

# WHY LEARN ALONE AND AS YOU GO WHAT OTHERS ALREADY KNOW!



FRANCINE S. CHARTRAND  
Vocational development  
coordinator  
La Cité collégiale

Post secondary teaching institutions are small-scale models of the outside world. We find professionals, as we do elsewhere, who successfully work in a specific field of activities, then one day branch out into a totally different field. These newcomers to the field of education thus become, from one day to the next, student teachers.

*Teachers* because of their professional expertise and *students* because they must relearn what was familiar in a world they thought they knew, given their number of years as learners themselves, participating in classroom activities. In their new role, they come face to face with a classroom that suddenly takes on a completely different appearance than the one they remember when they were sitting at the desk as students.

All teaching institutions are facing considerable challenges in promoting occupational integration for newcomers. Although there is a broad diversity of measures in place, there seems to be only one objective: to promote the development of a teaching identity. Guided by Adult learning principles, *La Cité collégiale* accepted the challenge. As the first French college in an Ontario network of 24 community colleges, we knew our teaching team was heterogeneous and our new teachers had previously worked contractually in universities, high schools, and sometimes colleges. We believed that this diverse range of professionals called for the personalization of training strategies. We also believed that newcomers would be motivated and more self-managed as a group if the learning context promoted the use of real life situations. Finally, it seemed important to take into consideration both the emotional and intellectual dimensions of occupational integration.

At the end of the nineties, the college began looking into management support for new teachers. Initially, an analysis of the professional context brought to light the following observations: The majority of teachers hired in Ontario colleges do not have teacher training or a background in Adult learning. Additionally, the ageing of school staff means an increase in new employees hired over the next two decades. We want to build an enviable reputation with regard to the quality of training and we are aware that the quality of training offered to students is a reflection of training received by the teachers. We therefore defined the following objectives:

- Develop a learning organization that promotes the sharing of knowledge and places value on relationships while offering each teacher the opportunity to upgrade his skills according to his needs and stage of professional life.
- Facilitate the integration of new college teachers to the environment.
- Promote the acquisition of teaching and adult learning principles.
- Guide new teachers in the design, construction, and management of their courses.

## EXPLORATORY PHASE

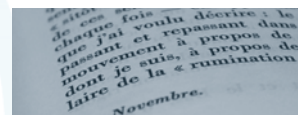
A recent census among Ontario and Quebec colleges and universities determined that training offered to newcomers, when it is available, varies considerably in terms

of approach used. The data collected allowed us to classify the approaches according to four scenarios. The first three scenarios are of an institutional nature and target the creation of a program where all training activities are coordinated by the institution. The fourth scenario recommends a cooperative approach with at least one post-secondary institution to ensure new teacher training takes place. The table presented on the next page, shows the specifics of each.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Following a study of best practices taken from postsecondary institutions that were surveyed, we opted for the hybrid approach of scenario 3 where peer exchanges and individual progress live side by side. Our challenge was to find a balance between the two strategies. This notion of balance became the leitmotif for the *Programme de formation en pédagogie et en andragogie* that was created in the Fall of 2000.

We believe that the success of any training program is based on the commitment and motivation of those involved. We further believe that recognizing the teacher's workload gives the training program credibility and encourages new teachers to take charge of their own professional improvement. To ensure that teachers feel supported and committed to investing time in the field and their profession, we have created a paradox by making participation in the program optional. This decision is based on the belief that participants must be prepared to invest the required time and effort if they are to reap the



## Scenario 1 A COLLECTIVE PROGRAM MANAGED BY THE INSTITUTION

**New teachers are brought together to work together within predetermined training**

(CAN BE OFFERED BY INTERNAL RESOURCE PERSONS OR EXTERNAL RESOURCES)

**Advantages** Promotes networking among new teachers.

**But...** Given that new teachers begin at different times throughout the year, there is no critical mass or best time to offer the program. The profiles of newcomers vary considerably. Some already have teacher training or adult learning while others are true neophytes in the field.

## Scenario 2 AN INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM MANAGED BY THE INSTITUTION

**A program tailored to each participant**

(REQUIRES THE PRESENCE OF AN INTERNAL RESOURCE PERSON TO COACH NEW TEACHERS)

**Advantages** The supervision process contains an analysis of each new teacher's needs, a personalized activity plan and a series of learning activities developed to promote the acquisition of competencies required by the profession.

Adapts to the needs and experiences of each new teacher. This will also prevent frustration and demotivation that come from repetition.

Teachers quickly grasp the advantages of a professional development plan.

Teachers work closely with their Resource centre and become ambassadors for the services provided with their colleagues.

This promotes adherence to the institution's educational philosophy.

**But...** Does not promote networking so runs the risk of professional isolation.

## Scenario 3 A HYBRID APPROACH MANAGED BY THE INSTITUTION

**Contains both a collective and an individual section**

(REQUIRES THE PRESENCE OF AN INTERNAL RESOURCE PERSON. EXTERNAL RESOURCES MAY BE ADDED)

**Advantages** It allows a balance between individual coaching and group training; it promotes both networking and individual approaches.

