

# An IPESA Rewritten By 200 Hands

Account of a Collaborative Process

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In the spring of 2018, Cégep régional de Lanaudière à L'Assomption<sup>1</sup> began the self-assessment cycle of its Institutional Policy on the Evaluation of Student Achievement (IPESA) and its application. The self-assessment revealed a very low level of teacher adherence to the policy. An IPESA that is not applied loses all its meaning. The questions that arose were: Why is there so little adherence? More importantly, how do we ensure that the policy is implemented?

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<sup>1</sup> This college has approximately 2,000 students and 230 employees, including 150 teachers.

We hypothesized that if the IPESA was not being implemented, it was because it didn't meet the needs of the community. In order to make the policy better reflect our community's practices and to make everyone feel comfortable navigating it, we chose to involve the community in the process of reviewing and rewriting the text in 2020-2021.

## The IPESA

According to the College Education Regulations (section 25), each college must adopt an Institutional Policy on the Evaluation of Student Achievement (IPESA), which is evaluated by the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial (CEEC) (Commission on the Evaluation of College Education, Ed.).

The IPESA is an official document in which a college describes how it assumes its responsibility for evaluating learning (CEEC, 2021, p. 10). It is intended to ensure that assessment is fair and equitable, and that it reflects student learning.

As it stands, it is a useful reference document for planning learning and evaluation activities and for making decisions about student files.

In order to do this, we have favoured collaborative work, i.e., a form of work organization based on solidarity in which each person is responsible for the whole without the individual part being systematically isolated, coordination being achieved by mutual adjustment (Gangloff-Ziegler, 2009, p. 97).

Some members of our community served on one of the three committees that moved the work forward, others

were called upon for their expertise, and all were invited to comment on the work being produced. In this sense, everyone who worked at the college during this period had the opportunity to have their voice heard on several occasions. Through these committees and consultations, collaboration took place on many levels, including between different professionals and between teachers from different disciplines.



## A collaborative approach in three stages

Although elements specific to our college and to the social context of the time, notably the turnover of the pedagogical counsellors in charge of the IPESA file and the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitated or hindered the progress of the work, we believe that our approach can inspire the college community. We summarize it here from a chronological perspective (see **Figure 1**), which we consider transferable to other institutional project development contexts.

## Self-assessment and planning of the rewrite

In 2018, nearly 600 students and 90 teachers responded to a questionnaire on the implementation of the IPESA. The policy was also analyzed

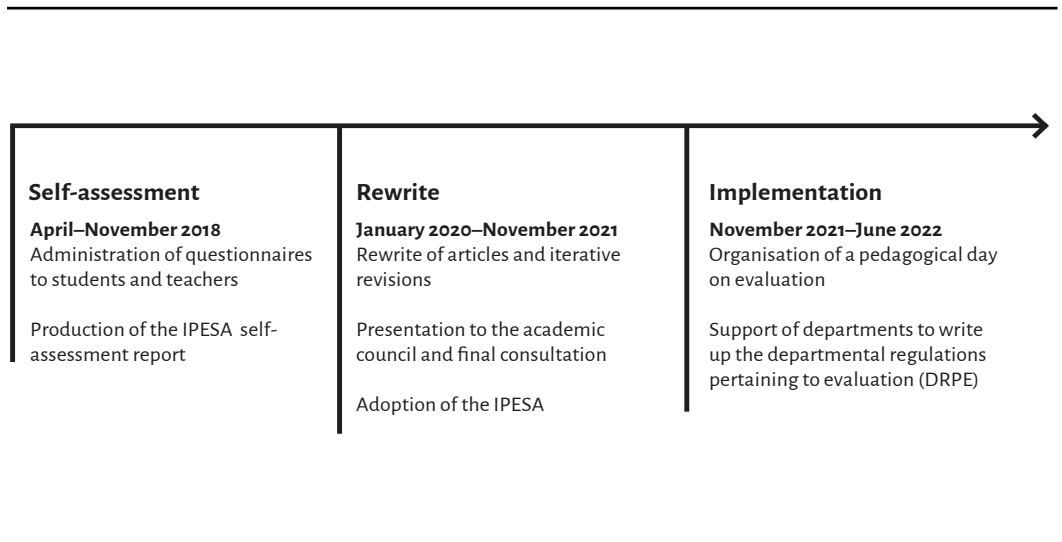
using the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial's (CEEC, 2012) framework for analysis. Given the low teacher adherence to the IPESA and the fact that it did not meet the CEEC criteria, a major revision was proposed in the IPESA Implementation Assessment Report. Therefore, the revision that took place in 2020-2021 took the form of a complete rewrite, where the structure of the text, the style adopted, and the content of the articles were analyzed, reconsidered, and modified.

