BRIEF TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, RECREATION AND SPORTS AND TO THE MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

POPULAR EDUCATION: PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON AN ESSENTIAL LIFELONG AND LIFEWIDE APPROACH TO EDUCATION

ABRIDGED VERSION

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The present document is an abridged translation of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation's brief ***L'éducation populaire : mise en lumière d'une approche éducative incontournable tout au long et au large de la vie***. The Conseil mandated the Commission on Adult Education and Continuing Education (CAECE) to prepare the brief, at the time of its adoption comprised of: Christian Blanchette (Chair), Nancy Arseneault, Michèle Bergeron, Isabelle Coulombe, Esther Filion, Karine Genest, Diane Laberge, Nadia Lakrouz, Jasmine Paradis Laroche, Maryse Porlier and Michel Turcotte.

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This document was drafted using gender-fair language.

THE CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION

Created in 1964, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation du Québec is an arm's length government body comprised of 22 members hailing from the field of education and other sectors of Québec society. Established as a unique space for thought in the development of an all-encompassing vision of education, the Conseil is mandated with the role of advising the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and the Minister responsible for Higher Education on any education-related matter.

Five commissions make up the Conseil, each corresponding to one level or sector of instruction in Québec: preschool and elementary education; secondary education; college education; university education and research; adult education and continuing education. In addition to these five commissions, the Conseil also includes a committee tasked with preparing a systemic report on the state and needs of education which is adopted by the Conseil and must be tabled in the National Assembly every two years.

The advice provided by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation is the fruit of deliberations by its members and those of its bodies, and is supported by scholarship and experts as well as consultations with education stakeholders.

More than 75 individuals, as volunteers and through their civic engagement, contribute to the work of the Conseil.

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INTRODUCTION

> "Popular education over time must become an integral part of our view of education (note I did not say 'our education system'). It is only once we have made this shift in our thinking that the work of hundreds of clubs and services that continue to provide—on a voluntary basis—education to adults actively involved in life will no longer be viewed as mere charitable work or a social service (in the curative sense), but as an essential component of our social structure" (Ryan 1950, free translation).

In its brief *L'éducation populaire : mise en lumière d'une approche éducative incontournable tout au long et au large de la vie [Popular Education: Putting the Spotlight on an Essential Lifelong and Lifewide Approach to Education*] the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (CSE) examines popular education practices carried out by a vast number of actors in many different sectors. These non-formal educational opportunities have drawn the Conseil's attention both for the gamut of educational needs they meet in diverse settings and for the wide range of approaches they offer. While the Conseil has already covered popular education from different perspectives in some of its earlier publications (CSE 1982a, 1982b, 1987, 1992, 1998, 2013), it has hitherto not devoted a full brief on this field.

Exploring this vast world of practices led the Conseil to note that popular education, through its complementarity with formal education and other opportunities, significantly expands the number of options available in adult education. Moreover, a recommendation adopted by the 2015 General Conference of UNESCO has made popular education an important vehicle for active citizenship and one of the three core areas of adult learning and education (UNESCO, 2015). It is for all these reasons that the Conseil selected it as a subject for further consideration.

Popular education has figured prominently as a pathway in adult education at various times in Québec's history. Prior to the 1960s it played a predominant role, particularly on the Francophone side, through some landmark initiatives by the Catholic Church. It was also instrumental in Québec's transition to a modern society by contributing to raising the general level of education and moving it toward a vision of social justice and the common good: popular education was, for example, behind

movements that led to the implementation of important mechanisms such as legal aid, early childhood centres, local community health centres, and the adoption of the 2002 *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. Even today, popular education remains a vital educational pathway for thousands of individuals faced with some of the challenges of adult life and at the same time is a wellspring of innovation and social change, particularly as a support to the collective action of many social movements.

Yet despite all of these contributions to society, there is a sense now that popular education has fallen off the radar. In fact, the last mention of it in official documents dates back to the early 2000s, with the release of the Policy on the Recognition and Support for Community Action by the Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome (SACA) in 2001, followed a year later by the Government Adult Education and Training Policy (Gouvernement du Québec, 2002). Indeed, the work carried out by the Conseil for this brief suggests a lack of widespread interest in popular education today, notably at the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur.

One need not dig deeply to find it, however—looking beyond needs strictly related to the labour market and closely observing the educational opportunities available to adults today reveals an abundance of practices that fit the description of popular education. Not only has it kept pace with social change, it continues to evolve. As a result, a panoply of terms and initiatives are associated with it (e.g.: community literacy, community health, collective action, union education, cooperative education, social activism, social movements, self-help groups, discussion groups, popular university). Always topical, popular education takes up important social issues (e.g.: poverty, rights advocacy, the adoption of ITCs and democratizing access to them, the environment and climate change) and enables meeting needs that arise during the course of adult life (e.g.: financial literacy, parenting skills, looking after one's health or that of a loved one, literacy, healthy lifestyle habits, communication).

Simply put, the Conseil noted that popular education continues to thrive, however it no longer enjoys a high visibility due to the prevailing lack of recognition. Yet the work carried out for its brief reveals that not only is popular education timeless—even current in today's world—it also can help reach objectives and take on forms that echo societal and institutional change as well as the individual or collective educational needs of adults who use them.

Popular education thus significantly broadens the scope of adult education and contributes to fulfilling the will of Québec to ascribe to a vision of lifelong learning, as suggested in the subtitle of its Government Adult Education and Training Policy, "A Lifelong Journey" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2002). In providing educational responses to a wide range of needs expressed by adults, popular education plays an important part in an education not only throughout but also widely across life (*see* the table "Components of Lifelong and Lifewide Education" in Section 2.1), opening the doors to educational pathways for thousands of adults each year.

Objectives related to developing the labour market currently dominate public policy and government guidelines on adult education. While these may well be legitimate and meet individual and Québec challenges, education policies also need room for components of adult education that address other equally legitimate types of needs or aspirations. The Conseil is well aware that choosing to devote a full brief to popular education is a bold move on its part—putting the spotlight on this field today is a deliberate attempt to significantly alter the view of education in general and adult education in particular. It is thus through the wider lens of a broader educational response to adult needs that popular education is examined.

The overall objective of the work for this brief was to gain a better understanding of, highlight and promote the field of popular education as a legitimate set of educational practices in Québec. The results led the Conseil to make recommendations designed to give popular education the necessary breadth and means to better play its role among the citizens of Québec, with the ultimate aim of incorporating it into a lifelong and lifewide vision of education, positioned as a keystone in a renewed education policy that leverages all education opportunities in complementarity.

The first section of the brief sets the scene with an overview of where popular education stands today: a working definition is presented and key actors in the field and the types of popular education they carry out are included. The second section outlines the various contributions of popular education, and how these have helped validate a vision of lifelong and lifewide education; a vision that has been on the horizon of adult education for several years now. In the third section, the Conseil identifies and discusses two types of challenges—cross-cutting and sectoral—facing popular education in key settings, based on the views of actors and observers in the field. The fourth section presents the key ideas the Conseil wishes to convey firstly to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and to the Minister responsible for Higher

Education, secondly to the Government and lastly to stakeholders concerned with the challenges identified and the conclusions drawn. In the fifth and final section the Conseil formulates guidelines and courses of action, along with subsequent recommendations in which numerous stakeholders are called upon to play a role in ensuring popular education attains its rightful legitimacy and a recognition that merits its educational and social contribution.

1 A SURVEY OF THE FIELD OF POPULAR EDUCATION IN QUÉBEC

1.1 A WORKING DEFINITION OF POPULAR EDUCATION

Popular education has had many definitions, depending on the context or the time. Since the beginning of the 2000s and despite the release of the Government Adult Education and Training Policy in 2002, it has failed to gain much traction in Québec, even though many actors continue to provide practices clearly associated with it. The combination of these has led to a limited—if not downright confused—understanding of just what the concept encapsulates, with the term "popular education" often being used but seldom referring to the same thing. In its examination of this field of adult education, the Conseil observed a certain resistance to any form of permanent, general or universal definition (Tétard, 2007). The field also continues to be dogged by the stereotypical image some have of craft courses, as noted in the research.

This pileup of definitions led the Conseil to attempt to delineate this educational field and draft an updated definition with the intention of connecting its disparate actors. The strategy in doing so was primarily to maintain an impartial stance—given the controversies surrounding the field and the age-old divisions between its different movements—so as to glean the shared objectives and characteristics of the popular education practices actors currently provide, while respecting the unique educational action of each.

Through its work the Conseil thus set out to document what exactly constitutes popular education in Québec today and expand knowledge related to this field of adult education. To this end, it carried out in various phases documentary research, data collection, two surveys and consultations with actors in the field (*see* Appendix 2 of the full brief). This research process enabled the Conseil to gather information on the current forms and practices of popular education, draw an updated picture, and define it in broad terms.

In doing so, the Conseil identified several components for its definition related to popular education's nature (e.g.: its structured aspect; the people it reaches; its mission of educational equity; its objective of empowerment; its collective scope) and its characteristics (e.g.: its accessibility; the full set of pedagogical tools it uses; the importance it gives the adult and the group as agents of their own learning; the diverse number of subjects that can be explored; its flexibility and

innovation in the area of andragogy). On a more theoretical level, popular education is also typically associated with non-formal education, which characterizes the educational practices of its various actors (*see* the table "Components of Lifelong and Lifewide Education" in Section 2.1). Based on this analysis, the Conseil formulated the following working definition[1] of popular education, making it possible to more accurately delineate its scope and broadly capture its footprint:

> Popular education is an interactive and collective learning process that can take many forms as a response to a variety of needs rooted in the different spheres of adult life. It enables social actors—individually and collectively—to be empowered, have their rights respected, exercise the role(s) they assume, see to their self-actualization and participate in the development of their communities.

This definition should be viewed as an attempt to identify the main characteristics of practices and approaches carried out by a wide range of actors in the field. Conceived as such, popular education can be a means of meeting needs and aspirations such as those listed in the box below.

