



A MONTREAL
SCHOOL
FOR ALL

Evaluation in
Montréal Disadvantaged
Communities:

Assessment for Learning at the core of our evaluation practices

Une école montréalaise pour tous

Ministère de l'Éducation
et de l'Enseignement supérieur

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Groupe de codéveloppement* sur l'évaluation: aide à l'apprentissage en milieu défavorisé montréalais

In 2016, A Montréal School for All (AMSFA) initiated a co-development group with a mission to reflect on evaluation practices. Over a two-year period, the work of this group, from four different Montréal school boards, brought together principals, educational consultants, resource teachers and classroom teachers, as well as a number of researchers.

During these meetings, we reflected on the core values of evaluation: equity, equality and justice. More specifically, we discussed the issues and challenges of evaluation in disadvantaged areas, as well as equitable evaluative practices. With a view to achieving a shared understanding, the concept of equity was closely examined in light of the following concepts: equal access, equal opportunity, equal treatment and equality of results. We also explored the topics of feedback and the adjustment of practice in teaching and learning. This document presents the results of this work.

Definition of "groupe de codéveloppement" in this context: is a group of individuals who reflect, along with professional resources from A Montréal School for All, on intervention strategies in disadvantaged communities. This group also contributes to the ongoing development of a theoretical and practical framework of intervention strategies in disadvantaged communities. (Translated as "co-development group" for the purpose of this document). Duguay et Poirier, 2011.

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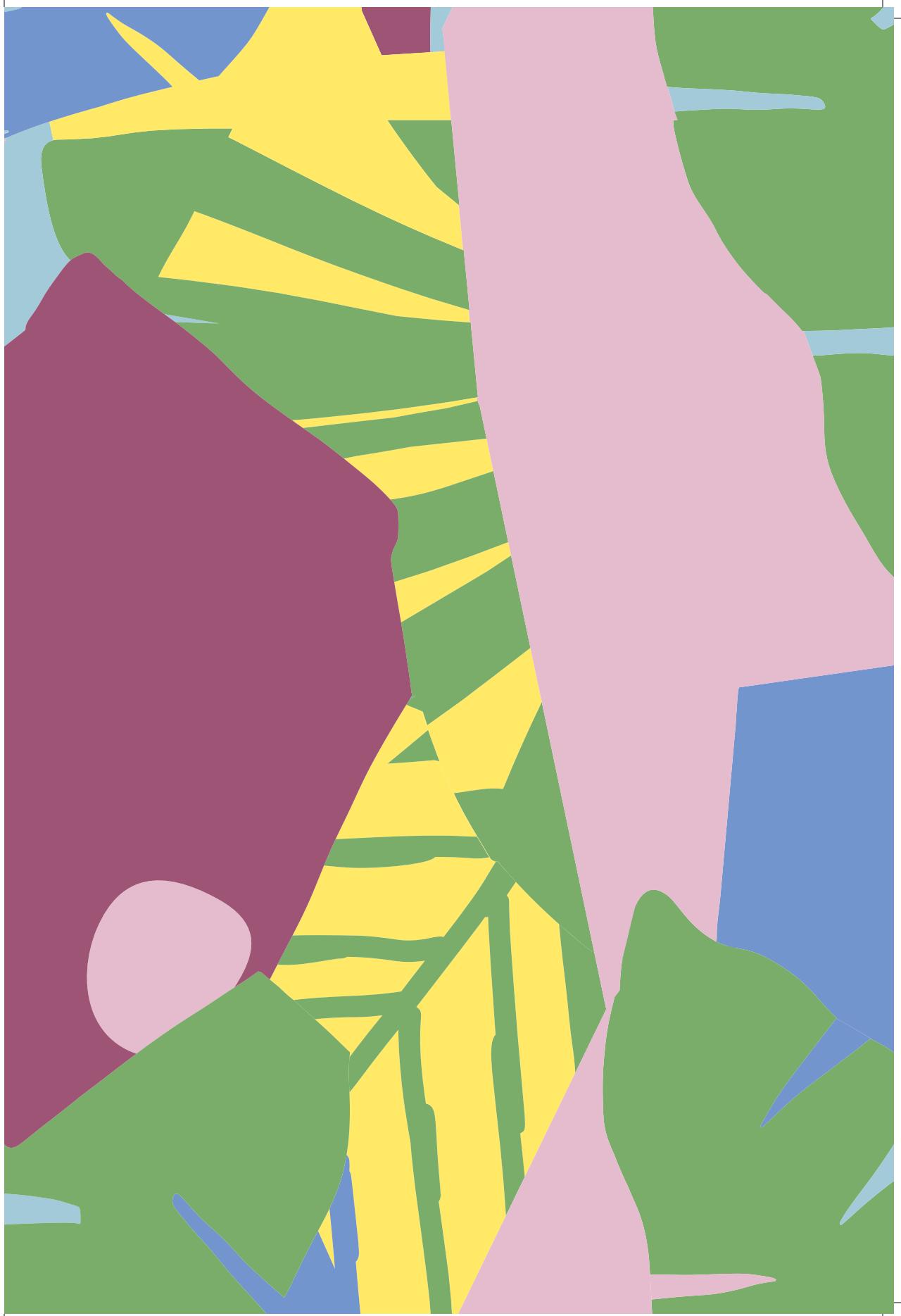
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The future of any society or community lies in the education of its children and youth who will in the course of time be its members. Yet, are not children already active members of this society? Education consists of transmitting knowledge (knowing how to be, how to act, how to live) so that everyone can find their place in society. Do the skills developed at school allow them to be part of their own journey and to play a role in their community? How should evaluation be interpreted and put into practice so as to become one of these skills?