In winter 2020, the administration granted release time (0.20 FTE yearly) to a teacher elected at the union meeting to supplement the **review committee** in charge of the work, which already included an associate dean and a pedagogical counsellor. This release time, extended until the end of the project (winter 2022), was primarily intended to provide

editorial assistance to the review committee, but also to encourage greater teacher participation in the revision and rewriting process. Three teachers from the different sectors (pre-university, technical and general education) were also elected at the union meeting to participate in the **steering committee** in charge of giving an initial opinion on the proposed articles. Finally, teachers who were members of the academic council sat on the **extended committee**, where, in addition to the members of the review and steering committees, representatives of all the college's stakeholders (e.g., student community, adapted services, registrar's office, continuing education) discussed the proposed articles and ensured that the work was carried out properly. In all, 15 people with different backgrounds worked together on these three committees.

Figure 1

## IPESA review timeline



## Rewriting

In the rewriting process, articles underwent an iterative revision cycle (see Figure 2). Members of the review committee, who met weekly, rewrote an article in light of the IPESA implementation assessment report as well as their review of other colleges' IPESAs and any other relevant literature, including texts in the field of education sciences. Several of these texts (e.g., Leroux, 2015; Ketele & Gérard, 2005) addressed assessment in a competency-based approach, including the purposes and modalities of formative assessment. Others focused more specifically on assessment modalities for which there was a disparity of practice among teachers (e.g., assessment of teamwork, assessment of written French, peer assessment). In addition to guiding the rewrite of the article, these texts informed the discussions at the various committee meetings. The review committee also relied on

the recognition of internal expertise. For example, a teacher whose master's report dealt with the collaborative approach fed into the reflection on the assessment of teamwork, and the language promotion committee proposed the article on the assessment of French language proficiency.

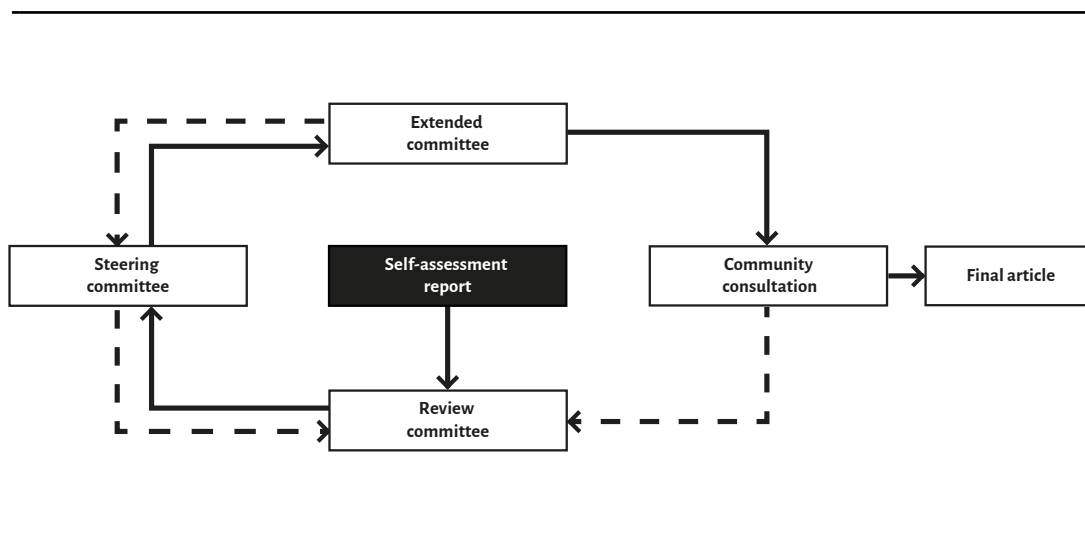
When three or four articles had been rewritten, the review committee turned to the steering committee, whose members met monthly. Teachers provided feedback on the articles, discussed how they might be received in their departments, suggested minor adjustments (e.g., rewording, exemplifications) or more significant changes. Once the articles reached consensus in the steering committee, they moved to the extended committee, which met twice per session. Substantive discussions could take place, considering the values, discipline, role and experience of each member. For example,

