# Daring Inter-Level Collaboration

## Account of the Development of the Parcours SH-BAC in Education

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The Sciences Humaines (SH) program (the French-language equivalent of Social Science, Ed.) at the Collège de Bois-de-Boulogne (BdeB) embarked on a vast collaborative exercise a few years ago. In 2016, the context was as follows: our program was looking to transform one of its profiles. We had noticed that many of our students were enrolling in teaching programs at university, particularly at the kindergarten-elementary level. For its part, the Faculty of Education (FE) of the Université de Montréal (UdeM) wanted to develop an inter-level education pathway integrated with its bachelor's degrees in education in the context of an initiative by the Regroupement des cégeps de Montréal. In retrospect, all the constellations were aligned for inter-level collaboration to take place. Six years later, last fall, we welcomed to BdeB our third cohort of students in the Parcours SH-BAC en education (Integrated education pathway in Social Science – Bachelor's in Education, Ed.). Our enrolment is gradually increasing and 86% of our graduates from the first cohort have decided to continue in the integrated program at UdeM. This inter-level collaboration, unique in Quebec in a pre-university program, includes several alignment measures that will be discussed in this article. We will also present how BdeB succeeded in developing the SH-BAC pathway in education[1] with its main partner, the FE of UdeM.

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[1] This is, of course, our perspective on the process while serving respectively as the Sciences Humaines program coordinator (2013-2019) and then the associate dean in charge of the program (2019-2021), and as the pedagogical counsellor working with the SH program (2014-2021).

## The relevance of inter-level alignment at the pre-university level

In higher education, the dual structure of CEGEPs and universities poses certain challenges in terms of the articulation of education. The "vertical coherence" of programs and their continuity from one level of education to the other requires particular attention to the harmonization of pathways in order to avoid overlap and duplication of program objectives and content. Those familiar with courses offered at both levels of education—everyone has their own examples—say that such duplication exists. To this end, many have called for the establishment of so-called seamless pathways between the two levels of education (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1988). During the 1990s and 2000s, issue tables, joint education offers, pedagogical alignment, agreements and DCS-Bachelor's bridging programs (Comité de liaison en enseignement supérieur, 1998) were set up in the technical sector to reduce the obstacles to the continuity of education paths leading to university. Despite renewed concern for the integration of pre-university and university programs over the past ten years (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2015), particularly in the humanities and social sciences (Comité de liaison en enseignement supérieur, 2004), it has not been possible to achieve the desired integration in this sector.

It is well-known that students' commitment to their studies is one of the main factors in academic success. However, pre-university programs are often considered transitional programs by college students, while they wait to establish their precise orientation choice and enrolment in a university program. This is justified, since the main purpose of the pre-university sector is to prepare students for university studies in a given field. While it is recognized that students in this sector have varying expectations of their educational and career plans, which may be multi-faceted and multi-directional so that coherence is not immediately apparent, pre-university programs must also provide added value to all those students who have a defined educational and career plan. Indeed, about half of those who attend a pre-university program have a clear goal associated with their studies when they enter the institution (based on internal consultations[2]). While they are motivated to succeed in their college diploma (DCS) because of the clarity of their choice, they must also be provided with opportunities to progress in their education path.

While respecting the purpose of pre-university programs, the structure of the programs and the diversity of the students' educational projects, inter-level pathways are likely to enrich the academic experience and commitment to studies of many students, provided they are given the opportunity to explore or confirm a choice of studies or career. The SH-BAC pathway in education offered at BdeB does just that. It offers SH students the opportunity to explore the human, philosophical and socio-historical foundations of education and the teaching profession in Quebec. Thus, it allows them to be better prepared if their vocation is confirmed and gives them several advantages (see **Table 1**) in the event that they continue their teacher training at UdeM in one of the following programs: Kindergarten and Elementary Education, Special Education, Secondary Ethics and Religious Culture, Secondary Social Sciences, Secondary French, and Teaching French as a Second Language. This represents six of the nine Bachelor of Education degrees offered.

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[2] This statement is based on two optional surveys ("Les 4 clés de votre réussite"—"The 4 Keys to Your Success," Ed.) conducted in Fall 2021 (n = 523) and Winter 2022 (n = 254) in the context of implementing the student success plan (Statement 1: I have a clear goal associated with my education).