Needs and Aspirations That Could Generate Popular Education Practices

> A woman with a recent history of mental health issues senses that her friends and family have become uncomfortable around her. She'd like to the break the taboo and talk to them about it.
>
> A First Nations youth who didn't complete elementary school is fed up with finding ways to compensate every time writing is involved. He'd like to learn how to read so he can be a good father and provider for his baby daughter and really support her when she goes to school, but his own school experience has left him with a bad taste and he feels his future slipping through his fingers.

1. This is a working definition rather than a conceptual one, as it seeks to capture the operational methods and objectives of popular education. It also allows to define popular education as a field based on the common features found in its practices carried out by actors in various sectors, making it easier for those unfamiliar with this field to better grasp it.

The arrival of temporary migrant workers at a poultry slaughterhouse has generated tension. The new workers speak neither French or English and aren't very familiar with their rights, nor do they trust their union representatives. For their part, the permanent workers feel this new group will lower working conditions and that they're "stealing jobs" from the locals. A union representative wants to de-escalate tension among members and forge links with the new workers at the same time, but isn't sure how to go about it.

A newly-arrived Bhutanese family, full of hope, are trying to fit into Québec society. The man, who speaks French well, is refused a job as a cashier with the excuse that his accent would "scare customers away." A few weeks earlier, the family couldn't rent the apartment they wanted, because the landlord didn't want to rent to "imported people." Faced with these rejections, they feel powerless.

A single mom had dropped out of high school to take care of her baby. Her already poor reading skills—acquired with difficulty—have declined, as she needed to work to provide for her family. Now that her child is older, she'd like to look after herself for a change and do something about her ABCs. She'd love nothing more than be able to use the ATM machine, find an address, use public transit, understand what's written on letters sent to her by the government and how to reply, or do something as simple as e-mail her son.

A group of social assistance recipients have been taking part in activities offered by an organization that helps them with things like filing income taxes and learning how to cook meals on a small budget. Over time, these individuals began to realize just how much the stigma of social assistance was harmful to their self-esteem and health. They'd love to say or even do something about it, but they're too shy or don't feel very confident about expressing their opinions.

A pensioner has been trying to get some help on the phone. But every time he calls he's directed to visit a website. Having retired back in the 1990s, he hasn't kept up with technological change and is now having difficulties as the government and other organizations are increasingly moving their services online. He'd love to know how to use the Internet so he can do things himself, but feels more and more on the wrong side of the digital divide.

A woman who is a victim of domestic violence feels helpless. Her husband has threatened to keep all her belongings and not let her see her son if she leaves. Feeling both guilty and ashamed, she blames herself for the situation she's in. She's at her wits' end and doesn't know what to do—let alone what her rights are—and wishes she could just find a way out.

1.2 ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF INITIATIVES IN POPULAR EDUCATION

To offer a substantive understanding of current practices in popular education and appreciate the diversity of actors who provide them, it would be useful to illustrate the above-mentioned working definition with some practical examples of initiatives in the field (*see* Chapter 2 of the full brief for additional examples).

Advocating for a Collective Cause: the "Alpha" Transit Fare

A popular education initiative undertaken from a perspective of social change was behind an effort to have public transit fares accommodate the ability of low-income individuals to pay, led first by participants in a Montréal-based community literacy group between 2005 and 2009, and more recently by the Carrefour d'animation et de participation à un monde ouvert, an independent community action organization in Québec City.

The Montréal example was submitted to the Conseil by the Comité d'éducation aux adultes de la Petite-Bourgogne et de Saint-Henri (CEDA) as an illustration of the type of independent popular education approach the latter organization supports. It all started with CEDA members complaining about how expensive it was becoming to get around by public transit, particularly to attend CEDA literacy courses. These members felt that ever-climbing

transit fares were becoming prohibitive for many low-income individuals. They also noted that while adapted fares were available for seniors and students, there was no special "alpha fare" for adults in literacy programs.

The underlying objective of the campaign carried out by CEDA was also a way to change perceptions of individuals in literacy programs, highlight their educational effort and build a more positive image of them—in other words, ending the social stigma attached to low literacy and championing learning for all through many different forms. It included all the key ingredients of an independent popular education approach: respect and value for the participants' culture, their contribution to decision-making, learning through action, collective action to improve life conditions, etc.

Close to ten community literacy groups—or about 80 people—took part over the course of this campaign. A committee was struck to coordinate their action and organize meetings. Participants were able to decide as a group the single demand to present to the Société de transport de Montréal (STM): a $22.25 "alpha fare" for people attending literacy courses (the average amount they deemed they could afford in 2006-2007). They also decided as a group on what actions to take in order to reach their goal: sending letters and written testimonials to the STM on the impact of public transit fares; ensuring a continued presence at STM board meetings to be able to question those in charge of the file; conducting *post mortems* before planning their next move. Most decisions were taken collectively at general meetings; some required consensus, others were left up to the individual. Those facilitating the meetings were not entitled to vote except on decisions that concerned their group. Between meetings, they informed themselves to be well-prepared, ready and able to lead the next one. Participants who took part were also provided with training on photography, media, being a spokesperson, etc.

Some of the skills acquired during the campaign participants were able to test for the first time: advocating for a collective cause; displaying leadership; speaking at STM meetings; taking photos and making videos; circulating petitions and being able to explain why the cause was important; writing slogans and songs; speaking about their experience; fighting for a cause. While in the end their demand was not met, the process of fighting for an "alpha fare" had numerous positive effects on the personal lives of the

participants: being able to open up in public about their issue with reading and writing; overcoming shame and embarrassment; boosting their self-confidence; expressing opinions in front of decision-makers; no longer feeling alone in defending their rights; advocating for others; having a sense of purpose; and breaking down the walls of isolation.

Mobilizing Citizens Around an Environmental Issue: The Fight Against Fracking

Initiatives based on popular education sometimes emerge from citizens mobilizing for a common cause, such as the environment. One example is a movement initiated by a group of citizens opposed to the shale gas exploration project in Québec (Batellier et Sauvé, 2011). Popular education played a part in this, as this collective action around an environmental issue elicited the development of critical thinking and the type of learning needed to establishing a position of power.

The engagement of citizens in response to hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," by the gas industry in Québec is exemplary, both in its scope and its success. As the fight against fracking grew, citizens became more aware and gained a greater understanding of the environmental and social issues at stake. They learned to mobilize, demand more transparency and have a greater say in decisions that affected them. They expressed an increasing desire for participatory democracy in choices that impacted the common good, use of land and resources (2011, p.49).

In the space of a single year, this grass-roots movement, supported among others by local advocacy groups, was able to alter the course of things. At the beginning of 2010, as the initial processes of fracking were proceeding unopposed away from the scrutiny of the media, this citizen-based movement sparked a widespread public debate on energy choices, how all natural resources were being used, and specifically mining laws (e.g.: the tabling of a new mining bill in May 2011) (2011, p.50). These citizens' groups attracted wide public interest on this issue, forcing an impact assessment study to be carried out by Bureau des audiences publiques sur l'environnement.

The collective action that made this opposition to fracking possible rests on a comprehensive set of learning skills resulting from a popular education approach. The list of skills citizens acquired is long: public speaking; understanding the issue and the "rules of the game"; the type of learning vital to fully understanding shale gas exploration and being able to apply it when taking a stance during hearings or through other participatory mechanisms; sustaining social mobilization over the months and the long-term commitment of participants, both individually and as a coalition of often disparate groups. For leaders of this movement, skills included the responsibility of representing a diversity of citizens, coordinating on-the-ground resistance planned in a context of urgency, and mobilizing at the regional or national level with available resources.

As to the benefits of opposition to the shale gas project, Batellier and Sauvé point out other examples of know-how acquired throughout this action: becoming better-informed citizens; learning to work in a network and having a clear vision championed collectively; building citizen knowledge and power; and ultimately developing "the power to do" (validating their intuitions and finding their position on the chessboard of political and economic decision-making).

In sum, social mobilization around socioecological issues can be a highly effective crucible for collective learning. It can help build an intelligent citizenry, one that has allows a better understanding of issues and a stronger civic voice driving the search for the right solutions (2011, p.57).

Coping With a Chronic Disease: Self-help Groups Supported by the Québec Lung Association

In 2002, to foster solidarity and exchange among those living with respiratory diseases, the Québec Lung Association established an outreach program of self-help groups to support them, their families and caregivers in coping with their new reality.

Accepting a chronic respiratory disease such as emphysema, sleep apnea, lung cancer, pulmonary fibrosis, or sarcoidosis can be often be very difficult and lead to insecurity, a sedentary life or isolation. To provide some relief, self-help groups were formed

around either a single disease, a group of conditions or issues, or to support caregivers (often family members). Members of these groups typically meet at informal coffee get-togethers or attend lectures once a month—depending on their group—to exchange information, swap stories, find answers to their questions about respiratory diseases, and see to their own well-being. These meetings are a good resource for participants to discuss their diseases and receive information about the treatments available, learn how to better cope, find out about the various programs offered by the Lung Association and the health and social services network or even attend lectures offered by experts from various fields (Chabot, 2014).

From what participants had to say, the benefits of these groups are by no means trivial: breaking out of isolation; learning that they are not alone living with their disease; acquiring tools to help them better cope; reassuring caregivers or helping them face their fears; forging ties of friendship and/or developing a sense of belonging to a group; a better understanding about respiratory diseases, the latest treatments and care services available, etc.

In those communities where popular education practices have spread, a range of responses to the same concern is often found, simply because adults who participate in them come with different expectations and histories. The same applies to the pedagogical tools (training, lectures, workshops, discussions, popular theater, global approaches, actions, chat groups, action research) employed by the facilitators leading these practices to reflect the concerns and commitments of the participants and inspire their learning. Lastly, the practices themselves can also evolve in line with developments in the field of andragogy.

