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SUCCEEDING IN COLLEGE

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Summary

Presentation

In all of Québec's colleges, the question of academic success has been constantly examined for a number of years. This reflection has taken various forms. It focuses on

means for promoting success as well as on the social and economic problems caused by a lower completion rate than expected.

A number of research papers or studies have examined the concept of success, the causes for failure and numerous means, each being more inventive than the preceding one, that teaching establishments take to promote academic success for their students.

Far from losing steam, this reflection is as dynamic as ever within the Québec college network. On a continuous basis, several players and organizations churn out studies on this topic which, when you get down to it, deals with the very mission of teaching establishments: to teach and promote success.

This *CDC Bulletin* has compiled references that are essential to gain a better understanding of academic success in students and that pinpoint certain follow-through practices promoting success.

History and Background regarding the Reflection on Academic Success

At the beginning of the 20th century, it was believed that the population had a limited educability. There were numerous aptitude tests to guide children either to school or the job market. In 1945, there were 5,294 classification and aptitude tests in use in the United States. Only 10% of citizens graduated from high school. School was a place based on selection, discrimination and competition (Tyler, 1986. See the section *"Delving a bit further into the subject"*, at the end of this *Bulletin*).

During the second half of the 20th century, research and changes within society led to democratization of social structures. We shifted from a rura*l* economy to a post-industrial structure, and now we live in an economy based on knowledge. Assuredly, this change is redefining the mandate of schooling.

During the 1950s and 60s, research undertaken by Jean Piaget, Benjamin Bloom, Ralph Tyler and several others reached a conclusion that drastically changed common thinking regarding the role schools play. Their finding was that any person can learn, as long as he or she receives help if needed. The school's responsibilities then take on a whole new meaning as it becomes a place for learning intended for all. With this emerging new paradigm, the school must adapt to the needs of all students.

From access to studies to access to academic success

In Québec, the college network began focusing on the question of academic success as "Renewal" measures were instituted in 1993. The societal effort in which we are collaborating in the colleges is based on the collective reflection made at the time of the 25th anniversary of Québec colleges.

The first two documents included hereafter are twenty years old but they turn out to be highly important for anyone wishing to understand the spirit of what may be called support for academic success at the college level.

GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, CONSEIL DES COLLÈGES. *L'enseignement collégial : des priorités pour un renouveau de la formation,* Québec, 1992, 413 p. (Available at the CDC. Class number : 701105)

This report on the state and requirements of college-level teaching, adopted by the *Conseil des collèges* in 1992, is a major component of the reflection on academic success in Québec colleges. It holds four main sections:

- An analysis of foreseeable change in Québec society
- An update of the conception of teaching at the college level
- An identification of priorities for developing teaching at the college level
- An examination of some of the main essential means of renovating and developing teaching at the college level.

This document is a must for anyone wishing to understand the college network past and present. You will mainly find how thinking developed at that time and on how the college network should evolve. You will also discover, described in a rich rigorous style, the social and pedagogical values of this period. Someone observing the school environment today will discover the contemporary college background and may use this to base his or her management or teaching practices. This document presents a history of evolution within Québec's college network.
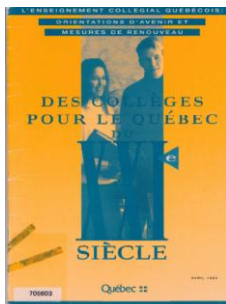
GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, MINISTÈRE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET DE LA SCIENCE. *Des collèges pour le Québec du XXIème siècle. L'enseignement collégial québécois. Orientations d'avenir et mesures de renouveau,* Québec, April 1993, 39 p.

In the wake of the social need to make education more democratic, there was already a mounting interest in giving young students access to a college education. In 1993, seeing that only 36% of Québec students were getting a college diploma before reaching the age of 25, the department of Education took a closer look at the question of access to academic success and adopted some 40 measures to increase the completion rate for students registered at the college level. This was called the college reform. Measures inscribed in this document are addressed to all levels of the college community, from the department of Education itself up to the teaching staff. The document notably deals with the following:

- Skills-based approach
- Program-based approach
- The studies commission (*Commission des études*)
- Adoption of program assessment policies
- Adoption of institutional learning assessment policies
- The uniform ministerial French test
- Creation of the *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (CEEC)

In 2013, it will be twenty years since these measures were adopted. If most were implemented and have become part of standard college practices, some still require adjustments regarding certain environments (the skills-based approach, for instance) while others meet a certain amount of resistance in some colleges (the program-based approach, for example).