## Concrete steps to increase program harmonization

**An inter-level education pathway for pre-university education is, in our experience:**

"a protocol agreement between a university and a CEGEP to increase the harmonization of study programs through the establishment of a "program logic" between a pre-university program and a bachelor's degree. The two institutions deploy, according to the needs of the parties, several measures to ensure greater coherence of objectives and content [...] and measures of governance and quality assurance of programs" (Collège de Bois-de-Boulogne, 2020).

**Table 1** provides a summary of the various measures related to this definition and those developed specifically for the SH-BAC pathway in education.

Table 1

## Summary of possible consistency and governance measures of an inter-level course

| Type | Measure | Summary | SH-BAC in education |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Consistency measures** | Recognition of competencies acquired in college | Recognition by the university of knowledge and skills acquired at the college level through credits or course substitution. | Up to three substitute courses at the university depending on the program chosen. |
| | Adjustment of prerequisites | Adaptation of the college study program to include all types of prerequisites required by the university. | Academic upgrading course in mathematics credited.<br><br>Withdrawal of the FE French entrance test if an average of 80% or higher is maintained in the first three college-level French courses. |
| | Conditional and unique university admission | Automatic admission into bachelor's programs of college students who meet the selection criteria established by the university after validation with the students of their choice to pursue their admission into the pathway covered by the agreement. | Unique and conditional admission procedure between BdeB and UdeM for education programs. Students are exempt from UdeM admission fees. |
| | Valorization and promotion of university courses | Enrichment of educational activities to help students develop their personal and professional identity (e.g., science career day, conference, mentoring with teachers or student researchers, etc.). | Lectures by FE professors in Education profile courses and activities at the FE for our students. |
| | Common pedagogical approaches and strategies | Implementation of common pedagogical practices (approaches, strategies and methods). | Use of the digital portfolio used in bachelor's degree programs, starting at the college level.<br><br>Shadowing practicum in nearby elementary schools associated with two of the profile courses and focused on a reflective approach. |

| Type | Measure | Summary | SH-BAC in education |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Recognized academic course offerings at both institutions | Permission for students covered by the agreement and in the last session of their program to take a course at the university. This permission is conditional on compliance with specific conditions established by the university (e.g., successful completion of methodology courses, maintenance of a certain R score, etc.). | This measure is not included in the present protocol agreement because of compliance with UdeM regulations. However, this measure is included in other agreements between the college and the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). |
| **Governance and quality assurance measures** | Coordination committee | Joint committee responsible for ensuring the application and management of the protocol agreement. | Committee meeting once a year or as needed. |
| | Articulation committees | Voluntary committees of discipline representatives from both institutions to discuss knowledge transfer issues and consistency of learning objectives. | Committees formed on an *ad hoc* basis for different courses in the Education profile. |
| | Cohort follow-up | Data collection (success, effectiveness, consistency) on cohorts throughout their inter-level path. | Follow-up of the students' academic path by the coordination committee. |

## Slow and steady wins the race...

Anyone embarking on the development of an inter-level collaboration must be prepared to invest the time and effort required. The stages of development of the SH-BAC pathway in education, while unique to our experience, offer useful benchmarks in terms of events, deliverables, and time frames for each phase of the process.

Figure 1

## Timeline of the four phases of development of the SH-BAC pathway in education
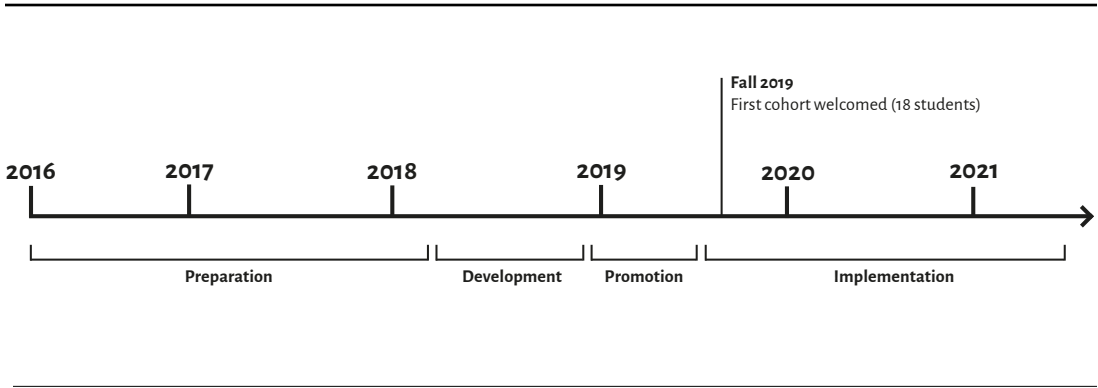