1.3 A CONTINUUM OF PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The Conseil's examination of popular education practices puts into perspective two distinct movements with regard to the overarching objectives of these practices: *social adjustment* and *social change*. Defined below, these movements represent the poles of a continuum of popular education practices that allow to characterize the goals of their different approaches. In meeting the needs or aspirations expressed by the individuals they reach as well as the guidance they can provide to an approach, these practices can elicit educational action in either movement within the same organization.

Social Adjustment and Social Change: Two Poles of a Continuum

The continuum of popular education practices is currently bounded by two major movements. Each of the different practices carried out by stakeholders can be found at a specific point somewhere between these two poles:

Adjustment of the Individual, where objectives are conceived more along the lines of socializing the learner toward mainstream culture (Bélanger, Bélanger, et Labrie-Klis 2014, p.11). In essence this means helping adults cope with everyday life or the prevailing economic or social environment (e.g.: being a parent; managing one's own finances; being an informed consumer and citizen; looking after one's own health). Benefits tend to be more on a personal level, but approaches can take on a collective character, as the goal here is not to change how society works, but rather to equip the individual with the right tools to better exercise his or her role(s).

Collective Advancement and Social Change, which strives to empower the individual and the group, leveraging a common interest to kick-start a collective action (educational in and of itself) leading to awareness and the development of critical thinking skills. This process occurs in action and results in actions to change the root cause of the action. This movement can be carried out through a collective development project (e.g.: awareness of a financial situation and deciding to form a cooperative) or social change (e.g.: awareness of one's status as a woman and taking action to change views of how women are viewed in society).

These two movements are thus not always mutually exclusive, as a single environment can at different times accommodate multiple practices found along the continuum. For example, in an organization whose mission is founded on social change, some practices have adaptive goals; shifting along the spectrum of actions within the same organization, they also contribute to a vision of change. Either way, both seek to empower the individual and the group, as well as promote better informed social and civic participation.

1.4 KEY ACTORS AND CURRENT FORMS OF POPULAR EDUCATION

The working definition of popular of education introduced in Section 1.1 allows the inclusion of the wide range of practices that underpin the field, highlighting in particular the flexibility of such approaches. As a result, this field covers part or all of the educational action of a diverse group of actors.[2]

The Conseil chose to spotlight a few specific popular education actors to provide a better insight into how the field is structured.[3] The focus was primarily on their educational actions and the particular forms of popular education they provide, tailored to meet the needs and aspirations of the adults concerned. In its analysis, the Conseil made a distinction between those practices found in institutional settings—under the stewardship of the State—and those in non-institutional settings, whose actors hail from civil society.

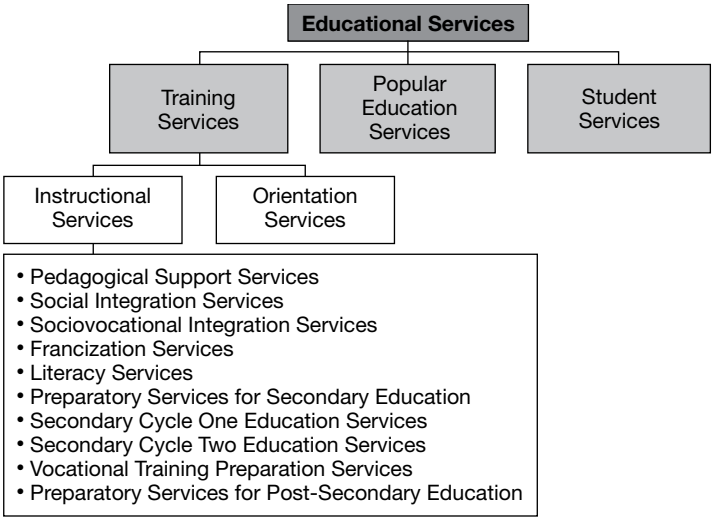
The first part of this subsection outlines popular education practices carried out in institutional settings, namely those implemented by school boards. The second part covers special forms of popular education developed by two actors from non-institutional settings: independent community action organizations and union organizations.

2. An exhaustive list of organizations operating in this field is beyond the scope of this brief. However, without neglecting actors whose contribution lies more in supporting popular education practices carried out by other organizations or communities, some of the many currently providing these practices to spark interest in learning among adults include: school boards, a number of foundations (e.g. the Québec Lung Association), core organizations or civil society groups, community action organizations, independent community action organizations, social economy enterprises (including cooperatives), union organizations, student associations and some branches of the public health and social services network (through the work of some of their partner community organizations).
3. For practical reasons, the Conseil has limited the number of actors included in this overview to three; for details see Section 2.3 of the full brief.

Popular Education in Institutional Settings: School Boards

The distinctive feature of popular education provided in an institutional setting is primarily the result of the legislative, regulatory and budgetary frameworks that govern them. In the case of school boards, the *Basic Adult General Education Regulation* is the framework for delivering popular education practices found in the adult education network, as it governs the entire adult education offer. Popular education services are one of several different types of services included in the Regulation (*see* figure "Educational Services in the *Basic Adult General Education Regulation*" below). The Regulation defines popular education services be those that "relate to the intellectual, social and cultural development of adults or groups of adults, and to the implementation of community projects" (Québec 2015b, Article 15) and that "the purpose of popular education services is to promote the acquisition of knowledge, the development of skills, attitudes and behaviour required in the everyday lives of adults, groups and communities" (2015b, Article 16).

Educational Services in the *Basic Adult General Education Regulation*



The manner in which the offer of popular education services as defined in the Regulation is carried out varies from one school board to the next. Where the offer exists, it typically consists of either recreational or sports-related activities or manual skills development. At times it can include computer skills, which can be very important and useful in supporting adult empowerment. Paradoxically, the Conseil has noted that currently there are very few popular education services promoting practices that match its working definition, compared to the beginning of the 1990s, when several practices embedded in these services did. Overall, a gap exists between the current offer of popular education services and the Conseil's definition, namely in the cost related to these activities, which can be prohibitive and inhibit access.

To meet the needs of their populations, school boards often resort to other types of instructional services covered in the Regulation, such as social integration services or programs of study included in basic adult general education (e.g.: computer courses). These popular education practices generally fall within the movement of social adjustment, notably by seeking to support adults in informed and active civic participation. In some cases, community organizations offer these services following a joint agreement with the school board.

Popular Education in Non-Institutional Settings: Independent Community Action Organizations and Union Organizations

In non-institutional settings, educational practices do not fall under a legal framework, funding regime or curriculum established by the Government. In this respect, popular education actors have more latitude in adopting governance and defining their practices than their counterparts in institutional settings.

Independent Community Action Organizations

Popular education is front and centre in the work of independent community action organizations, a movement whose very heart beats for social change and citizenship. These organizations offer a distinctive approach to popular education: independent popular education, which effectively leverages the learning approaches and critical thinking involved in raising individual or group awareness to lead citizens to act collectively to change their living conditions and, more broadly, society. As part of a vision of empowerment and citizenship, independent popular education is specifically intended for individuals or groups who are vulnerable or facing exclusion.

While there are several definitions for this approach, the one adopted in 1978 during the general meeting of the Comité de coordination des organismes volontaires d'éducation populaire (the Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec as of 1981), brings together the greatest number of actors in this movement. This approach combines learning, critical thinking skills and collective action to effect social change:

> Independent popular education is a set of learning and critical thinking approaches through which citizens collectively take action leading to raising individual or collective awareness of their living and/or working conditions, and whose goal is to effect social, economic, cultural and political change in their environment over the short, medium or long term.[4]

Independent popular education is led by **core organizations** active in many areas: advocating for collective rights; women's' rights; individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities; LGBT communities; immigration; housing; health and social services, etc. It also rests on the action of **local regional and/or sectoral groups** as well as **independent community training organizations** that primarily provide support for popular education practices in the areas of quality assurance, promotion and advocacy. This action is also supported by **umbrella organizations** that strengthen the voice of the organizations they represent, notably to ensure recognition for independent community action, as in the Réseau québécois de l'action communautaire autonome, or unique forms of independent popular education, as in the Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec (*see* the table General Structure of the Independant Community Action Movement on p. 18). All these organizations share overarching objectives of active citizenship and the advocacy of collective rights, thus seeking to address the many forms of inequality and exclusion.

4. Source: Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec, http://www.mepacq.qc.ca/education-populaire-et-luttes-sociales/quelques-definitions/, page accessed May 12, 2014, free translation.

General Structure of the Independent Community Action Movement

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Core Organizations
(More than 4,000, including some 3,000 in the health and social services sector alone)</td><td rowspan="3">Independent Community Training Organizations
(e.g.: Relais-Femmes, La Puce informatique, Centre de documentation sur l’éducation des adultes et la condition féminine)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sectoral Groups
(e.g.: Regroupement des cuisines collectives du Québec, Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec, Table nationale des corporations de développement communautaire)</td><td>Local Regional Groups
(e.g.: Regroupement des organismes communautaires de la région 03, Table ronde des organismes volontaires d’éducation populaire de l’Outaouais)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Umbrella Organizations
(e.g.: Mouvement d’éducation populaire et d’action communautaire du Québec, Réseau québécois de l’action communautaire autonome)</td></tr>
</table>

Currently, the independent popular education approach is most prominent in advocating for collective rights[5] and community literacy[6] as well as in women centres.[7] It is also provided by a number of independent community action organizations in various sectors (family, health and social services, community media) or inspires, to varying degrees, popular education practices of many core independent community action organizations.

The adoption of the Policy on the Recognition and Support for Community Action (SACA, 2001) opened the door to a wider recognition of the value of these organizations and has led to renewed relations between the latter and the Government. In the Policy, popular education is positioned as an essential component of this form of community action (*see* box on p. 19).

5. There are over 350 core independent community action organizations in Québec actively advocating for the rights of pensioners, social assistance recipients, injured workers, tenants, individuals with mental health issues, etc. They are primarily active in independent popular education, representation, non-partisan political action and social mobilization.
6. In 2015-2016, there were 128 core independent community action organizations and two umbrella organizations working in community literacy.
7. As an example, L’R des centres de femmes du Québec is a federation of nearly 100 women’s centres established in virtually every region of Québec.