Several studies emphasize that education, particularly in today's context, is an essential tool for fostering social cohesion and sustainable development, but above all for achieving equity and social justice. In this perspective, equal access to school is recognized as a universal right: every child has the right to education.

However, if equal access is an essential condition for making school an instrument of justice and equity, it is far from being the only condition. In order for the school to play this role properly, it should in itself, be fair and equitable, which isn't always the case. In fact, research studies conducted in different socio-cultural and economic contexts come to the same conclusion: the school is characterized more and more by indirect social segregation. Such segregation is often difficult to detect and expose and is generally sanctioned by public and institutional policies. This means, among other things, that there are noticeable gaps in achievement among students from different backgrounds. Segregation is more prevalent in urban areas, mainly affecting students from underprivileged families. In this respect, Montréal is no exception. This is illustrated by the fact that more students attending schools in disadvantaged areas of the Montréal region are at risk of failure and of dropping out of school.

Not surprisingly, we notice that the "least successful" students are overrepresented in disadvantaged socio-economic groups, and are also those whose family culture is furthest from the culture of the school: "Compared to other young Québécois, the rate of academic achievement of students from

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disadvantaged backgrounds has not really increased in recent decades, despite the efforts of the state to combat educational inequalities." (adapted from Lapointe, 2014: 117). Data from the Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD) also indicates that living in a disadvantaged area is associated with a higher risk of dropping out before the end of high school (adapted from Janosz et al., 2013; Conseil supérieur de l'éducation 2016: 13-14).

AMSFA's mission is to contribute to the educational success of **all students** from a Montreal disadvantaged background. Convinced that a fair and equitable education is the key to achieving a more just society, we have looked at the pedagogical practices that help provide such an education for these students. This text will examine evaluative classroom practices; more specifically, the use of assessment for learning.

The background of the slide features a solid green color. Overlaid on this are several yellow geometric shapes: a large parallelogram at the top right, a horizontal bar below it, a curved shape in the center, and a large triangle at the bottom. There are also smaller triangles and a trapezoid in the bottom right corner.

*"Justice in schooling
is measured by the
way it treats its most
vulnerable students."*

— François Dubet, 2009 (translation)



"Evaluation must integrate a sympathetic approach that gives support to learning and is reliable, rejecting all forms of ranking, selection and labelling."

— Rey et Feyfant, 2014 [translation]



Policy on the Evaluation of Learning (MEQ, 2003)

According to the Policy on the Evaluation of Learning, "evaluation is the process whereby a judgment is made on a student's learning on the basis of information gathered, analyzed and interpreted, for the purpose of making pedagogical and administrative decisions."