## Preparation phase

At BdeB, the introduction in 2015-2016 of an efficient information system[3] pertaining to all aspects of the program has allowed, among other things, the members of the Sciences Humaines program committee to better know their students and their professional aspirations. The committee then decided to develop its profiles according to the academic fields pursued by its students, i.e. administration, psychology, law and education. Thus began the preparation phase in 2016. During this time, the labour shortage hit many sectors in Quebec, including the education sector. Many teaching positions at the elementary and secondary levels were to be filled, everywhere in the province. The FE was looking for ways to create new educational paths that would give people from different backgrounds access to the teaching profession. In response to the critical need for qualified teachers, the Sciences Humaines teaching staff and FE members shared a common goal to facilitate the development of a new entry point to teacher training programs.

## Development phase

This second phase of the pathway was the result of joint program development, at all stages of the process, between the Sciences Humaines program and the FE. The approach followed is the same as the one used in the college network when developing a program of study: identification of issues, program orientations, exit profile, flow chart of competencies and courses, study grids, analysis of human, material and financial costs.

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[3] This is the system for continuous monitoring of the quality of programs of study (including a program fact sheet and a program synthesis produced each year) developed according to the criteria set out by the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial (Commission of college teaching evaluation, Ed.) in its reference framework for the evaluation of study programs, i.e., the relevance of the program, the coherence of the learning activities, the value of the pedagogical methods and the supervision of students, the adequacy of the human, material and financial resources, the effectiveness of the program and the quality of program management.

We made several concerted efforts at each stage of the process to ensure acceptable pedagogical alignment on both sides. To do this, we opted for an incremental and iterative method, which saw both institutions participate in the production of documents that frequently evolved over the course of the meetings. To this end, we set up a joint development committee between our two institutions that oversaw the production of the documents and the consultation of the various authorities and parties involved. Each step could be divided into one or more iterations, which were improved each time the development committee held a consultation.

To identify the issues involved in the development, we conducted a broad consultation with the departments on the Sciences Humaines program committee in order to determine their interests, needs and concerns regarding the inter-level pathway. The consultation exercise made it possible to identify the common goals that would guide and give meaning to the work on the inter-level alignment, such as recognizing competencies acquired at the college level, maintaining multidisciplinary and fundamental training from several of the program's disciplines and using common pedagogical approaches. The latter were able to rally most of the parties and were based on a sufficient level of commitment to ensure the implementation of the specific projects associated with the implementation of the inter-level pathway. At this stage, the university also identified the main gaps in the training of future teachers in order to guide the courses the Education profile could offer to students in preparation for their entry into the university. These include the quality of French, both in speaking and writing, literary culture, the level of understanding of elementary mathematics, scientific culture, the understanding of the Quebec educational context, the use of information and commu-

nication technologies (ICT), as well as consideration of the socio-economic situation in Montreal.

Since we had well defined the common aims of the development process, we were able to proceed relatively quickly to draft the orientations and the exit profile for the SH-BAC pathway in education. The orientations repeated the same elements identified earlier, such as the increased contribution of the fields of mathematics, culture and French; the use of several disciplines, such as history and sociology, to discover and understand school as a social institution; and students' development of critical thinking about issues affecting education and the teaching profession. The detailed version of the orientations explicitly mentioned certain characteristics of the profile, such as the contributing disciplines, the preferred pedagogical formats (e.g., internships and portfolios), the courses to be created for recognition of acquired competencies in mathematics, and the attitudes expected of the students. These commonly shared orientations acted as guidelines during the other stages of development.