Popular Education as a Natural Field of Application for Independent Community Action

> "The general objectives of the policy are to […] **acknowledge** [and] **consolidate independent community action** and its natural field of application, **namely community education** and social change, support for participation in the democratic process, development of a global vision of issues, the exercise of active citizenship and the entrenchment in the community […]" (SACA, 2001, p.16, emphasis the Conseil's).

Some of the adverse effects of the adoption—and more importantly the implementation—of this policy must be noted, however. The Policy's proposed notion of independent community action characterizes popular education as one of its intrinsic components, yet its implementation has paradoxically made popular education an implicit characteristic, undercutting its explicit recognition by the Government. Furthermore and meanwhile, the Ministère de l'Éducation has since ceased being solely responsible for the independent popular education portfolio, and this has obscured the educational practices provided by this movement. Sitting in this no-man's land, popular education is no longer explicitly recognized anywhere (except by collective rights advocacy groups). In the halls of government, hardly anything is mentioned or heard anymore.

Moreover, government organizations are much more interested in front-line alternative services such as food banks or mental health interventions. These services, particularly when they ensue from service agreements, rely very little on popular education practices. Consequently, the autonomy of independent community organizations and how they fulfil their mission is at times called into question. The independent community movement is thus faced with a number of challenges, particularly in maintaining its internal coherence vis-à-vis the objectives of social change—a change primarily realized through popular education practices.

Union Organizations

The Conseil was also keenly interested in the labour movement, as it touches adults in a very important sphere of their lives: work. One specific action that drew its attention was union education, as it fits squarely within the adult education sector. Additionally, union organizations have long modeled their educational action in such a way that it is has now effectively become another branch of the field of popular education.

Unlike the independent community action movement, labour union organizations are highly structured and have adopted tools to promote learning within their rank and file, a type of learning transferable to other spheres of life. In general, the labour movement is comprised of local or sectoral unions affiliated in different models into national federations. It is from the latter that learning is disseminated to its members; federations typically have a dedicated unit for planning and coordinating educational activities. Based on the model observed, these units generally ensure training the union representatives who in turn lead the training activities at their local.

Overall, the goal behind union education offered to the rank and file is to defend and promote "the economic, social and moral interests of their members" (Québec, 2016). For its part, the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) provides a more concrete definition:

> Union education is an art which rests on expertise in facilitation techniques for leading groups of adults. It is a way of working with groups to encourage them to act collectively to change their work environment, and raise the living standards of workers. Union education is creating the conditions so that each and every individual in the group comes away with the strength to advocate for a more just, prosperous and tolerant society. Union education is also contributing to change in the individual, the union and society (Definition submitted by FTQ's education services; free translation).

Consultations held with representatives of union organizations revealed the twin objectives of union education. First, educational action is designed to equip union leaders and the rank and file with the tools to help them exercise their various roles, starting with the opportunity to learn about the world of work. Second, some of the training covers social issues and is based on learning linked to civic participation and individual rights advocacy but primarily collective rights (e.g.: the right to employment; the right to unionize; dignity and freedom of expression and opinion; democracy; economic and social inclusion; equitable redistribution of wealth; access to health and education services; sustainable use of natural resources). In some cases, union education can also fill the gaps of an incomplete or lacking basic education (e.g.: literacy or francization in the workplace).

Moreover, union education offered to leaders and the rank and file generally employs adult education approaches that leverage group discussions and the experience of the participants. As such, union education can be considered a form of popular education intended for unionized adult workers but whose action seeks to have a broader impact beyond the struggle for better working conditions.

1.5 PRACTICES SUPPORTING POPULAR EDUCATION APPROACHES

The Conseil also noted the valuable work of various organizations supporting popular education approaches. Although these initiatives are not pedagogical practices *per se*, they do contribute to ensuring and raising the quality of the approaches, as well as developing new ones. This support comes in many forms: action research, knowledge transfer, training facilitation staff, creating interactive tools and web platforms, etc. These are steered by many actors, namely universities, CEGEPs, umbrella independent community action organizations, and independent community training organizations.

2 THE CONTRIBUTION OF POPULAR EDUCATION IN QUÉBEC

To highlight the scope of popular education, during its work the Conseil examined its contribution to the development of adults and—by extension—Québec as a whole. The contribution of popular education is as multifaceted as its participation in the democratization of the public space. Significantly enhancing the adult education offer, it is also unmistakably present system-wide.

2.1 CONTRIBUTION TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND TO A VISION OF LIFELONG AND LIFEWIDE EDUCATION

Firstly, the Conseil considered the contribution of popular education to the Québec education system—in particular the field of adult education—as well as to the development of a vision of lifelong education. This vision has been given a central place in Québec education, notably in the 2002 Government Adult Education and Training Policy—still in effect today—whose subtitle is *A Lifelong Journey* (Gouvernement du Québec, 2002). The concept of lifelong learning is an extension of a much older one, continuing education,[8] and conveys a notion of learning that does not

8. In 1982, inspired by the *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education* adopted by UNESCO in 1976, the Conseil emphasized that continuing education refers to an entire project aimed at restructuring the existing education system as well as developing all learning opportunities that stretch beyond it (CSE 1982a, p.64). UNESCO has been promoting lifelong education in its work on the development of a global vision of education as far back as the 1960s. During the same decade, the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Québec (the Parent Commission) also espoused a vision of education entrenched in a perspective of continuing education (Commission royale d'enquête sur l'enseignement dans la province de Québec 1964, Tome 2, Paragraph 467).

end with compulsory education nor with what is needed to hold a job but one that is also pursued throughout adult life. It also extends to all spheres of life, not simply those related to employment. Thus the need for ongoing learning in all areas of life acts as a starting point for the adoption of education policies to ensure the global development of all society and its citizens. In this notion of learning, the central role of the various fields that comprise adult education is easily understood.

Core Areas of Adult Education and Learning According to UNESCO

In its 2015 *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education*, UNESCO divides adult education and learning into three core areas:

1) literacy and basic skills;

2) professional development;

3) active citizenship (traditionally associated with popular education).

Educational activities that support these areas leverage "a variety of learning pathways and flexible learning opportunities," and allow the consideration of individuals lacking minimal schooling who wish to have a second chance (UNESCO, 2015). Some of these pathways also enable meeting demands whose response is not echoed by a formal education offer or does not resonate with some adults.

Since the mid-1980s, with the exception of a period during the 2000s, the Government's choices in the area of adult education have leaned more toward professional development and preparing individuals for the labour market rather than "to be a citizen." In light of these choices, the place and recognition of popular education has varied ever since (*see* box on p. 23). Training has gradually been relegated to "an economic function" and meeting the underlying objectives of market competitiveness and employability, at the expense of a broader opening of education that must integrate other social and cultural aspects (CSE, 1996, p.56).

The Place and Recognition of Popular Education in Québec: Four Distinct Periods

Before 1960	Popular education practically synonymous with adult education, offsetting the scant offer available in the latter;
1960–1979	Popular education recognized by the State, considered in the trend of "social modernization" and "catching up" in education;
1980–1999	Popular education less recognized by the State, with uneven implementation from sector to sector (decreasing in institutional settings, redoubling in non-institutional ones);
2000–	Popular education no longer relied upon in implementing education policy.

Currently in Québec, as in trends around the world, resources allocated to adult education and policy are heavily skewed toward employment needs; for example, professional development to improve work skills or to encourage professional mobility. These needs can also be associated with initial qualification that is both accredited and recognized, and facilitates job market entry or a second career.

In the wake of choices made by the Government, formal education offers many responses to these needs that do enable those who wish or can to attain their objectives. The Government rests its policy choices on the importance of Québec's economic growth, following demographic studies (aging population and a large wave of retirement) and medium-term labour market forecasts (hundreds of thousands of skilled jobs need to be filled in the coming years). This interpretation of trends has led the Government to prioritize training related to workforce development for several years now. To wit, a reform launched in 2011 and tabled in 2015 to better align training with the labour market and foster workplace integration is one such example (Québec, 2015a). Despite the release of the Government Adult Education and Training Policy in 2002 under the banner of lifelong learning, it is predominantly this alignment of education with the workplace that has become a top priority for the Government in the area of adult education.

The Conseil noted that in the development of public policy aimed at implementing the Government's vision of education, the notion of lifelong learning or education is sometimes scaled down to more modest levels

by placing particular emphasis on some of its components or objectives. For example, Bélanger (2015) argues that the educational aspirations of older individuals or approaches to support citizenship participation, well-being and quality of life, are sometimes left out. However, as he also points out, we "live in a society where social roles are constantly evolving and becoming increasingly more complex and demanding" (2015, p.192, free translation). In addition, depending on their own life pathways, the meaning individuals attach to these roles and how they choose to assume them, or because of societal change, individuals may struggle with or develop an interest in an issue associated with any of these roles. This in turn can ignite a desire to acquire or upgrade competencies or knowledge empowering them to act—either individually or collectively—in the different spheres of their lives.

The Conseil thus believes it is crucial to advance once again a vision of learning where education is both lifelong and "lifewide" (*see* box below), to increase the legitimacy ascribed to a range of educational demands.

Lifelong and Lifewide Education According to the Conseil

Like some authors (e.g.: Bélanger, 2015; Schuller et Desjardins, 2007), the Conseil advances the idea that education can also be "lifewide," or occur across life. A lifelong and lifewide education pivots, then, not only on the multitude of processes that make it possible—by considering educational pathways, methods and settings beyond those found in formal education—but equally on the multiplicity of needs, aspirations and situations to which an educational response can be brought. In this global vision of societal and the individual development, this idea (*see* the table "Components of Lifelong and Lifewide Education" on p. 26) has the advantage of bringing legitimacy to a whole range of educational offers and needs traditionally not included in formal education and making them complementary.