the rewrite of the section on grading deadlines required more time: while it is important to provide timely feedback to students, the burden of the grading task necessarily varies depending on the type of evaluation or the discipline.

When necessary, the review committee reworked the articles and resubmitted them to the steering committee or the extended committee. Finally, the sections approved by the extended committee were presented to the community at large at one of four major consultations held in 2020-2021. The first consultation focused on the foundations of the IPESA (defining the policy's goals and guiding principles). It was launched in March 2020 and re-launched in August 2020 due to the pandemic. Subsequent consultations (November 2020, March 2021, April 2021) each concerned five or six articles.

Figure 2

### Iterative rewriting and revising of the articles





During these consultations, the students' association, teachers, professionals, support staff, management and the teachers' union were invited to comment on the articles, anonymously or not, on a website. They could also provide their comments by e-mail or verbally in one-on-one meetings with a member of the review committee. After each consultation, the review committee analyzed the comments received and, if necessary, modified the article, which could then go back through the review cycle.

A few articles did not follow this cycle, for example those relating to the sanctioning of studies, which must necessarily respect the requirements of the College Education Regulations (CER). Nevertheless, they were discussed with the registrar's office. Thus, the process followed was always oriented toward collaboration, but certain actors were called upon more for certain articles because of their role or their expertise.

Once the entire IPESA had been rewritten, the work was presented to the academic council in May 2021. To

ensure that everyone had a chance to comment on the final text, the academic council proposed that the IPESA be subject to a final consultation during the summer of 2021. As such, it was shared with the community by email, along with a short introductory video. It was also suggested that discussion sessions be planned for all staff. Two discussion sessions were organized: one by videoconference in June and another in person at the park adjacent to the college in August. Approximately 50 people participated in these discussions and expressed their concerns regarding the assessment of learning. After minor adjustments, the IPESA was adopted by the governing board in November 2021.

## Implementation

To ensure the implementation of the IPESA, a three-part pedagogical day was organized by the pedagogical days committee and the review committee. First, the main changes to the IPESA were reviewed. Second, a workshop-conference on formative

assessment was offered, since during the various consultations and discussion sessions, several teachers had shared that formative assessment didn't seem to be sufficiently engaging for students. Third, five discussion circles were held on other topics related to learning assessment (e.g., assessment of teamwork, portfolio assessment). Each circle was facilitated by one or two teachers standing out with regard to the theme. The teacher opened the discussion circle by sharing their practices with the others, and then everyone was invited to share how they position themselves in relation to the theme, the challenges they face, and the solutions they implement. These workshops were rich moments that encouraged reflection, sharing and even innovating. Ninety teachers participated in the workshops, which were greatly appreciated.

During the winter 2022 session, the pedagogical counsellor in charge and the released teacher supported departments in drafting their departmental rules that clarify a limited number of IPESA rules (e.g., French language proficiency assessment). Each department could therefore count on assistance in familiarizing themselves with the changes that had been made to the IPESA and, if they wished, rethinking the evaluation in certain courses. This was another opportunity to collaborate with teachers to ensure greater adherence to the IPESA.