We were able to propose a course grid consistent with the aims, issues and orientations of the program fairly quickly: courses in French, philosophy, history, sociology and psychology were created (see the detailed course grid in **Table 2**). For each of these courses, the development committee, in consultation with the disciplines concerned, produced a course guidelines document specifying and justifying the main characteristics of the course proposal, such as the pedagogical orientations of the course and the essential content to be covered.

These documents were shared within the two institutions. Their final version was used to draft the inter-level agreement for the part dealing with the recognition by the university of competencies acquired at the college level, and locally to draft the general course outlines.

Table 2     **Course grid of the Education profile (without mathematics) of the Sciences Humaines program at BdeB**

| Session 1 | Session 2 | Session 3 | Session 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Program-specific component** | | | |
| • Économie globale<br>• Introduction à la psychologie<br>• Histoire de la civilisation occidentale<br>• Cours au choix nº 1 | • **ABC des mathématiques***<br>• **Histoire de l'éducation au Québec**<br>• Individu et société<br>• Méthodes quantitatives en SH | • **Sociologie de l'éducation et stage d'observation**<br>• **Psychologie de l'enfant, communication et stage d'observation**<br>• Des premiers humains aux grandes civilisations<br>• Initiation pratique à la méthodologie des SH | • Intégration en SH<br>• Cours au choix nº 2<br>• Cours au choix nº 3 |
| **General education** | | | |
| • Écriture et littérature<br>• Philosophie et rationalité<br>• Langue anglaise | • **Science, technologie et société**<br>• Littérature et imaginaire<br>• L'être humain<br>• Activité physique et santé | • Littérature québécoise<br>• Activité physique et efficacité | • **Art oratoire**<br>• **Éthique et politique**<br>• **Littérature jeunesse** |

*Courses indicated in bold are associated with the SH-BAC pathway in education

## Promotion phase

Communicating and promoting a new profile is an important step, especially when it is the first fully education-focused SH profile in the Montreal area and the first such partnership for a pre-university program. Hence, we worked with the college's communications department to develop a plan to reach as many people as possible and spread the word about our new profile. The plan included:

- the creation of a website to promote the pathway [education.bdeb.qc.ca];

- the redesign of the Sciences Humaines program website;

- a press conference[4] on December 14, 2018;

- The official presentation of the pathway to psychologist, author, lecturer and student success specialist Dr. Egide Royer in February 2019;

- a targeted campaign on social networks;

- presentations to guidance counsellors in 2018 and 2019;

- a clean visual developed for our open house activities;

- A personalized mailing of promotional tools to guidance counsellors at schools in our usual recruitment pool.

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4   Interested readers can view a recording of the press launch of the SH program: [bit.ly/3LJo6KG].

## Implementation phase

Finally, the implementation of the project is the ongoing phase. In this phase, the skills and qualities of our teacher colleagues are particularly evident, since it is at this point that the courses must be developed, the practicums must be planned, the digital tools must be mastered and the alignment must be created.

The implementation of common pedagogical approaches and strategies between the teaching staff of the two institutions is the element that has had a considerable effect on teaching practice and on the quality of learning done by the students in the profile. In keeping with the pedagogical practices used in the bachelor's degrees in teaching, the education pathway now includes a credited practicum providing a job shadowing opportunity, and the use of a digital portfolio based on a reflective approach.

The 45-hour practicum in a school environment, in partnership with the Centre de services scolaires Marguerite-Bourgeoys (CSSMB), is exploratory in nature and allows the student to experience school for the first time from a completely new vantage point: that of a future teacher. The practicum activities are mainly focused on the observation of the school environment, on exchanges with the school's various stakeholders, and on the community involvement in the school. The development of the practicum allowed the teaching team to improve its knowledge in terms of planning and organizing teaching, since all the activities are detailed in terms of pedagogical intentions, tasks and productions required of the

students, as well as the tools used— more specifically, a journal for note-taking and a digital portfolio for evaluations.

In addition, each of the five practicum activities leads the student to develop a reflective practice, which is the basis of all professional practice. Thus, reflective analysis skills are to be developed during the practicum through the description of situations observed or experienced in the school, and the establishment of links between these experiences and knowledge in the field, with the aim of developing an understanding of teaching practice. To this end, the BdeB teaching team has established a theoretical framework for the productions to be recorded in the portfolio, which specifies the three stages of the reflective approach: description, conceptualization and critical feedback.