LAPOSTOLLE, Lynn. «Réussite scolaire et réussite éducative : quelques repères», *Pédagogie collégiale*, Vol. 19, no 4, Summer 2006, p. 5-7.

In this text, Lapostolle skillfully guides us through a history of reflection on academic success and demonstrates that it is better to talk of academic success rather than educational success.

Educational success is a rather qualitative concept and is tied to the notion of project (personal achievement, personal and professional development, vocational maturity). Educational success transcends college walls. The teaching community has no direct or observable control over it. However, regarding academic success, you can have some control over the concept: it may be measured using class grades (course success rates, means), perseverance rates within a program, diplomas granted.

Overviews on academic success
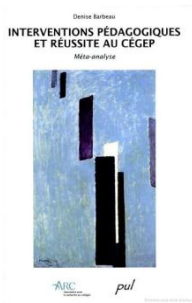
BARBEAU, Denise. *Interventions pédagogiques et réussite au cégep. Méta-analyse,* Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2007, 426 p. (Available at the CDC. Class number : 786470)

This major and essential study deals with various aspects of research on support for success. In this meta-analysis of 96 studies and research papers covering 962 dependant variables, Barbeau describes two major types of interventions. One focuses on actions that are set just outside of the classroom, while the other category deals with actions that are directly linked to everyday teaching practices.

Actions outside of the classroom

Barbeau describes and comments on measures that can help a student as he moves into the college level. There are several types of actions that lie on the fringe of teaching. Here are a few examples:

- Help centres
- Familiarization and integration sessions
- Special classes
- Peer tutoring
- Tutoring by teachers or college employees.

Denise Barbeau notes that these actions on the fringe of teaching are aimed at helping students learn more about themselves, gain a better self-control and develop better study habits. (p. 44).

Everyday teaching practices

Barbeau refers to several research studies showing that students at risk have a better success rate if, in class, they are given detailed, well-structured learning situations that promote development of natural mutual peer assistance, if teachers use teaching strategies based upon cognitivist and constructivist teaching models, if the learning process is contextualized and if the teacher-student relationship is positive and personalized. Interventions aimed at students at risk must also be designed to end attitudes and modes of behaviour that lead to failure. Such interventions must be led on several fronts: cognitive, social and affective.

In more than 75 studies, the importance of pushing the students' cognitive development is clearly noted. More specifically, emphasis is placed on the need to help students deal more effectively with information, to develop their capacity to analyze and summarize as well as their critical judgement.

Study findings challenge traditional teaching approaches and notably suggest the importance of having a better balance between instructional and practical teaching. Students must develop their understanding of abstract concepts, their analytical capabilities, their ability for in-depth reflection, integration of what is learned, critical judgement, metacognition and transfer of acquired knowledge. This is only possible if traditional teaching approaches are supplemented with approaches based on the principles of cognitive psychology, social constructivism and constructivism.

The building up of learning experiences can greatly benefit from working with others. Thus the role of the teacher as a transmitter of information is challenged. This evolving role will notably be to design learning contexts and conditions that will allow students to be active in their own learning experience and to find meaning in what they learn. In order to promote development of higher cognitive abilities, teachers must give the student an active role in processing information and put an end to his passive role.

Several teaching strategies and approaches have been inventoried and are described in a great number of texts and research papers. Barbeau refers to a few of these: team work, strategic teaching, problem-based learning, situation-based exercises, project-based approaches, concept mapping, ICTs, role-playing exercises, long-term projects, research work, keeping a logbook, formative assessment, writing, meeting with guest-speakers, etc.

All these strategies and several others mix in well with more traditional approaches. According to Barbeau, these studies show the importance of putting teaching in context and planning it out, while ensuring that you build on previously acquired knowledge.