In other words, adopting a vision of lifelong and lifewide education calls for promoting access to diversified education opportunities at any age, while considering the needs and aspirations associated with the different spheres of life. This effectively means creating conditions for accessible educational approaches in areas such as: the needs of new caregivers, the aspirations of career changers, the desire of parents to support their school-age children, the need to better support immigrants in integrating socially and economically, the desire of older people to learn a new language or religion, the demand for community education on nutrition or mental health, the interest of citizens in environmental or related

issues, the quest of adults faced with exclusion who want to better cope with their own lives, the needs of mature workers nearing retirement who wish to learn more about how the economy works to plan for their future, or adults whose plans demand greater literacy skills. These approaches can be as much a part of formal education as informal education or non-formal learning, with offers from the different categories taking on a complementary aspect.

Without proposing to replace the notion of lifelong learning, for its brief the Conseil builds on its foundation, adding to it the notion of "lifewide" education in order to underscore the importance of considering an expanded vision in the development of education policy in Québec.

In addition to being workers, adults must also assume other social roles (e.g.: member of a household, consumer, citizen) that can generate educational needs. In this regard, the offer in the public education system is more limited—particularly in formal education[9]—and may not suit all adults. Yet the needs of individuals who are dealing with some of life's challenges or simply wish to attain personal or collective goals can be found in many areas. Moreover, these needs can arise at any age, just as skills can cease to be adequate. The response to all these demands calls for a range of methods and forms of learning to be offered by a variety of actors. While the formal education system is involved in some areas—namely professional development and basic skills—it is not as well adapted to support active citizenship, for example. This fact strengthens the idea that an education system needs to be conceived around the notion of complementary methods, settings and objectives of learning.

The concept of lifelong and lifewide education revolves around the idea that education considers all needs to be equally valid, given that opportunities and aspirations of people are manifold and can change over time. Consequently, they must be accompanied by a wide range of educational responses. The contribution of popular education, which complements the options in formal education and other categories (*see* the table "Components of Lifelong and Lifewide Education" on p. 26) is crucial to realizing this vision. Popular education lets in a broader swath of adults to take part in learning activities that can meet their needs. It fosters certain types of learning capital for civic participation, well-being and the ability to take control of their lives and the development of their communities (CSE 1996, p.49).

9. For example, the programs of study in the new Common Core Basic Education Program cover issues related to social roles, however, the implementation of the Program varies from one institution to the next, as not all programs of study are part of the actual offer in every adult education centre.

Components of Lifelong and Lifewide Education

Youth Education[10]	Adult Education			
Institutional Settings			Non-Institutional Settings	
Formal Education		Non-Formal Education		Informal Learning
Formal education practices typically comprise school-based activities structured in a curriculum that lead to a diploma or a certificate recognized by society. Not only does formal education encompass mandatory basic education, it also includes full- or part-time studies pursued in college, university or a dulthood (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 1997, Sheet 12; Lavoie et autres, 2004, p.40; Livingstone, 1999).		Non-formal education refers to structured training activities often provided in a non-school environment that generally do not lead to certification. Learning occurs through planned activities that are not explicitly designated as pedagogical (Hart, 2013). It often rests on facilitation practices and training through action (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 1997, Sheet 12). For example, community literacy programs fit this category (Lavoie et autres, 2004, p.41). Non-formal learning takes on a voluntary and intentional character, and can cover a vast number of topics.		Informal learning refers to non-structured learning that occurs in a range of environments without any direct official recognition or external planning (e.g. by a trainer). It is neither structured nor organized in terms of objectives, time and/or resources. Most of the time it has a non-intentional character (Tousignant, 2013). In this category there is an internal distinction between informal practices that are intentional (or explicit) and non-intentional (or implicit).
Examples of Learning Methods Associated With the Different Categories (Those associated with the field of popular education that are discussed in the brief are indicated *in italics*.)				
Youth basic education (Mandatory attendance)	Common core basic education and diversified basic education Vocational training Technical training Continuing education Pre-university or university programs	*Popular education services* *Instructional services in social integration* Professional development University of the Third Age Personal development	*Independent popular education* *Popular universities* *Union education* Learning a language *Community animation* Library and museum activities Sports training	Cultural activities Personal development Using social media and electronic resources (web, TV, radio) Recreational activities Peer training Various life experiences

Adapted from CSE, 2013, p.42 and Vallée, 1988, p.4.

10. It is important to note that both formal and informal pathways can also be found in the youth education sector. However, as the Conseil's brief is devoted to adult education, this sector is not discussed here.

In the opinion of the Conseil, for some adults the field of popular education represents a front-line means to meet needs related to their individual or collective empowerment, such as those illustrated in the box "Needs and Aspirations That Could Generate Popular Education Practices" in Section 1.1. This broader response to educational needs is one of the reasons the Conseil chose to dedicate an entire brief to it.

2.2 CONTRIBUTION TO ADULTS AND TO QUÉBEC

The Conseil's research identified four major facets of popular education that highlight the contribution of this field to a broadened vision of education. These four facets also underpin its relevance to adults and, by extension, the whole of Québec.

A Means of Fulfilling the Right to Education for Adults

Regarding the contribution of popular education to both individuals and communities,[11] the first facet that emerged from the Conseil's work shows that popular education in fostering its accessibility and offering solutions to address educational inequality represents an effective means of fulfilling the right to education. Through its different methods and settings it opens up access to learning opportunities for adults whose needs for whatever reason are not adequately addressed by formal education.

About the Right to Education

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26) recognizes the right to education for all individuals, which was also reaffirmed by Québec when it signed the International Covenant of Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (ICESCR) in 1976.

The covenant emphasizes that accessibility to the different levels of instruction should be fundamental. Basic education must also be encouraged or promoted, particularly for those individuals who have not finished their primary education. Simply put, the notion here is that access to an educational opportunity is an essential condition for fulfilling the right to education.

11. For this brief, the Conseil adopted the term "community" (*collectivité*) to refer to a group of people who share common interests, have a common identity or live in the same geographical area (Ministère de l'Éducation, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, 2015). Individuals making up a community have a sense of belonging to it or recognize that they are members of it.

Moreover, the rise in popularity of the concept of lifelong and lifewide learning begs reframing the issue of the right to education in new terms. In essence, it is no longer simply about promoting access to a basic education that fosters social and economic integration and leaves the classroom behind once complete, but also about supporting access to ongoing learning opportunities and adjusting to an ever-evolving society. In this perspective, the issue of accessibility is front and centre and shifts adult education to the foreground.

Several of popular education's characteristics also make it an exceptional means of ensuring greater educational equity[12] for adults. For example, popular education comes with no restrictions on participation. It has the ability to easily adapt to the profile and life experience of adults for whom it is addressed or support a diversity of needs. Better yet, the fact that individuals committed to the same educational process can also collectively manage it make popular education a particularly viable option for adults who wish to learn. Moreover, it opens up access for many individuals who may not have the prerequisites to enrol in the type of formal knowledge- or competency-based training that interests them. It can also represent a learning pathway for those who have had negative school experiences in the past, and multiply the number of environments and contexts for learning (e.g.: union education in the workplace).

As a result, because of the wide range of practices and issues it embraces, popular education can be suitable for all adults. The Conseil deems, moreover—as it has done in the past (e.g.: CSE 1982b, p.1; 1987, pp. 23-24; 1998, pp.60-61)—that it is a particularly well-adapted vehicle to reach individuals who are vulnerable or faced with economic, social or cultural exclusion as well as the communities that they create or in which they self-actualize, as it is able to use these life experiences as building blocks. The opportunities offered by its practices thus make popular education an important driver of educational equity for these individuals and communities. In contributing holistically to the realization of a lifelong and lifewide vision of education, popular education for some represents the main route to fulfilling the right to education in adulthood.

12. According to the *Grand dictionnaire terminologique*, "equity" (*équité*) takes into consideration the specific characteristics of individuals or groups in order to place them on an equal footing or at least provide some equality. It opposes a blanket application of standards that do not take differences and diversity into account. The goal of educational equity, therefore, is to offer learning opportunities to adults by considering the specificities of their experiences, plans and needs.

An Educational Pathway to Citizenship That Strengthens the Democratic Character of Québec

A second facet of popular education that highlights its contribution relates to citizenship education, which is at the heart of many educational practices in this field. These practices foster the acquisition of citizenship knowledge (e.g.: citizens' rights, the right to public institutions in Québec, the pillars and requirements of democracy) and more importantly, applying this knowledge in *exercising* citizenship (e.g.: participating in general meetings; creating forums for debate and decisions that promote the expression of different views; advocating for collective rights; playing a role in committee). In putting the theory of citizenship into practice, these popular education initiatives take on a form of learning through action, helping to support and facilitate active citizenship by individuals or communities who may not otherwise have been able to do so for reasons of social stigma or exclusion. Through this process individuals can not only become aware of their rights and unacceptable situations that may be holding them back, but are also equipped to effect change and break out of their social isolation (Bélanger, Bélanger, et Labrie-Klis, 2014). This new awareness can lead them to question exclusionary mechanisms or take action, thus empowering both the individual and the community. Added to the experiential knowledge of the participants, this learning process can thus bolster the power to act and democratic and civic participation.

In brief, activities associated with popular education often and in many ways enable acquiring knowledge on the values and fundamental principles of democratic life in Québec, as well as the benefits and corollary responsibilities that go hand-in-hand with being fully recognized as a citizen. They also make it possible to effectively put this knowledge into practice. For the Conseil, citizenship education can be summarized with three key terms: *democracy*, *pluralism* and *collective engagement* (CSE 1998, pp.35-36). The Conseil reiterates the fact that this field continues to be a valuable tool in citizenship education. In its opinion, a recognized popular education whose practices are granted legitimacy can at the same time help strengthen the democratic character of Québec.