"The Ministère recognizes that evaluation has two primary purposes: support for learning and recognition of competencies."

"Studies have shown that the use of assessment for learning contributes significantly to improving student achievement, and that improvement is greatest among lower-achieving students."

— Black et William, 1998
cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p.28

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Assessment for learning has been prioritized because it reinforces the learning of students from disadvantaged backgrounds; thus, promoting their academic and educational success. In fact, research confirms that assessment for learning is one of the most effective ways to improve learning and raise standards, as it helps students have more successful outcomes..

The work of the co-development group on evaluation as assessment for learning in disadvantaged areas has identified several principles to guide evaluative practices. However, in this context, we are of the opinion that schools must first and foremost rely on the following principle: **prioritize learning before making a judgment.**

PRIORITIZE
LEARNING
BEFORE
MAKING A
JUDGMENT



As evidenced by several research studies, prioritizing learning is one of the basic principles for ensuring educational success in disadvantaged schools, (Archambault, Garon, Harnois, 2011).

Schools with an educational vision that prioritize learning, use evaluation as assessment for learning and therefore reflect it in their pedagogical practices. This vision is embedded in the belief that evaluation should support students in their learning process, over and above placing importance on assessment outcomes.

The role of the teacher is to observe students' learning, collect a variety of data illustrating their progression, and interpret these observations and data in terms of support rather than in terms of recognition of skills. It also consists of giving effective cognitive and metacognitive feedback, in order to adjust one's teaching (analyze to what extent one's intervention produces the expected outcomes on student learning and to adjust if necessary). In so doing, students play a more active role, in particular by better identifying what they have learned and by recognizing the means that have helped them learn – allowing them to take more responsibility for their learning.

This principle is particularly important in schools in disadvantaged areas where students arrive in the classroom with a set of learning experiences and a manner of learning that might be different from what is expected.

Considering this particularity, learning must be prioritized, thus, paying attention to students' progress, before making judgments about their achievements. To put this concept into practice, we must especially:

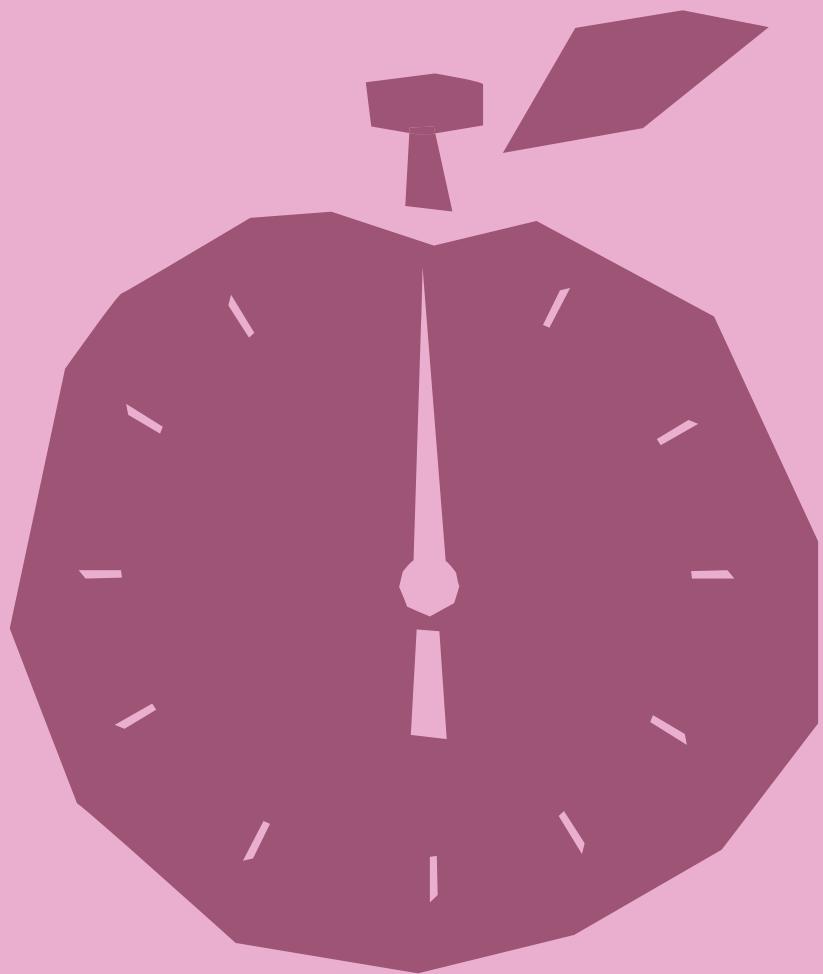
OPTIMIZE LEARNING TIME
+
VALUE PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