The program-based approach: A place for institutional coordinated approach

According to Barbeau's meta-analysis, the relationship between a student and his learning experience does not occur on its own. In order for a learning experience to occur, pedagogical relationships must prosper in a favourable environment. This environment will only be as rich as the learning experience (acquired knowledge) is diversified and the degree of personalization is intense.

Students and teachers both have some responsibility in the learning experience but the school environment also plays an important role. School learning occurs in groups students learn within a classroom group. It is there that interpersonal relationships occur and these necessarily imply a concerted effort between teachers and various players, first within the program and then within the entire college.

It is therefore necessary for teachers, professionals, management and even students to collaborate. Thus, says Barbeau, a systemic approach and a concerted effort between the various players constitute two essential support bases for students at risk. To quickly identify which students are at risk, colleges must define and implement systematic concerted actions.

Stressing the importance of creating a harmonious balance between students, teachers and subject matter, Barbeau quotes Michel Develay who, in 1993, stated that teachers could no longer consider their profession in an individual or individualistic manner. They must now view it collectively.

Crossroads to Success in College [1]

The *Carrefour de la réussite au collégial* website, established in the wake of the development of colleges' student success plans, is aimed at helping institutions to implement their plans. Different means are developed and promoted: organization of conferences, seminars, theme workshops, regional meetings, support in developing screening and diagnostic tools.

The *Carrefour* has identified eight themes focusing on continued training and has commissioned PERFORMA to prepare kits to organize theme-related activities. Each of these kits includes a facilitation guide and a collection of texts. The following is the list of eight themes for which documents are available on the *Carrefour* website (see *learning kit* tab).

1. Teaching practices in the first term
2. Interventions regarding students at risk
3. Motivation
4. Academic success for young men
5. Guiding school

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1 This text on the crossroads to success in college is an excerpt from the CDC Bulletin titled SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR BOYS, Part 2: Actions and avenues of intervention, No 8, January 2012.

6. New teaching strategies
7. Learning models
8. Assessment of learning

Students at risk

We know there are numerous factors outside college that come into play and influence the college completion rate. As one enters college, the high school average is a statistical indicator for which there is a consensus. The higher the average, the greater the completion rate. We also know that girls succeed better than boys. These assumptions having been established, here are a few key documents dealing with this topic.

ROY, Jacques, Josée BOUCHARD and Marie-Anne TURCOTTE, in conjunction with Gilles Tremblay and Simon-Olivier Fournier. Valeur des collégiens et réussite scolaire. Filles et garçons au collège : des univers parallèles? Étude sur la problématique des genres et la réussite scolaire en milieu collégial. PAREA research report, Québec, Cégep de Sainte-Foy, 2010, 176 p.

Quoted in: **Boisvert, Jacques. SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR BOYS, Parts 1 and 2,** CDC Bulletin, # 6 (*Global problems and factors in play*) and # 8 (*Actions and avenues of interventions*), Montréal, May 2011 and January 2012.

This study by Roy and his collaborators shows that, world-wide, there are few fundamental differences between boys and girls, at least among those who are eagerly working towards a diploma or degree. However, differences between boys and girls would seem more apparent among students at risk. It is mainly regarding values that the distinction between the two sexes would apply. These values make up almost half the discriminating factors based on gender, notably values of competitiveness, respect, family and the importance of effort devoted to succeeding at one's studies. Moreover, girls are more committed to their studies, they grant more importance to a college-level diploma and, more than boys, they believe that success, power and social status must be earned.

ROY, Jacques, Josée BOUCHARD and Marie-Anne TURCOTTE. «Girls and Boys in College : Parallel Universes?», *Pédagogie collégiale*, Vol. 25, no 2, Winter 2012, p. 34-40.

In this recent article, Jacques Roy and his collaborators took a look back at a study they completed in 2010 and closely analyzed factors that set boys apart from girls regarding performance in school. They observed certain factors that appear in the success of students who have obtained higher than average grades.