## Challenges and facilitators

In terms of the challenges encountered, it is worth noting that various circumstances led to six different pedagogical counsellors working on the IPESA file

in less than three years. Despite the resulting instability, this turnover had its upside, as it brought new perspectives that enriched the common reflection. The presence of the teacher who was released from the beginning to the end of the process ensured that the work continued smoothly. Then, the context of the pandemic disrupted our timelines, considering that the rewriting work was started in January 2020. In March 2020, the IPESA file was put on hold for a few weeks. When work resumed, community engagement was not always affirmed. The first two consultations were poorly attended, and committee members were not able to carve out as much time for meetings as they should have needed. In addition, it was sometimes difficult to engage some members in discussions around the IPESA during the video conference meetings. One way to encourage active participation during these virtual meetings was to create a collaborative document (Google Docs) based on the IPESA. Similarly, student engagement posed some challenges. We wanted to consult with students from the beginning of the process, including questionnaires surveying them about teachers' evaluation practices. We then invited the students' association to participate in each major consultation, but our invitation went unanswered. Nevertheless, one student was present at the extended committee meetings to express his views on the articles. In addition, we are currently working with the college communications office to ensure effective dissemination of the IPESA to students.

Another challenge was the fact that the community was very divided on one article—the one concerning the number of summative evaluations per

course. The committees first rewrote the article, limiting the number of evaluations. This was in response to the concerns of many teachers and other college stakeholders who wanted to limit the number of evaluations to prevent overloading students with evaluations, to prevent evaluations from being a means of monitoring class attendance, and to ensure that the final evaluation was a true reflection of the achievement of the course competency. However, the article limiting the number of evaluations was not well received by many teachers who argued that they should be in control of their evaluation planning. They felt that disciplinary differences or student profiles might lead some teachers to divide the content evaluated in smaller units or to evaluate their students more frequently. After much discussion, a compromise was reached. The article adopted suggests a number of evaluations per course without prescribing it. It was also agreed that there would be time for discussion so that teachers could explore alternative means of evaluation, with the aim of reducing the number of evaluations.

For the facilitators, the time spent thinking about the direction of the IPESA (structure of the document, style, inclusion of department-specific rules) and its preamble (policy objectives and guiding principles) allowed us to begin the work on a solid common foundation. Keeping the meetings short (usually an hour and a half), but periodic, kept us on track and engaged in the project. The variety of consultation modes and times certainly contributed to community participation. In addition, the involvement of management at all stages of the process underscored the importance of the issue for the

institution. Moreover, the fact that it was an institutional priority, a fact mentioned to the entire college community, encouraged commitment. Finally, the recognition of each person's expertise engaged the members of our community in the different phases of the process.

In sum, the factors that have facilitated collaboration are both organizational and individual, which we see in the literature (Asmar & Wacheux, 2007; Gangloff-Ziegler, 2009). The college has fostered collaborative work by providing the necessary resources and support for this mode of work. Collegiality within the work teams and active community participation were evident. Although there was a diversity of views, there was mutual trust within the work teams and the student was always at the center of everyone's concerns. The common concern to provide an IPESA that would serve the students rallied us.

## Conclusion

Although it required time and resources, our collaborative approach allowed us to rewrite, in under two years, an IPESA that emanates from the community and takes into account the concerns of the various stakeholders of the college. The collaborative experience has been positive and has contributed to a better knowledge and recognition of each person's expertise, which strengthens the work teams and the feeling of belonging to the institution. Given the number of stakeholders who have mobilized around the policy, the community's adherence to the IPESA in the coming years is very promising—which was the very objective of our approach.



Rewriting the IPESA was not just a matter for the pedagogical development office. Our policy is the result of collaboration among the various stakeholders who work at the college, regardless of the service to which they belong or their teaching discipline. Interprofessional collaboration was at the heart of the process, hence the choice to bring together a pedagogical counsellor, a teacher and a manager to form the review committee. Since learning assessment in mathematics does not necessarily require the same means as the assessment of a design project, the steering committee had to be

transdisciplinary. Interprofessional and transdisciplinary collaboration also took place in the extended committee, where representatives from all backgrounds could contribute their views and expertise. Finally, it was more widely experienced during the four major consultations as well as during the other moments of exchange (discussion sessions, workshops during the pedagogical day).

This approach does not allow us to link an IPESA article to a single individual or even to a single work team, which makes it a truly collaborative

work according to Gangloff-Ziegler's definition (2009). It is even difficult to count the people who contributed to it if we consider the different ways in which collaboration took place and the number of times community members were invited to participate in the work. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to count exactly how many community members participated in the work, we estimate that at least 100 people, mostly teachers, were actively involved. This is a policy written by 200 hands. ■

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