**But...** It increases the complexity of the program therefore requiring greater coordination and on-going adjustment depending on the make-up of new teachers to ensure proper balance between the two sections.

## Scenario 4 A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

**This involves a joint program with a university or an affiliation with a college institution**

(REQUIRES THE PRESENCE OF EXTERNAL RESOURCE PERSONS. INTERNAL RESOURCE PERSONS MAY BE ADDED)

**Advantages** It allows the teacher to receive more extensive training therefore promoting the emergence of improved knowledge of professional potential; and to develop reflective capacities centered on professional practice.

**But...** Negotiations for a joint program are time consuming and could considerably delay the start of the training program.



benefits. It is therefore up to the institution to promote the validity of the program and incite participants to get involved, while respecting the choice they make. The program itself is a two-year program consisting of an *Integration* and a *Training* section.

The *Integration* section is offered during the first session subsequent to the hiring of a new teacher and it extends over a period of four months. A group process that simultaneously addresses the new group of teachers, it deals specifically with the development of a support group and the launch of a professional education network: A sharing of pedagogical experiences and an identification of resources such as people, training activities, didactic tools, and concrete solutions to teaching problems. This section also offers specialized workshops lasting from three to six hours. Some sample workshops: Teaching strategies; How to intervene with difficult people; The evaluation of learning; Animating the classroom; Intercultural communication; The art of asking and answering questions.

The *Training* section starts during the second work session and lasts for 18 months. It is designed so teachers can take charge of their own pedagogical and adult learning activities. This section uses an individual approach adapted to the needs and experiences of each new teacher. Each teacher follows a four-step process: **The assessment of learning and training needs.** The purpose of this step is to confirm participants' commitment to their vocational development. During an interview, each teacher defines and analyzes the nature of his needs. With the help of the *Assessment of learning and training needs* grid, he identifies the learning results and indicators of success he wants to achieve.

**The development of a vocational upgrading program** allows teachers to identify their training needs based on results achieved during the assessment of learning stage. Determining training needs is done with the help of a *Vocational upgrading program* grid. Teachers choose which resources to use and determine schedules.

**The acquisition of pedagogical and adult learning tools** is achieved via training activities tailored to individual needs and takes the form of meetings with representatives from the Resource Centre for teachers. As required, these meetings are supported by a reading programs or parallel activities such as observation in the classroom, meetings with other resource persons, professional visits, and participation in workshops.

*It is therefore up to the institution to promote the validity of the program and incite participants to get involved, while respecting the choice they make.*

And lastly, **the implementation of a personal development project** that touches one or more aspects of teaching and facilitates the integration of pedagogical and adult learning principles. These projects are concrete and their application generally occurs as they develop. A vocational development program is defined using the *Vocational development action plan* grid and specific steps are completed in order to ensure its realization: project feasibility, implementation stages, action plan finalization, and the development of a timetable as well the project realization and its validation.

#### ► CREATING THE GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN POSTSECONDARY TEACHING – CERTIFICAT EN ENSEIGNEMENT POSTSECONDAIRE (AVAILABLE IN FRENCH ONLY)

In the exploratory phase leading to the creation of a graduate certificate, one scenario favoured a collaborative approach with another institution to assure new teacher training. We revisited this scenario and in our program's second year of existence, we undertook a joint approach with the University of Ottawa to develop a graduate certificate, the Graduate certificate in post-secondary teaching, a course centered on three axes: teaching and learning in adults, information and communication technologies, as well as the evaluation of learning. Students who succeed and meet admission requirements can then register for one of the master's degrees in education.

#### ► IMPLICATIONS

Since 2000, 58 teachers have completed the *Programme de formation en pédagogie et en andragogie* (Training in pedagogy and adult learning principles), which represents a 95.1% participation level. Our decision to leave it up to teachers to decide on their participation seems to have paid off. Some results are also due to "word of mouth" that has increased significantly over the years. At the beginning of the program, we depended on our welcoming activities and management support to inform and recruit participants. As the groups followed one another, we received the support of ambassadors who had followed the program themselves and were now enthusiastically recommending it to their peers.

When it was first conceived, the program displayed an imbalance with regard to



exchanges with peers. This aspect existed almost uniquely in the *Integration* section. Structured by five meetings, this section was designed to offer participants the opportunity to develop a reflective practice and share their results with colleagues. The meetings provide a secure environment where newcomers can talk about what they are experiencing. Teachers quickly realize they are not the only ones living the experience. By working together with people in similar contexts, teachers gradually learn to view their actions with a critical eye and to identify their comfort zone. Once they recognize what makes them feel comfortable and what makes them feel uneasy, teachers become better equipped to create and maintain an environment suitable for learning and teaching. In other words, if teachers adopt behaviours that make them feel comfortable in their practice, students will sense this and respond by being more receptive to their teachings.