Both high performing girls and boys spend less time at part-time jobs. The importance of succeeding in school and their interest in studying are among the prime factors linked to persevering in school, for boys as well as for girls.

Three variables should be mentioned for students, both boys and girls, who persevere in school until they graduate.

- The interest and importance granted to studying
- The influence exercised by family and social networks
- The personal well-being of the student

Roy's research proposes five parameters for intervention aimed at helping students at risk, whether boys or girls. These parameters touch on student-teacher relationships, the financial and moral support of parents, extracurricular activities, tutoring and finally, teaching methods.

Academic success for young men

It is common knowledge that boys do not succeed as well as girls in college. Statistics confirm this: there is a gap between success rates for boys and girls. What has been observed throughout is that more girls go to college, they have better grades than boys during the first term in college and they have a better perseverance rate throughout their time in college. Furthermore, they have a better completion rate in the time normally provided for college studies. Their completion rate is generally 12% higher than for boys. In certain communities, twice as many girls obtain their college diplomas than do boys.

The problem of academic success for young men is of such importance that it is specifically dealt with by several authors.

GINGRAS, Michèle and Ronald TERRILL. *Passage secondaire-collégial : caractéristiques étudiantes et rendement scolaire. Dix ans plus tard*, Montréal, Service régional d'admission du Montréal Métropolitain (SRAM), 2006, 33 p. (Available at the CDC. Class number : 786462)

According to this SRAM study, not all young men have a poorer success rate or are at risk. This issue should be played down and we have to determine which young men are having trouble. Boys who had a lower average in high school when compared to girls of the same caliber have less success in their courses during the first term of college. Boys get twice as many grades under 60% than girls. They also have a lower completion rate.

BOISVERT, Jacques. SCHOOL SUCCESS IN BOYS, Parts 1 and 2, CDC Bulletin, # 6 (*Global problems and factors in play*) and # 8 (*Actions and avenues of interventions*), Montréal, May 2011 and January 2012.

The *Centre de documentation collégiale (CDC)* published a two-part bulletin devoted specifically to academic success for young men. This summary by researcher and retired teacher from the Cégep St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Jacques Boisvert, is undoubtedly an essential reference on the question of academic success for young men. We will not summarize all the texts examined by this author as they are too detailed and extensive. Here, however, are some of the key points.

Why do boys have a lower academic success rate than girls? On this issue, the Boisvert summaries allow us to examine the social context in which students live and their degree of motivation. The author reminds us that the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* had observed as far back as 1995 that young men feel vulnerable concerning their vocational choice and they need support in this regard. A certain number drop out because many young men do not want to embark on studies if they haven't first clarified the question of their career path. Young men need to give a meaning to their education, a meaning that is sustained by a vision of what they will do with their diploma when they graduate. Their motivation to study would seem directly linked to their career vision. Furthermore, it would seem that young men have a wider definition of success. For them, success is not simply a question of academic success.

According to the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* (see the section *Delving a bit further into the subject* in this edition of the *Bulletin*), it is possible to help students who are having trouble or who are at risk by taking into account:

- their cognitive styles
- their need to give a meaning to their academic situation
- their language skills.

Boisvert refers to Jacques Roy, an important researcher on issues of young men having trouble in school. Roy says that one must take into account young men's values and aspirations as well as their need to achieve a balance between work and school and their relationship with knowledge and with school.

According to Boisvert's research, young men with a greater risk of failure and dropping out are mainly characterized by their perceived relationship with their teacher, the influence of their friends and by an instrumental vision of academic success. These are young men who tend to challenge the usefulness of the courses they are taking, the meaning of what is being taught and their interest in the teaching methods used.

As far as the training received in high school is concerned, it seems fairly evident to Boisvert (2010) that steps must clearly be taken at that very level. It is in high school that students must be taught good study habits and that they must get further help regarding their study plans and career. It is especially important to help them develop a more accurate view of what college-level courses will be like.

Young men at risk have difficulty managing their time, they have serious language or literacy deficiencies and they have little confidence in their own ability to succeed in school. They are confused about their career path and college class schedules are drawbacks. What seems to give them some satisfaction is avoiding failing grades.