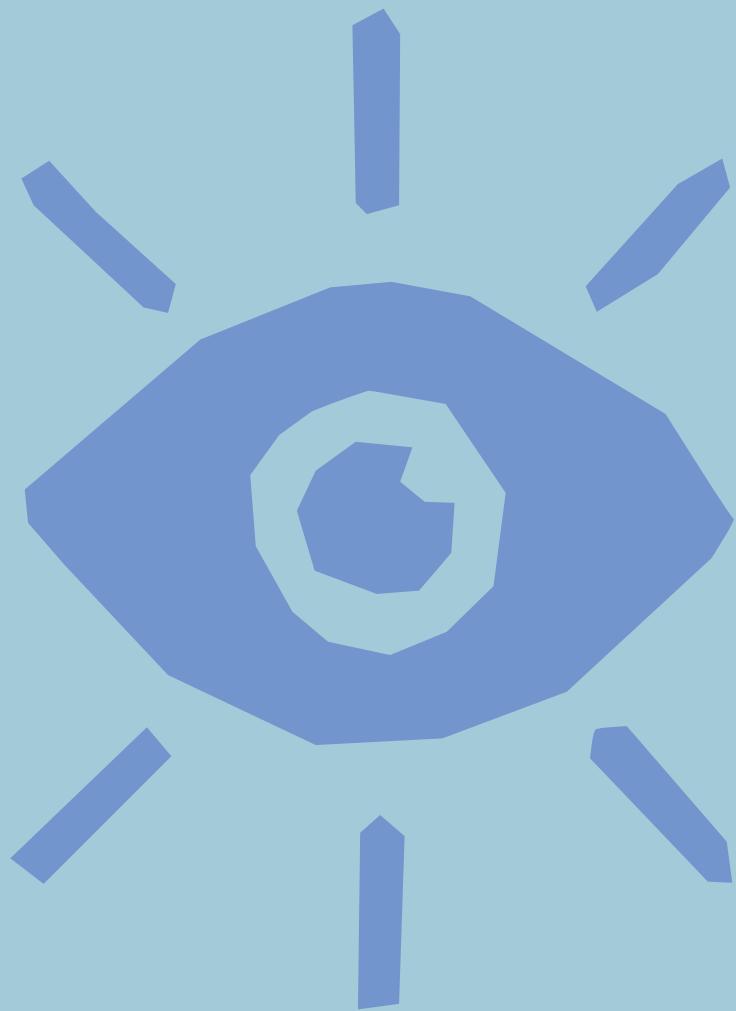
Optimize learning time

Paying attention to the learning process involves **maximizing the time given to learning**. This means teachers must ensure the cognitive and social engagement of every student. To achieve this, they must take advantage of every opportunity that the school environment has to offer. In other words, observing whether students are engaged in a task, thinking, making connections, asking questions, and developing learning skills that they can recognize and transfer.

"Assessment for learning is an integral part of the day-to-day practices of students and teachers who, individually and through interaction, research, reflect on and react to information from exchanges, demonstrations and observations in order to augment what is being learned in class."

— Allal and Laveault, 2009: 102; Laveault 2012: 116) [translation]





Valuing professional judgment

Professional judgment is an act of discernment that must be based on frames of reference. This allows for a student's progress to be assessed for its true value in a way that is clear and makes sense. It implies that one must be attentive to the students' identities, cultures, and their knowledge, in order to support them in the construction of their learning. Furthermore, professional judgment implies that a teacher acts ethically and responsibly in the performance of his or her duties. The teacher "considers the practical and moral consequences of his or her actions" (Allal and Mottier Lopez, 2010 in Rey and Feyfant, 2014).