A Series of Educational Pathways That Foster Individual and Collective Empowerment

Another facet of popular education's contribution is found within the broader concept of education itself: the fact that it can foster individual and collective empowerment. This can be defined *grosso modo* as the ability of people, either individually or collectively, to influence their reality according to their aspirations (Le Bossé, 2003, p.34). Popular education

experiments and practices observed show that they can help people or groups acquire competencies, develop their ability to act and take the helm in steering the course of their own life or environment. Popular education has indeed shown itself to be well-suited in supporting adults in exercising their different social roles, allowing them to increase their participation, boost their self-esteem, and develop a critical eye on life issues or their environment and, in doing so, strengthen their own ability to meet their own needs and aspirations in the best possible manner. This newly-acquired knowledge can then lead them to envision collective action to attain set objectives, which in turn supports the development of societal values such as solidarity and the common good.

A Series of Educational Pathways That Promote Developing and Maintaining Literacy Skills

The fourth facet of popular education's contribution has to do with educational pathways that promote developing and maintaining literacy skills. In concrete terms, the different practices emerging from this field enable the application of these skills in a variety of educational processes (e.g.: individuals writing letters as part an initiative of advocating for collective rights; parents newly arrived in Québec searching the Internet to get information about its education system; reading brochures about mental health issues at a group meeting). Without prerequisites, resting on a structure resembling more a social activity than a pedagogical exercise and by drawing upon concerns and experiences of participants, popular education affords people with low reading skills the opportunity to develop and maintain their literacy skills through different methods, allowing them to rebuild their relationship with reading and writing and make it more positive.

3 CHALLENGES FACING KEY ACTORS IN POPULAR EDUCATION

The views provided by key actors and a number of observers made it possible for the Conseil not only to document the state of popular education in Québec, but also highlight challenges to the full development of practices in this field. Three types of challenges were identified: those cutting across the entire field of popular education, those found in institutional settings, and those found in non-institutional settings.

3.1 CHALLENGES CUTTING ACROSS THE ENTIRE FIELD OF POPULAR EDUCATION

Two major challenges emerged from the consultations carried out by the Conseil that cut across the entire field of popular education. While the findings are specific to the settings, they share common issues.

Asserting the Legitimacy and Relevance of Popular Education in Meeting Educational Needs

The first challenge, which for the Conseil is the crux of the matter, lies in asserting the legitimacy and relevance of popular education in meeting certain adult educational needs. Actors consulted by the Conseil all pointed out the current under-recognition of popular education practices on the part of Government, notably the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur. Seeking ways to have the legitimacy and value of these practices recognized as a valid educational pathway for adults from a standpoint of both continuing and basic education, these actors believe this recognition is warranted by the relevance the practices have for the adults who use them. Popular education practices can meet some of their needs and aspirations, and it is on precisely this aspect that the recognition being sought must pivot.

From what the Conseil heard, it is not so much the fear of popular education disappearing that is behind this call for recognition, but rather the fact that a more widely recognized and disseminated popular education would help fill the gap in the needs of adults who cannot find an adequate or accessible educational response. It is also important to remember that one of the objectives in adult education is to develop an educational demand that is very real, but at times not easily expressed. It is against the twin challenges of the expression of an educational demand and access to the right educational pathways that the issues of visibility and recognition of popular education take on their meaning.

In this regard, the objectives of the 2002 Government Adult Education and Training Policy proposed renewing the vision of adult education in a perspective of lifelong learning, namely to better capture the diversity of training settings and methods and set an overarching goal to generate the expression of a demand for training. For those actors consulted, however, the implementation of the Policy has not made it possible to fully consider the two aforementioned challenges.

Instead, guidelines found in the Policy and its accompanying action plan offer a vision of adult education and training heavily weighted toward formal education tied to the labour market. Any room left for non-formal components of education—including popular education—is rather

minimal. Simply put, this guiding document and its implementation have not met the expectations of popular education sectors in recognizing their practices and more broadly considering adult needs, particularly those related to social roles and the exercise of citizenship.

The views of popular education actors consulted point to the different effects of this under-recognition:

- In school boards, amendments to the framework and funding of popular education services have made providing these services difficult, particularly since the 1990s. However, the actors consulted emphasized that there is real need for which popular education practices are the best fit. Without dedicated resources, this demand barely registers a response.
- In CEGEPs, popular education practices have gradually declined since the 1990s to the point of disappearing altogether. Continuing education services in CEGEPs now offer programs largely related to employment.
- The role of union organizations in citizenship education and empowerment to effect social change is no longer recognized. Instead it tends to be primarily associated with the defense of workers' rights and/or workplace health and safety training, as well as francization programs (training jointly developed by unions and various government organizations), obscuring a wide swath of educational activities provided by these organizations.
- Independent community action organizations are called on by the Government more for their alternative services rather than their educational action. This poses a challenge for these organizations in continuing to build their action around popular education approaches that would sustainably equip their members rather than offering short-term, band-aid solutions to their needs.
- In the health and social services network, the place of the community organization is being challenged, as the network is relying less and less on the intervention of the latter. Instead, it now advances a more medical vision of health, one that is less encompassing and downgrades the importance of individual and group empowerment. This retreat has an impact on the use of popular education practices in community organizations, both with regard to increasing citizen empowerment and supporting community development.

In other words, the absence of official recognition on the part of the Government and particularly by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur has reduced the ability of key actors in popular education to implement such practices in carrying out their respective missions. In addition, the state of things is such that some sectors are no longer carriers of popular educational practices (e.g.: CEGEPs). Consequently, some of the needs related to exercising social roles and citizenship tend to be relegated to the background or simply overlooked. This is having a chilling effect on opportunities for education initiatives by some adults, notably those faced with poverty and social exclusion.

Maintaining and Improving the Quality of Popular Education Practices

The second challenge facing the entire field of popular education is maintaining and improving the quality of educational practices specific to the field. The Conseil was able to identify some of the competencies required for facilitating popular education practices in different settings. Those consulted expressed concerns regarding initial and ongoing training for facilitators, given the specialized competencies needed to apply these practices with adults. The means to address these concerns, however, are not always easy to implement.

In fact, a number of challenges or obstacles were raised. For example, initial training for professional competencies in popular education in some post-secondary programs appears to be lacking or failing to generate interest among students. Other limitations also feed these obstacles, such as financial and time constraints that make attending ongoing training activities problematic. The same can be said for planning activities or maintaining tools developed to produce, archive, share or disseminate knowledge on these practices, for which financial resources, if not scant, are questioned.

Moreover, some wished to see an increased commitment on the part of post-secondary institutions to practices that support popular education approaches (discussed in Section 1.5). In general, these approaches can enrich popular education initiatives and the learning that results. Indeed, some pointed out the positive contribution of these approaches to the overall quality of popular education.

Given such a context and stopping short of professionalizing popular education, it is clear the time has come for a global dialogue on the competencies and aptitudes required of facilitators as well as the necessary training and support to ensure the quality of practices in this field.

3.2 CHALLENGES SPECIFIC TO INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

On a different level, popular education is also facing challenges in institutional settings. To start, it must be noted that the place of popular education at this level has diminished considerably since the early 1990s. The commitment on the part of the college network in this field has also been substantially reduced, following a revision of its objectives. Only the school board network effectively remains active in this field, thus the challenges identified below apply strictly to it.

Broadening Opportunities for Individual and Collective Empowerment, Exercising Social Roles and Aptitude for Social Adjustment

Actors in the school board network indicated that one of the impacts of amendments to the *Basic Adult General Education Regulation* and popular education services was to reduce their ability to implement a training offer based on a popular education approach. With the government ceasing to fund these services as far back as the early 1990s and the lack of clear policy directions on the part of the Ministère, programming of these services, where it still exists,[13] has progressively shifted toward activities of a more recreational or cultural nature. Moreover, as the implementation of these activities rests on their self-funding, it also raises the spectre of financial accessibility for low-income individuals. To be sure, the offer of common core basic education courses by school boards could address some of the educational needs related to empowerment and exercising citizenship. The Conseil's findings, however, show that to date these are under-utilized and not very accessible.

To meet identified needs, some school boards are now resorting to other types of basic adult education services, including instructional services in social integration, to offer educational pathways that fall under a popular education approach. While these initiatives are generally relevant and can meet legitimate needs, this substitution, in the views of these actors, is a weak, stop-gap solution. In some cases, it also prompts a broader interpretation of their purpose or the characteristics of the people for whom they are intended, potentially causing a slide in meaning of the wording in the Regulation. There is a fear that this may lead the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur to question the popular education component of the school boards' offer, as it did the 1980s.

13. Article 247 of the *Education Act* stipulates that school boards must establish a program for providing popular education services in compliance with objectives set out in the Regulation. Given the current conditions set for these services, some school boards have opted to no longer offer such programs.

For those consulted, this state of affairs testifies to the lack of manoeuvring room adult education centres are currently experiencing in meeting—through non-formal education offers—the needs related to empowering individuals and community groups, their ability to confidently exercise their different social roles and their aptitude to adjust to an ever-evolving society that often creates exclusion.

3.3 CHALLENGES SPECIFIC TO NON-INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

In non-institutional settings, the Conseil was specifically interested in the experience of actors in the independent community action movement and union organizations. Challenges specific to each setting emerged.

Independent Community Action: Strengthening and Developing Popular Education

Four major challenges were identified with regard to the independent community action. The first lies in securing explicit government recognition for it as a legitimate and relevant educational vehicle. The adoption of the Policy on the Recognition and Support for Community Action (SACA, 2001) has had the effect of obscuring popular education practices, ironically the very practices that are at the heart of independent community action. This decline in recognition has been compounded by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur being divested of sole responsibility for the popular education portfolio.

In addition to the lack of understanding about the underlying philosophy and function of independent community action, some ministries and government organizations have established rules and conditions that impinge on the autonomy of community organizations. This hinders the educational action of these organizations, and creates additional obstacles.