Teaching approaches

Barbeau's above-mentioned and described meta-analysis indicates that the student's cognitive, social and emotional development is identified by research as an essential factor in academic success. As far as everyday pedagogy is concerned, important documents focus on sound teaching practices that also contribute directly or indirectly to academic success.

Consistency and formative assessment

All authors agree that the practice of formative assessment contributes directly and assuredly to learning and to motivation. Also, a tight consistency in planning the various steps of a training program will promote success.
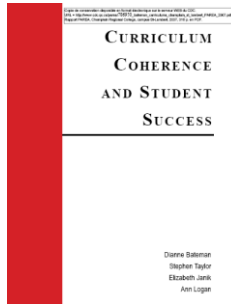
BATEMAN, Dianne, Stephen TAYLOR, Elizabeth JANIK and Ann LOGAN. Curriculum Coherence and Student Success, PAREA research report, Cégep Champlain Saint-Lambert, 2008, 395 p**.**

Also see the reporting article: **D. Bateman et al, «Curriculum Coherence and Student Success»**, *Pédagogie Collégiale*, Vol. 22, no 5, Summer 2009.

This study, as well as the summary published in *Pédagogie collégiale*, deals with planning teaching and, in particular, the required concordance between what is being assessed and what is taught. The authors show how the internal consistency within a course, between the learning objectives, learning activities (including formative assessment practices) and summative evaluation of learning, leads to success for students.

SCALLON, Gérard. *L'évaluation formative des apprentissages. Tome I : La réflexion,* Québec, PUL, 1988, 170 p. (Available at the CDC. Class number 706251 V.1)

In this reference work on formative assessment, Scallon describes the steps that are characteristic of formative assessment. In order for formative assessment to occur, the teacher must observe the learning experience during the process, apply professional judgement as the expected learning experience evolves, offer feedback, correct the learning process and/or the teaching process, reinforce or confirm the learning experiences. Feedback is essential for the formative function of this episode of professional judgement.

In any case, it has been shown that students are more motivated when their learning progress is monitored with formative evaluation. This helps develop a sense of power, of self-control on what has to be learned. Thanks to formative assessment, there won't be surprises when the time comes for summative evaluation (or certification).

Jan Chappuis, Rick J. Stiggins, Steve Chappuis, Judith A Arter. Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right; Using it well. Prentice Hall, 2011, 418 pages [Available on request]

In this book, dedicated to teacher training and heavily oriented on formative assessment (see section *Delving further into the subject*), the authors make a most inspiring distinction between "Assessment for Learning" and "Assessment of Learning".

When formative assessment is seen as **assessment-for-learning**, students:

1) Visualize the learning to be done

2) See what has been learned
3) Measure the gap between what has to be learned and what has been learned
4) Evaluate what has to be done to attain the objectives
5) Are motivated and involved

BÉLAIR, Louise M. *L'évaluation dans l'école, nouvelles pratiques.* Paris, ESF, 1999, 125 p.[Available on request]

According to Bélair, the teacher assumes a major role in assisting success of learning. In order to play this role in helping students, the teacher has to assume that each individual can be educated. Better yet, he adopts a daily benevolent attitude. Formative assessment, says UQTR professor Louise Bélair, constitutes a free zone in which a student has the right to make mistakes without any penalty.

Teacher training, upgrading and support

Overall, the problem of academic success is brimming with avenues for training and upgrading for teachers as well as all staff members. CEGEP management has a privileged role to play in initiatives that support the constant need for upgrading the personnel involved.

CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION. *Au collégial : l'engagement de l'étudiant dans son projet de formation : une responsabilité partagée avec les acteurs de son collège,* Chapitre 5, Québec, 2008, 102 p.

Quoted in **BOISVERT, Jacques**. **SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR BOYS, Part 2**, CDC Bulletin, # 8, January 2012.