*By working together with people in similar contexts, teachers gradually learn to view their actions with a critical eye and to identify their comfort zone.*

Teachers soon acquired a taste for **sharing their professional experiences** and insisted on **setting up additional forums**. So, two more networking meetings were added to the *Training* section. The first meeting takes place during the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, around the tenth week. At that time, participants present the themes of their vocational development projects. Those with common interests can form work groups if they so desire. During the second meeting, participants present their projects. Strategies and tools that have been developed are also shared. This meeting takes place during the 4<sup>th</sup> stage, around the tenth

week. Over the last few years, graduates of the program almost exclusively moderate this series of talks better known as the **Step-by-step series**. These 60-minute lunchtime meetings make it possible to tackle crucial subjects. Participants bring their lunch, hold discussions in a relaxed and informal atmosphere in the company of invited colleagues—and exchange insights. A climate soon develops that can be summarized in one sentence: “Why learn alone and as you go what others already know?”

Recently, the CRE (Resource Centre for teachers) decided to take advantage of the existing climate for exchanges by adding a section in its **website pages** entitled “I share...”. This feature allows graduates of the *Programme de formation en pédagogie et en andragogie* to post the projects they developed during the *Training* section and share them with colleagues. It is also a powerful tool that encourages newcomers to join projects already in progress. Creating a sharing environment is relatively easy because teachers are usually generous by nature. Still one must also get past the natural humility of most teachers. When teachers are invited to publish their projects, they often react by denying the usefulness of their projects or even the potential interest of others. They ask themselves why a project designed for computer courses would be relevant in other disciplines. We must help these teachers recognize how the transfer of knowledge relating to their achievements becomes the foundation that provides support for others who will, in turn, create their own personalized projects.

#### IMPACT AND REPERCUSSIONS

We have seen a marked improvement in the quality of education offered in our institution since the creation of the *Programme de formation en pédagogie et en andragogie* (Training in pedagogy and adult learning principles), as shown by our results relative to performance indicators (PI). The performance indicators are in a manner of speaking, the performance chart for an Ontario college. During the first PI surveys, our college was less than 10 years old. Our results relative to student satisfaction ranked us among the worst. Eight years later, results from the same survey shows a complete transformation. We are now first among 24 Ontario colleges in terms of the quality of our teaching and our program relevance. We now rank second when it comes to general student satisfaction. We cannot however accurately measure the impact of our training program because it is impossible for us to isolate its contribution from other factors that could give similar results. Nevertheless, it is logical to believe that the support and supervision given to teachers is reflected in their practices and, consequently, is of great benefit to students.

#### THE FUTURE

In the early days of the mandate, resource persons responsible for vocational development adopted the following rule of operation: Start small and dream big! All initiatives were on a voluntary basis and those who chose not to participate in the program were not penalized. We wanted to create positive energy that would communicate itself to others. What followed has allowed us to see that our plan is working, but there remains much to do to break through professional isolation. We will rely even more so on our teaching ambassadors to optimize the human and intellectual capital. This implies the development of mechanisms so that those concerned with their own progress and the progress of others may blossom. We will



need to work on three levels: the pooling of accomplishments, the realization that transfers often take place subsequent to pooling, and the impact of these transfers.

Between now and the end of the decade, we will see an increase in the gradual departure of baby-boomers. Already, two major issues are emerging from this reality. A wealth of resources will disappear along with a high percentage of teachers, whereas the teachers who joined our ranks at the onset of the training program will become the next group of seniors. Our preoccupation with the personal and vocational development of these teachers and the reality of quickly ensuring valid replacements led us to research strategies designed to forge bonds of loyalty, integrate new teachers, provide unique learning opportunities and protect our knowledge capital by making use of their experienced personnel.

*Mentoring* is one such strategy. According to Houde (1995<sup>1</sup>), it helps bridge the gap between generations. Through mentoring, a person with competencies to learn and vocational objectives to reach can take advantage of the experience and expertise of another in his own development. This description of mentoring seems to provide for our needs relative to recruiting, building loyalty, and teacher training. We believe that interaction will help new teachers feel secure in their choice of career and be motivated to develop professionally and personally. Additionally, the integration of mentoring activities in the daily routine of teachers would represent an opportunity for them to develop competencies, strengthen their morale and motivation, increase their degree of satisfaction, improve their performance, attain personal and professional objectives, and perfect their networking skills.

The initiatives already implemented bring us closer to the concept of *community learning*. However, there is still much work to do before the desire to transfer knowledge becomes second nature in teachers. We believe that grasping the essence of this “attitude of sharing” (Houde 1995<sup>1</sup>) is at once a strategy and a way of promoting the flourishing of teaching staff and creating a context of cooperation, trust, and fairness that is the foundation of any learning organization. ◆

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Francine CHARTRAND is a coordinator for professional development at the *Centre de ressources pour les enseignants* at *La Cité collégiale* in Ottawa. She has been working in the education field for over 20 years now. Initially, she taught various programs in the Health sector. She then directed projects dealing with the evaluation of study programs and the integration and supervision of teachers. Her fields of interest include the mentoring relationship in the work environment and the training of school staff for greater sensitivity toward cultural diversity.

fschart@lacitec.on.ca

<sup>1</sup> HOUDE, R., *Des mentors pour la relève*, Montréal, Éditions du Méridien, 1995.