The second challenge cited by independent community action organizations stems from the context of uncertainty in which they must carry out their educational action. The absence of government funding has many consequences: In addition to having to devote time to source additional funding, these organizations can no longer adequately meet all the needs of the people they serve, particularly through popular education. To be sure, the signing of service agreements with ministries and government organizations brings in some revenue, however when these agreements—intended for predetermined services—represent a substantial percentage of a given organization's budget, they may lead it to sideline its popular education practices.

Moreover, the unpredictable funding climate independent community action organizations find themselves in can often lead to a deterioration in working conditions for their staff and, in many cases, cutbacks. These changes in turn affect their ability to offer educational activities inspired by independent popular education practices. The longevity of their action is then questioned, impacting the scope of their activities, for example in the area of literacy and combatting poverty. In short, this context of uncertainty is creating further obstacles.

The third challenge concerns the longevity of umbrella organizations and independent community training organizations. Both support core organizations in carrying out the educational component of their missions, training staff and developing educational content and tools. They also help them strengthen their action, ensure cohesion within the independent community action movement, and promote the dissemination and upgrading of popular education practices. All these elements attest to the benefits of their longevity, which is far from guaranteed as they are not direct providers of citizen services and are often under threat of closing their doors.

The final challenge relates to training opportunities for staff, which in some instances is insufficiently structured, in others non-existent. The actors consulted by the Conseil have in fact noted that new facilitators are under-trained in the skills required for popular education. A lack of internal mechanisms to ensure training, the transfer of internal culture and organizational continuity and memory are currently impeding the delivery of educational activities inspired by the philosophy of independent popular education.

Union Organizations: Ensuring the Recognition of Union Education as an Integral Component of Popular and Adult Education

Union organizations also face the challenge of being recognized as legitimate providers of educational practices that fall within the field of popular education and (more widely) adult education. Union education is not limited to working conditions and union life—it also includes learning about many topical issues that extend beyond the workplace. This learning equips workers to exercise their various social roles and take part in civic life, specifically through leveraging their experiential knowledge.

Currently, the contribution of union education to the field of popular education (and, by extension, a broader vision of adult education) is largely overlooked, particularly as it does not enjoy any official

recognition. To wit, it is not included in the Government Adult Education and Training Policy of 2002. Greater Government recognition of its contribution could bring a better visibility to union education, promote it as a valid pathway to citizenship education, and spark interest among an increased number of workers who could benefit from the learning that it offers.

4 KEY IDEAS ADVANCED BY THE CONSEIL

Starting from the work that enabled it to draw an up-to-date overview of popular education, define contributions and identify challenges voiced by actors and observers in the field, the Conseil has distilled several key ideas that guided the formulation of the recommendations it wishes to convey to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and the Minister responsible for Higher Education and—by extension—to the Government. These ideas throw a spotlight on the main characteristics and benefits of popular education which, in the Conseil's view, validate giving this educational approach its due.

The Vision of a Lifelong and Lifewide Education Must Be Fully Implemented

In Québec, the vision of a lifelong education has been recognized as far back as the Quiet Revolution, with the creation of its public education system—notably through the concept of continuing education. Developing this vision hinges on the implementation of accessible educational mechanisms—both formal and non-formal—that enable adults to undertake educational steps at any time throughout their lives. These steps are meant to respond to needs and aspirations so that these individuals can take the helm of their lives and fully participate in society. The place of this vision within public education policy, however, has varied over the years. Currently it is weak, lagging behind the importance of aligning training with the labour market.

It is with this perspective in mind that the Conseil once again calls for redoubling efforts to create the right conditions to fully implement a vision of lifelong and lifewide education, thus supporting the implementation of the right to education. It should be noted that the Québec Government was one of the signatories of the 1997 Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning, which proposed viewing youth and adult education as "a lifelong process," one that aims to "enable people and communities to take control of their destiny and society in order to face the challenges ahead" (UNESCO, 1997, p.2). The signatories also pledged to afford men and women the opportunity "to learn throughout their lives" (1997, p.3).

Popular Education Enables Implementing a Vision of Lifelong and Lifewide Education

Popular education is a field essential to implementing a vision of lifelong and lifewide education. Through its many forms and deep roots in many sectors, it complements formal instruction in meeting a range of individual and collective needs. To be sure, it can sometimes result from calling existing formal pedagogical practices into question, but it can also enrich these practices, particularly in the field of andragogy. Popular education is highly adapted to individuals who are vulnerable or faced with exclusion, as well as the communities they create. Not only does it meet their educational needs, it also equips them with the tools to support their empowerment and reclaim control over their lives.

Popular Education Makes an Invaluable Contribution to Citizenship and Democracy

In addition to its purely pedagogical objectives, popular education can also support forging new social ties and exercising citizenship with a view to social justice and equality. In doing so, it fosters the democratization of the public space by developing new social practices that bring to the fore educational demands or needs hitherto overlooked. This contribution is also found in the creation of forums for and by citizens or communities where they can engage and put a range of educational practices to use. These practices can also be designed to enable participants to acquire greater autonomy or establish new initiatives to meet their needs (e.g.: support for individuals facing mental health issues or integration of recent immigrants or refugees).

Moreover, challenging or questioning directions in public policies and their accompanying action plans can also be a form of democratizing the public space. Viewed through this lens, popular education can be a vehicle for increasing awareness of new issues or giving new voices the right to be heard, and thus participates in the development of Québec in many areas, often of a social nature (e.g.: the initiative that led to the adoption of the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, mobilizing women's groups to denounce violence in all its forms).

The Contribution of Popular Education to Public Action Is Too Often Overlooked

Popular education practices contribute to public action in many different ways—in some cases, by contributing directly to the development and implementation of public policy or action plans by allowing participants in these practices to become stakeholders in the process (e.g.: demands by independent community organizations that combat poverty and

social exclusion). In other cases, they pick up the slack in government actions that have been abandoned or are less intensive (e.g.: union action and independent community action). In addition, these practices can be an alternative way of fulfilling the mission of a relevant ministry or government organization. They can also help move it forward (e.g.: mobilization by independent community organizations denouncing sexual abuse against women and domestic violence).

Popular Education Faces a Number of Obstacles That Need to Be Removed

Popular education actors are faced with many obstacles that restrict their ability to act, which at times can lead them to put their activities on the back burner. These obstacles are manifold: inadequate funding, lack of staff support, amendments to the *Basic School Regulation*, varying interpretations of public policies. In such a context, the delivery of popular education practices is limited, reducing access to educational opportunities, which in turn affects the implementation of the right to education for those whom popular education represents a more meaningful and better-adapted pathway to their needs and aspirations.

Popular Education Must Receive Greater Recognition and Support

In light of the different roles and social impact of popular education, the Conseil deems that it must be fully recognized and supported. This recognition could be realized notably through support for the development and implementation of government policies and action plans dedicated to popular education practices.

5 GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING THE CONTRIBUTION OF POPULAR EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

Taking into consideration the key ideas outlined in the previous section, the Conseil herewith formulates guidelines and recommendations intended to foster a better integration of popular education with tools available in adult education in order to meet the legitimate needs of adults. The underlying goal is to provide popular education with the means to fully contribute to adult education. The guidelines and recommendations are therefore structured to support the recognition of popular education within a broader vision of education, as well as provide the means for it to take its rightful place in the adult education sector, thereby facilitating the implementation of the right to education for adults.

5.1 THREE PRINCIPLES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

To guide stakeholders concerned with the guidelines and recommendations, the Conseil proposes the following three principles:

1) Support for popular education practices and approaches that reach individuals and communities faced with poverty, vulnerability, exclusion or even deprivation must be prioritized.

2) The legitimacy of the entire field of popular education must be recognized.

3) The rightful autonomy of organizations and communities that provide popular education must be ensured.

These three principles form the foundation on which the implementation of the Conseil's guidelines and recommendations rest.

5.2 THREE GUIDELINES AND THEIR COURSES OF ACTION

The Conseil herein formulates three guidelines, each followed by courses of action that form the basis for its recommendations.

Guideline 1: Engage Québec in a broader vision of education in which popular education contributes to the well-being of adults

This first guideline is meant to take into account the multifaceted nature of needs and aspirations that can arise at any time in life, and therefore realize a lifelong and lifewide approach to education to meet them. In this context, recognition of the legitimacy and relevance of popular education takes on its full meaning, namely to promote the expression of an educational demand and to formulate adapted responses.

First Course of Action: Adopt a vision of education that supports the recognition of popular education

Recommendation 1

The Conseil recommends to all ministries and government organizations with responsibilities that may involve popular education to consider the practices of this field in the development and implementation of public policy.

Recommendation 2

The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and the Minister responsible for Higher Education to assume stewardship in engaging all actors in the field of popular education to develop the necessary means to ensure the implementation of this educational action, for the purpose of steering Québec toward a vision of lifelong and lifewide education.

Second Course of Action: Ensure a better visibility of popular education

Recommendation 3

a) The Conseil calls on organizations who provide popular education to bring the educational value of their action to the fore so as to increase its visibility;

b) To provide breadth to this visibility, the Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and to the Minister responsible for Higher Education to establish a strategy for the promotion of popular education for which the collaboration and engagement of organizations implementing such practices will be sought.

Guideline 2: Consolidate and increase the place of popular education as a means to support the empowerment of adults and their ability to exercise different roles

The second guideline is based on views of actors and observers in the field of popular education on improving conditions in which popular education practices are provided or carried out. In facilitating and consolidating both the interventions of some actors and these conditions, popular education can assume a more prominent place and reach a greater number of adults who could then benefit from an increased number of formal and non-formal educational pathways.

The Conseil deems that for its courses of action and recommendations included in this guideline to have the desired impact among adults, two conditions need to be in place:

1) **Generate interest in and support the expression of an educational demand**. Actions to address this concern—which is not unique to popular education, but applies across the entire field of adult education—are primarily part of an upstream educational approach and even part of the expression of the educational demand itself. They seek to spur the expression of needs on the part of adults and communities. Needs related to empowerment fall under this category. In such cases, consideration should be given to those adults or communities more difficult to reach by emphasizing the value of the potential benefits of educational pathways.

