The literature concerning professional development for administrators, and by extension, educational administrators is abundant. The authors agree that it is essential for educational administrators to maintain a high level of competence in order to support and facilitate organisational development oriented towards student retention and success. However, beyond the traditional models of initial and in-career training, very few original solutions are being suggested. There seems to be a lack of transference of new knowledge, gleaned from current research about learning, into new practical learning solutions focused on the development of professional competencies and organizational improvement.

The *Personal Learning Plan* (PLP) proposes an alternative to the more traditional approaches. It was developed with a view to supporting the development of professional competencies and is grounded firmly in the most recent research findings in the areas of cognitive science and learning theory.

It has been conceived, as a process tool, to assist the educational administrator in taking charge of his or her own learning and assists by providing common definitions, integrated worksheets, reflective activities and concrete examples which support the construction of the learning plan. This program manual provides all of the support necessary to carry out the proposed steps. It is made up of a beginning section which attempts to frame a common view of learning and the development of professional competencies. Following four modules or sections are presented in the form of separate files: the first deals with the generation of a personal profile of competencies; the second deals with the planning and carrying out of learning activities; the third module is entirely focused on the evaluation of the development of those competencies and the analysis of feedback, and the last module targets the retooling and updating of the *Personal Learning Plan*. Finally, a series of annexes are provided that contain concrete examples and program tools intended to assist the PAP learner.

An on-line complement to the manual, *Galileo,* is a state-of-the-art internet tool which supports the progress of the learner by helping him manage his learning, and then adds the perspective of organizational development and the management of intellectual capital into the mix.

One View of Learning

In the constructivist approach, learning is grounded in the learner taking charge of his or her own learning. The foundations of this view rest on the idea that each human being is endowed with unique sets of baggage and potentials. Each learns at his own rhythm, and in the multitude of ways that make sense to that individual learner.

Such a vision of learning, which can be qualified as more systemic or organic than normative, includes the following notions: development, by construction and production within a given context; active learning situations; and an array of skills and knowledge as well as the demonstration of same through practical application in projects, both simulated and real.

Dewey and Piaget were among the first contemporary researchers to present elements relative to a constructivist view of learning. Their work lead to the emergence of many understandings which are

current to this day. The PAP program leans heavily on the work of the '*American Psychological Association,* in collaboration with the *Mid Continent Regional Education Laboratory* (1995) which talks about learner-centred principles of psychology, on the work of Gardner (1993) and his focus on multiple intelligences, and on the work of Gravel (2002a.b.) that deals with the acquisition and development of competencies. It is useful to illustrate the fundamentals of this paradigm of learning by comparing it to the paradigm of nature that is more normative.

Learning Paradigms

Normative Approach	Systemic or Organic Approach
• Descriptive logic • Assimilation of knowledge • Development by following established rules • The learner is passive • Knowledge is categorized and compartmentalized • Demonstration by gradual conditioning and exercises	• Logic is animated and spontaneous • Knowledge is constructed • Development by constructing and producing within contexts • The learner is active • Knowledge and competencies are combined and integrated • Demonstration by practical application in projects, simulated and real

Gravel (2002b.)

In addition, current research in the area of learning and its manifestation in action presuppose reflection on the part of the learner. Many researchers and practitioners approach this question from the issues of metacognition and regulation. Metacognition refers to the process of learners engaging in an exercise of introspection and mental reconstruction. Regulation refers to the process of applying knowledge in an anticipatory and hypothetical way. On this last issue, the Minister of Education of Quebec, in "le *Programme de formation de l'école québécoise (2001)"*, makes reference to regulation in terms of "the process of anticipating the approaches that might be taken with regard to the problem at hand, as well as the controls and adjustments that might be necessary along the way". When we consider concepts such as metacognition and regulation, it is possible to talk about strategies relative to "thinking about thinking", as well as a learner consciously considering the structures, the processes and contents of his learning, his way of thinking, the operation of his memory, and his actions.

A similar form of reflection, during and about actions, is discussed by numerous management theorists such as Deming (1988), Payette (1993), Schön (1994), Zúñiga (1994), St-Arnaud (1995) and Barnabé (1998). Collectively they highlight three aspects that are essential to consider when looking at the process of reflection: the actor, the action, and the context. They also highlight the importance of discussion, and the structure surrounding the reflective act. For Shulman (1998), a good surrounding structure, in the form of a working tool, greatly facilitates the reflective act, self-evaluation and co-evaluation.

In addition, when learning takes place in a common sense context, the competencies of the learner are more likely to be mobilized. In this regard, Bouteiller (1997, p. 23) stated that the learner must be given total or partial control over the orientation and progression of their learning. He added: "It is not the training that must be ongoing, it cannot be. It is the learning! And if it is going to be continuous learning, we have to learn to allow the management of that continuity to occur at the individual level and not at the organizational level." The PLP adheres to this philosophy.

The Development of Competencies for Educational Administration

For a long time, the professional development of educational administrators has been entrenched in a normative approach, that is to say, a place where researchers produce theories, where professors teach these theories, and where practitioners study these theories with a view to eventually applying them to the real world. After many years of trial and error, this approach must be seriously put into question (see the work of Grégoire [1993] and Gravel [2002a.]). We are seeing that this approach cannot keep pace with our present needs, and will certainly not be able to keep pace with the ever increasing demand to renew and extend the competencies of educational administrators as they attempt to remain in sync with the rate of change in our contemporary society.

More and more, professionals working in the field of education feel it necessary to modify their practices in order to become more efficient and effective. In fact competence is no longer defined as an accumulation of knowledge, but rather the "utilization of a combination of understandings, abilities, attitudes, and social behaviors that are expressed in an action, or a series of actions, in a given context and towards a specific goal" (Gravel, 2002a., p. 68). In other words, it is not sufficient to accumulate theoretical knowledge in order for competence to grow; growth is obtained moreover through the integration and synergy of knowledge used in the context of, and in accordance with, a specific goal or vision.

The operationalization of the growth in the level of competencies (Gravel, 2002b) lies in the back and forth and the osmosis between the planning and carrying out of learning activities, the attempts at testing new learnings in the real world, the evaluation of the levels, and the achievement of expectations. Learners, having taken charge of their own learning process, can thus develop a diverse set of competencies and enhance or discard old ones (according to their needs) over a range of different activities. This variety allows them to consolidate or advance in their development of competencies. The illustration of the dynamic of this evolution in the level of competencies is presented in the figure below.