In this study on student involvement, the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* reminds us that the project of education is a responsibility that is shared among all college players. One chapter is devoted to the need for cooperation and for concerted effort among teachers and with other college resources. This study describes four avenues of development aimed at generating and developing structured actions that focus on teacher training:1) getting to know the students; 2) measures to be taken to account for the diversity of individuals, their evolution and their needs; 3) pedagogical approaches and the diversity in teaching strategies required to promote student commitment (tutoring, mentoring, problem or project-based learning, cooperative teaching, team work, etc.); 4) student services (notably peri-curricular activities).

The study and its recommendations clearly illustrate the diversity of avenues on which the training and upgrading of teachers and members of the professional and management staff must focus.

Evaluation of teaching

BERNARD, Huguette. *Évaluer, améliorer et valoriser l'enseignement, (a guide for universities and colleges),* Montréal, ERPI, 2011, 331 p. (Available at the CDC. Class number 787780)

This updated edition of Huguette Bernard's book reminds us that the objectives for evaluating teaching are:

- Promoting continued development of professional skills
- Providing the teacher with a diagnostic of his or her teaching practices in order to improve them
- Providing assistance and guidance to new teachers
- Allowing more experienced teachers to take stock of their teaching practices
- Guide the development or maintenance of professional skills.

The evaluation of teaching is an important resource for teachers and colleges. In the case of a new teacher, an evaluation is a good probation tool that includes the professional assistance of the educational advisor. For the experienced teacher, it is a self-assessment tool that can be used for upgrading one's skills. For the educational advisor, it provides an opportunity to give professional assistance. Finally, it is an enriching collective experience for the teaching department and a responsible and constructive exercise for college management.

Institutional integration

Regarding the responsibilities of colleges, the renewal measures adopted in 1993 by the MELS notably promoted a redefinition of the academic management of programs. This measure introduced the notion of the program approach. The principle is easily apparent. The program approach builds on the collaboration and concerted effort of all teachers involved in a training program in order to promote consistency and coordination of what is taught in class.

Most colleges have implemented priorities aimed at exploring various program-approach conditions. In a majority of colleges, program committees have been created and seem to work well. It would seem that in other colleges, resistance to change remains quite severe.

Several documents described above note the need for a concerted effort among college players. Here is just one such document.

MOISAN, Richard. «L'élaboration d'un modèle de référence en encadrement des étudiants», *Pédagogie collégiale,* Vol. 24, no 3, Spring 2011, p. 4-9

Recently, Richard Moisan, an educational advisor at the *cégep de Sherbrooke*, described a reference model for mentoring students. The model focuses on practices that promote a concerted effort among practitioners and that have a positive effect on student

support. At the *cégep de Sherbrooke*, the priority regarding mentoring activities is given to supporting students who are having difficulties or are potentially at risk within a given program. This mentoring is done in and out of class, either by teachers or individual teaching assistants, as determined by the student who wants to help himself, and based on available resources.

This study report defines 21 characteristics that promote the success of a mentoring intervention. Among these, some relate directly to either the teachers or to other professionals or resources. Other characteristics touch on the context of interventions.

In this intervention and integration model, the author states that it is up to the programs to define their priorities. In all cases, they should promote the integration of newly arrived students.

Delving a bit further into the subject

CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION. *Pour une meilleure réussite scolaire des garçons et des filles : Advisory to the ministre de l'Éducation,* Québec, 1999, 116 p. (Available at the CDC. Class number 723758)

Develay, Michel. Pour une épistémologie des savoirs scolaires. Pédagogie collégiale, octobre 1993, vol. 7, no. 1. Page 36.

FÉDÉRATION DES CÉGEPS. Augmenter le nombre de diplômés, un défi complexe. Montréal, November 2000.

TREMBLAY, Gilles, Hélène BONNELLI, Simon LAROSE, Steve AUDET and Claire VOYER. *Recherche-action pour développer un modèle d'intervention favorisant l'intégration, la persévérance et la réussite des garçons aux études collégiales. Programme d'actions concertées. Persévérance et réussite scolaires.* Final report submitted to the Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture, Québec, Cégep Limoilou, February 2006, 175 p. Also see the study summary available at the CDC. Class number 786293.

TYLER. R.W. Changing concepts of educational evaluation, *International Journal of Educational Research,* 1986, Vol. 10. p. 11-35. [Available on resquest]

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