A teacher's professional judgment is developed through interactions with other members of the school team to form judgments from an assessment for learning perspective, thus requiring continuous analysis and reflection of his/her practice (Lafortune, 2009). This judgement is not solely based on a teacher's experience or years of teaching, it is also based on a reflection of that experience. This allows for a degree of questioning and adjustment of one's teaching practices, particularly evaluation practices that prioritize learning.

Therefore, to exercise professional judgment presupposes reflection, coherence between beliefs and practices and thoughts and actions, and a tolerance of uncertainty (Lafortune and Allal, 2008).

"When we believe that it is our students who are the starting point for our unit and lesson planning, not the course content or textbook, we try to live that belief by getting to know our students' learning needs and preferences and then responding to that knowledge through the opportunities we provide in our classrooms."

— Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013: 34

Conclusion

It is important to restore the value of learning to the purpose of evaluation. According to A Montréal School for All, this purpose serves to acknowledge and legitimize the learning of students from Montréal's disadvantaged communities. This allows them to become aware of their own resources and of the control they have over their own learning, as well as their access to academic and educational success.

If we presume that this awareness can build sustainable learning behaviors among students, we can surmise that assessment for learning can not only foster student participation and involvement in the learning process throughout their school career, but also their commitment to life in society.

In conclusion, A Montréal School for All reaffirms that evaluation practices centered on the principle that prioritizing learning before making a judgment can reduce the differences in academic achievement and perseverance between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from more affluent communities.

"We must ensure that the root causes of these discrepancies are reduced rather than condoning or increasing them."

— Marc-André Deniger, 2008 [translation]

A Montréal School for All therefore recommends
the following actions:

**PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH
OPPORTUNITIES TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR
SKILLS IN A VARIETY OF CONTEXTS.**

OPTIMIZE LEARNING TIME.

**PROVIDE EFFECTIVE COGNITIVE AND
METACOGNITIVE FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS
THROUGHOUT THE LEARNING PROCESS.**

**CONSIDER ERRORS AS OPPORTUNITIES
FOR LEARNING.**

**VARY EVIDENCE OF LEARNING AND AVOID
OVER-TESTING.**

Have a clear and shared vision of evaluation as assessment for learning

What is my view of evaluation as assessment for learning in a disadvantaged community? Is it clear and shared with the other members of my cycle and my school team? If not...

How do my evaluation practices reflect the fact that I have high expectations for all my students?

How can evaluation motivate my students?

How can I use evaluation to help my students?

QUESTIONS FOR ONGOING REFLECT

Support students in their learning

Planning one's teaching and evaluation practices

How does my planning take into account the pace at which my students learn?

Do all students learn at the same pace? If not, when should we evaluate them?

How do my evaluation practices allow all my students to talk about themselves as learners?

What criteria do I use to make a judgment about student learning?

What is, or will be, the data and evidence of learning I will rely on to make a judgment?

What evidence should be returned to the students?

Are the data or evidence of learning selected sufficient, varied and relevant? If not...

What adjustments should I make to my planning and teaching?

How will I support all my students throughout the learning process so they can be successful?

What does it mean to adjust one's practice?

What should be the focus of those adjustments?

When should I adjust my teaching?

In what ways does my school team have a shared understanding of what it means to support students in their learning?

How do I take into consideration my students' prior knowledge, diverse experiences and interests?

When organizing my class, how did I take student differences into account and in what ways have I encouraged those differences to emerge?

How do I ensure student interactions?

How can students show evidence of their learning?

How can my feedback support students in their learning process?

Who else can help support learning?

How can my collaboration with various members of my school team help my students?

How do I communicate with each student in order to support them?

How does a teacher ensure that a student can adjust their learning?

How can errors be used as leverage to support learning?

How can I get the students' point of view on their learning?

Why is it important to communicate with all parents? What should be communicated and how?

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