

# Learning: A Never-Ending Story

A teacher attends a webinar on artificial intelligence (another one!) between two classes, a pedagogical counsellor participates in a community of practice on digital pedagogy while eating lunch, an educational researcher takes an online course to learn how to better transfer the knowledge resulting from her research to the learning community... Behind the scenes at CEGEPs—as in many other sectors—a growing number of people are engaged in life-long learning, a commitment that never loses momentum.

A survey of in-service teacher training was recently conducted in France,<sup>1</sup> and it's safe to assume that its general findings are transferable here. What do we learn from it? That teachers are increasingly self-taught when it comes to professional development (PD) (80% of continuing education is self-directed learning); that online platforms are the main source of such training (60% of continuing education takes place on the web or social networks) and that ongoing PD is often invisible and undervalued (a large proportion of teachers engage in PD outside of working hours, on weekends [55%] or in the evenings [45%]). The study also highlights the fact that ongoing PD is a lever for improving pedagogical practices and a pillar of student success (over 50% of teachers report that participation in PD has a positive impact on their desire to deepen their knowledge and teaching practices). We'll come back to this interesting finding.

There's a lot of talk these days about the importance of continual, lifelong learning. Since the 1970s, lifelong learning has been a recognized perspective and fundamental principle of education policy, adopted by the United

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<sup>1</sup> The results quoted in this article are taken from the Observatoire Ecolhuma report "Formation continue des enseignants : usages et besoin," published in May 2023 [[ecolhuma.fr/2023/06/06/barometre-formation-continue-des-enseignants-usages-et-besoins](https://ecolhuma.fr/2023/06/06/barometre-formation-continue-des-enseignants-usages-et-besoins)].

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), among others. It promotes the idea that education and competency development should not be limited to a particular stage of life, such as childhood or adolescence, but should be an ongoing process that extends from infancy to retirement. So why is learning so ubiquitous in our lives?

In fact, learning is an intrinsic human quality that has been referred to since ancient Greece. The modern world did not invent the knowledge society, but the last few decades have reinforced the importance of expanding the *knowledge society* into a *learning society*.<sup>2</sup> Rapid technological advances have significantly changed the way, and, more importantly, the pace at which we work and live today. As a result, essential skills are changing and becoming obsolete faster than ever before, making *learning how to learn* essential. Workers must constantly adapt their skills to meet the changing needs of the economy, society and the individuals who drive them.

But can't continuous—and ubiquitous—learning lead to mental exhaustion, or even cognitive overload? It's a bit like continuous information, quickly consumed, quickly passed on, on the spur of the moment, without taking the time to measure its effects. Information overload can lead to a sense of perpetual vertigo, similar to the feeling one gets when eagerly following all the latest advances, novelties, pedagogical or technological innovations. This is especially true if you're the type of person who wants to follow every discovery or inspiration of the moment. There's no denying that lifelong learning costs money, but it also costs time.

So what should we do? Stop being curious and learning all the time? Certainly not. But maybe we can *learn to make choices* according to our own criteria of quality, *learn to value and perfect existing competencies* before exploring more “innovative” ones, and certainly *learn to say no* to change

for change's sake. Moreover, if PD is a lever for improving pedagogical practices and a vector for student success, as the virtuous circle of continual PD suggests,<sup>3</sup> isn't it about time that it was valued and given a prominent place in our educational institutions? And, above all, to officially recognize this fundamental competency for the teaching profession—and, more broadly, for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Baril, Executive Director of the Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes (ICEA), has often spoken about the learning challenges of a knowledge-based society [[icea.qc.ca/en/tags/apprentissage-tout-au-long-de-la-vie](http://icea.qc.ca/en/tags/apprentissage-tout-au-long-de-la-vie)].

<sup>3</sup> According to the Observatoire Ecolhuma report, the enhanced classroom engagement, teaching structure and autonomy support put in place by teachers involved in their professional development promote student progress in their learning.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'A' and 'P' intertwined.

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