   In the view of the Conseil (2006, p.16), it is vital to support the development of the demand and the educational approach itself for needs and aspirations to be expressed and that the learning approach developed truly reflect the needs, interests and culture of adults and communities concerned.

   In other words, popular education approaches should not be limited to implementing methods and measures simply for the sake of increasing access to and interest in an educational pathway (e.g.: planning the training offer, funding or structure of the educational offer). While important, these conditions on their own are not sufficient to stimulate demand when the goal is the empowerment of adults and communities.

2) **Increase collaboration in popular education to better meet the needs of adults**. The Conseil calls for increased partnership among the different actors in the field of popular education, such as implementing a shared initiative. While some actors have a long

history of commitment to many forms of collaboration; it would be beneficial to increase their number, notably to enrich the practices and learning of the adults involved. In addition to providing a better response to the needs and aspirations of adults, increased partnerships in this field represents one tool for consolidating and developing popular education.

The Conseil cautions, however, that this collaboration be undertaken on a voluntary basis from the standpoint of providing a response to the needs of adults and communities. It should by no means be considered by the Government as a way to scale back investment in adult education or to offer education at a discount.

With these two conditions in mind, the Conseil proposes the following courses of action:

Third Course of Action: Recognize popular education as a keystone of independent community action

Recommendation 4

The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports to promote among ministries and government organizations represented on the Comité interministériel de l'action communautaire the importance of:

a) the educational action by independent community action organizations in the development of many citizens as well as that of Québec;

b) gradually applying all the principles advanced in the Policy for the Recognition and Support of Community Action (PRSAC) so as to recognize the educational nature of independent community action and promote the delivery of popular education specific to this sector.

The Conseil also calls on umbrella independent community action organizations to continue and step up their action in engaging their core organizations in recognizing the importance of placing popular education at the heart of their action—in accordance with the principles established in the Policy—as a means of fulfilling their mission and fully exercising their role in independent community action.

Fourth Course of Action: Ensure the longevity and development of popular education practices of organizations working with people faced with vulnerability and exclusion

Recommendation 5

The Conseil recommends to ministries and government organizations to take the necessary steps to ensure the longevity and development of popular education practices in organizations working with people and or communities faced with poverty or situations of vulnerability and exclusion.

Fifth Course of Action: Assure the longevity of structures that promote the full development of popular education

Recommendation 6

The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports to:

a) assure the longevity and development of **independent community training organizations**;

b) promote among other ministries and government organizations the importance of recognizing **umbrella independent community action organizations** and their action in popular education and assure their longevity and development.

The Conseil also invites independent community training organizations and umbrella independent community action organizations to continue and even multiply efforts to promote quality popular education practices and engage their core organizations to recognize the importance of placing these practices at the heart of their action.

Sixth Course of Action: Revise governance related to popular education services in school boards and develop the means for their implementation

Recommendation 7

The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports to:

a) revise the wording of popular education services in the *Basic Adult General Education Regulation* so as to better define their purpose;

b) establish a dedicated budget for popular education services earmarked to:

- increase their accessibility for adults and groups;
- provide different forms of popular education practices, including support projects for community action organizations and communities;
- support collaboration between community action organizations that provide popular education to individuals not easily reached by adult education centres in school boards;
- better define local needs that popular education practices can meet or stimulate the educational demand in their region (jointly with Reception, Referral Counselling and Support Services) in this regard.

The Conseil also calls on those in charge of Reception, Referral Counselling and Support Services in school boards to assess their current strategies to spur demand for training, and if necessary, revise them to implement proactive approaches that reach adults whose needs may not be met by the popular education services offered.

Guideline 3: Enrich and sustain the means for quality popular education

The third guideline is founded on the importance popular education actors attach to the quality of their practices. Echoing their concern, the Conseil deems that different sectors must have the means that enable them to carry out rigorous and quality popular educational practices, whether it be staff training, producing content that promotes learning or the structure of educational approaches. Providing these practices is undoubtedly one way to recognize this field as an essential and legitimate

educational approach. The Conseil would like to clarify, however, that to avoid the trap of standardization and ensure diversity as well as quality in their practices, the different stakeholders must enjoy their respective autonomy.

The Conseil thus submits the following courses of action for the guideline to have the desired outcome among the various actors in the field of popular education:

Seventh Course of Action: Support the training of facilitators

The Conseil herein proposes two different means of expanding the options of initial and ongoing training offered in post-secondary institutions for popular education facilitators:

1) Enrich the content of some college and university programs to foster the acquisition of popular education skills;

> **Recommendation 8**
>
> The Conseil recommends to CEGEP and university stakeholders to ensure their programs can prepare applicants to work in sectors supporting adult learning as well as individual and/or collective empowerment and acquire the necessary competencies to deliver popular education practices or approaches.

2) Consider the needs related to the development of popular education competencies in their training programs.

> **Recommendation 9**
>
> The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and to the Minister responsible for Higher Education to include in its consideration of initial training for teachers working in general adult education the need for skills development specific to popular education.
>
> It also recommends to university stakeholders to ensure that their bachelor's and master's programs in adult education and training foster the development of skills relevant to popular education.

Eighth Course of Action: Create a centre for popular education practices and expand research on these practices

Recommendation 10

The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and to the Minister responsible for Higher Education to:

a) jointly ensure, with other ministers concerned, support for research initiatives to document popular education practices and innovative approaches as well as the benefits of these practices;

b) mandate and provide funding for the Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (CDEACF) to create a centre for popular education as a repository for documents, knowledge and studies produced by organizations active in the field or as part of research for dissemination among stakeholder communities.

Ninth Course of Action: Increase the contribution of support practices to popular education

The Conseil suggests that universities and CEGEPs further develop their respective support roles among popular education stakeholders, and to this end formulates the following recommendations:

1) In universities, broaden the support role of popular education practices;

Recommendation 11

The Conseil recommends to the Minister responsible for Higher Education to ensure continuous funding through the Fonds des services aux collectivités, and to broaden the latter's scope and promote its visibility among university institutions throughout Québec. It also calls on the Minister to consider means that would increase its use by a greater number of university institutions.

2) In CEGEPs, broaden support for popular education practices.

Recommendation 12

The Conseil recommends to the Minister responsible for Higher Education to promote broadening the support of popular education on the part of CEGEPS by increasing funding through the Fonds des services aux collectivités and by making innovative projects on knowledge transfer supported by the college community eligible as a separate category within the Fonds des services aux collectivités.

The Conseil also recommends to the Minister responsible for Higher Education to increase funding for the social innovation component of the Programme d'aide à la recherche et au transfert (PART), thus supporting a greater number of innovative research projects on knowledge transfer in popular education.

CONCLUSION

At the closing of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education organized by UNESCO in 1997, the signatories of the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning committed to explore the implementation of adult education by adopting a vision of lifelong learning. Québec was one of them. Five years later, Québec adopted its Government Adult Education and Training Policy, also under the banner of lifelong learning. Since then, however, changes in public education policies have made it practically impossible to broaden the scope of adult education, with resources being directed primarily toward meeting societal needs for a skilled labour force.

By spotlighting popular education as a legitimate field of adult education, the Conseil's brief is above all a call to the Government in general and to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and the Minister responsible for Higher Education in particular to reframe the entire education system in a vision of lifelong and lifewide learning. For adult education, this presupposes taking into account every sphere of adult life. Viewed in this context, rightly and fully including popular education in education policy is both a reasoned and essential choice.

As many stakeholders in the field of adult education do, the Conseil deems that the time has come for Québec to adopt a updated strategic vision that would not only allow a better alignment between youth education and adult education, but more importantly a broader consideration of the needs that education is meant to meet. This vision of lifelong and lifewide education could be expressed in a renewed policy on adult education.

As this brief has demonstrated, popular education has lot to offer to an expanded vision of adult education. Yet it is woefully under-recognized by the Government, first and foremost by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur. Nevertheless, hundreds of organizations and community groups today carry out popular education practices that fall within the field of adult education that meet their needs or aspirations of thousands of adults. A number of movements feed these practices and contribute to their great diversity. These practices also represent training pathways and methods that are more finely attuned to the expectations of the different participants, enabling them to access a learning that is lifelong and lifewide. Recognition of popular education as a valid pathway to quality education would thus be an essential component in the development of this proposed strategic vision.

This recognition must be accompanied by a redoubling of efforts in consolidating and developing popular education practices that are specifically intended for adults living in vulnerable conditions or facing economic and social exclusion. In this area, Government support is vital. The costs related to these practices can hardly be shouldered by the same people for whom they are intended, as in most cases they will not have the resources to pay for them. In addition, these types of practices are often associated with objectives that form the very foundations of the Québec society. Broadening access to them goes without saying.

These efforts would allow for better articulation of a vision of lifelong and lifewide education and Government actions to combat poverty and social exclusion. Popular education can play a bigger role in this regard as it makes it possible to: reach beyond the economic surface of these issues and empower individuals with a better understanding of their own situation (or their community's), develop their ability to assume their different roles, gain independence, have their rights respected, see to their self-actualization, and participate in the development of their communities.

In sum, an updated vision of education would greatly benefit from a full integration of popular education as a legitimate educational pathway giving greater access to and meeting the needs of great a number of adults not easily reached by formal education pathways. Popular education practices are out there, and are structured in such a way as to offer an abundance of opportunities to quality education. Their official recognition would help steer Québec toward a culture of a broader, more inclusive "continuing education."

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The full text (in French) of the Brief entitled ***L'éducation populaire : mise en lumière d'une approche éducative incontournable tout au long et au large de la vie***, as well as its abridged versions in French and English (**Popular Education: Putting the Spotlight on an Essential Lifelong and Lifewide Approach to Education**) are available on the website of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation at : **www.cse.gouv.qc.ca**.

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