The students' productions are recorded in a digital portfolio in order to document their experiences and the achievement of their practicum objectives. The implementation of a digital portfolio required careful planning and experimentation with several digital media, such as Mahara and OneNote, before finding the most appropriate format to match the needs of teachers and students.

For each of these projects, the college's teachers were able to count on the support of fellow teachers, managers and professionals from the FE who have expertise in the planning and organization of practicums. Thus, the various pedagogical approaches and strategies were developed in consultation with the FE through meetings of the inter-level agreement coordination committee and meetings of the
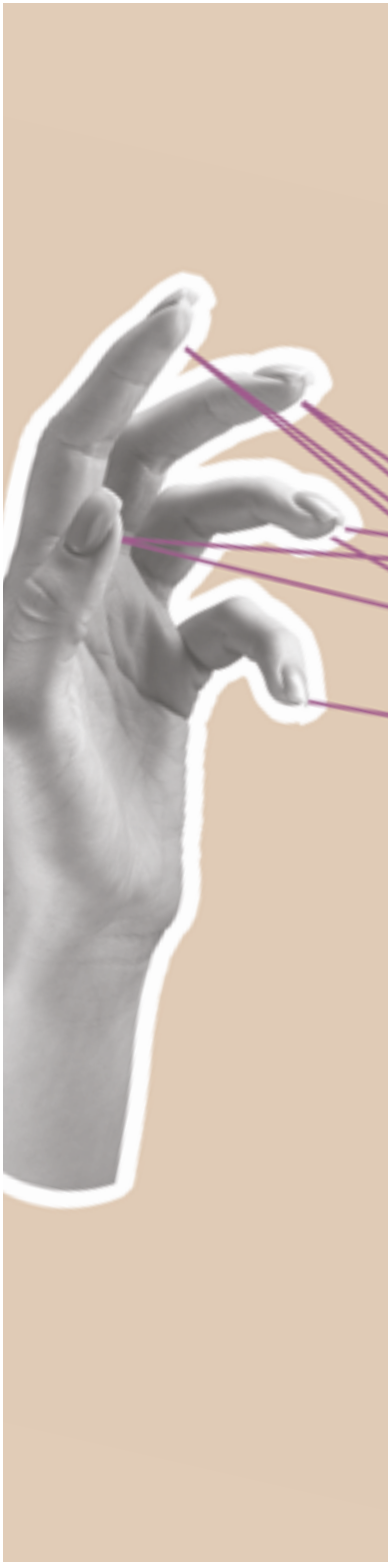
articulation committee, which brings together teachers from both levels of education. The latter committees, whose function is to ensure the coherence and relevance of inter-level education, bring together teaching staff from both institutions on a voluntary basis, based on their disciplinary and didactic interests. The meetings, convened on an as-needed basis, are collaborative spaces that expressly meet a pedagogical or didactic need of one or the other of the parties. For example, the UdeM staff advised our teachers in the deployment of the portfolio, which contributes to significantly improving learning, supervision or evaluation in training.

Having the availability, experience and expertise of the FE staff and a space for mutual collaboration allowed the BdeB teaching team to overcome all the challenges posed by the implementation of the pedagogical and didactic aspects common to the inter-level pathway.

## Conclusion

Strengthening the internal coherence between the two levels of education is the basis of the inter-level education pathways that one hopes to see established between college programs and university programs. As has observed the Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation, these are two institutions that, together and in continuity, administer one long study program (Fédération des cégeps, 2004). The SH-BAC pathway in education is an example of an initiative whose pedagogical and governance alignment measures have allowed for coherent and harmonious inter-level collaboration. We hope this article

may facilitate collaboration among interested institutions and among colleagues who will work on other such pathways!

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our colleagues who made this project possible: at BdeB (S. Lacasse, L. Ouellette, S. Grandmont, F. St-Onge, M.-A. Gosselin and all the teacher who work on the Education profile courses); at UdeM (J. Robert, P. Lefrançois and A.-M. Girard); at the CSSMB (L. Otis and D. Tremblay). ▬

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