will develop cross-curricular competencies through different disciplines, or subjects.** If you keep in mind the question « **What does this discipline contribute to cross-curricular learning?** » you're on the right track. Your planning, in English Language Arts or any other discipline is in answer to this question. You need to be **deliberate & focused** in your teaching-learning

goals. But **avoid treating the cross-curricular competencies as another program in the QEP.**

A useful exercise that you can do with other teachers is to take each cross-curricular competency & connect it to English Language Arts, as well as other disciplines. For example, ELA contributes to developing a sense of ethics when we study the decisions characters make in a story, or the values being promoted in TV commercials.



**The Case of the Emperor Who Had No Clothes**

## MAKING CONNECTIONS: Using Effective Work Methods & English Language Arts

All of the disciplines in the QEP were written to contribute to the development of knowledge, processes and strategies that contribute to the cross-curricular competencies.

Taking « **Uses effective work methods** » as an example, you will find that this competency

connects to ELA in the following ways:

- Reading competency (1): **uses a response process** (1.1): shares responses with others to clarify meaning & enrich interpretation ; **constructs own view of world** (1.3): generates own questions about a text;
- Writing competency (2): **understands writing is a system** (2.1): identifies purposes for writing; **uses**

**a writing process** (2.2): all; **applies his/her knowledge of linguistic features & structures** (2.4): develops a sense of rules, patterns & generalizations for spelling through trial and error when writing

- Viewing competency (3):

**constructs visual texts in order to communicate for specific purposes to specific audiences** (3.4): uses pictures, symbols, signs and /or words to construct/convey meaning(s); works collaboratively with peers;

- Interacting competency (4): **uses language (talk) for learning & thinking** (4.2): practices effective strategies for problem-solving; **clarifies & reshapes ideas through collaborative talk; participates in**

**group activities as member of a team** (4.4): uses a range of strategies to assist communication with the team; participates in group activities in a variety of roles. All of these ELA competencies contribute to what your students are learning about effective work methods

When you focus on these areas of ELA in your classroom, you are setting the stage for this cross-curricular competency of using effective work methods to grow. And, as you can see, these kinds of work methods are useful in many different subject areas and in experiences outside of school.

**But is this growth automatic?** Or do I need to consider some other elements as well ? To find out, read on.....

... there is much in English Language Arts that contributes to the development of effective work methods!



**Working together is important in school & in the world**

## VISION 2000 LITERACY

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For more information about other issues in this series, contact your ELA school board consultant, ELACC representative, or Abigail Anderson @ 514-873-8719.

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**FOR OTHER RESOURCES SEE QESN,  
MEQ.GOUV.QC.CA OR YOUR  
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**VISION 2000 LITERACY** is a series of booklets for Québec educators. The purpose of the series is to look at the teaching of English Language Arts in the context of the Québec Educational Plan (QEP). Also in this series: **Literacy; Media Literacy**.

The topics chosen in 2000-2001 were suggested by the members of the Québec English Language Arts teaching community through the auspices of the Elementary Language Arts Consultative Committee (ELACC).

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## MAKING CONNECTIONS: The Rest of the Story!



**Important conversations  
are important learning  
too!**

We don't really know anything until we know that we know it — until we are conscious of what we know.

In looking at possible ELA & cross-curricular connections on page 3, you were getting a thumbnail sketch of how to bring a « cross-curricular mind set » into your teaching. But what about your students? Can we assume that they will understand that they are learning important & useful work methods when they work in a team on an ELA activity?

You will need to help your students become conscious of what they're learning if you

want them to transfer effective work methods to different situations. (This is nothing new. Most teachers do this all the time. Think of cooperative learning methods...don't you draw your students' attention to what they're learning to do? This is the same.)

How might you work towards « knowing what we know » effectively with your students? In the case of « using effective work methods » it would be important to take time to list — for all to see — what these work methods are AND to also write down other situations in which they might apply, in school and

outside of it. You might draw on familiar experiences: in a hospital do people work together? What about in our community? What about in our school? What are some things that we can do better together than we can alone?

We know: you're one busy teacher, right? But don't neglect these important conversations. They are among the most important learnings that you can give your students!

After a conversation like this, you might follow-up by having your students work on an activity outside of ELA that asks them to use effective methods.