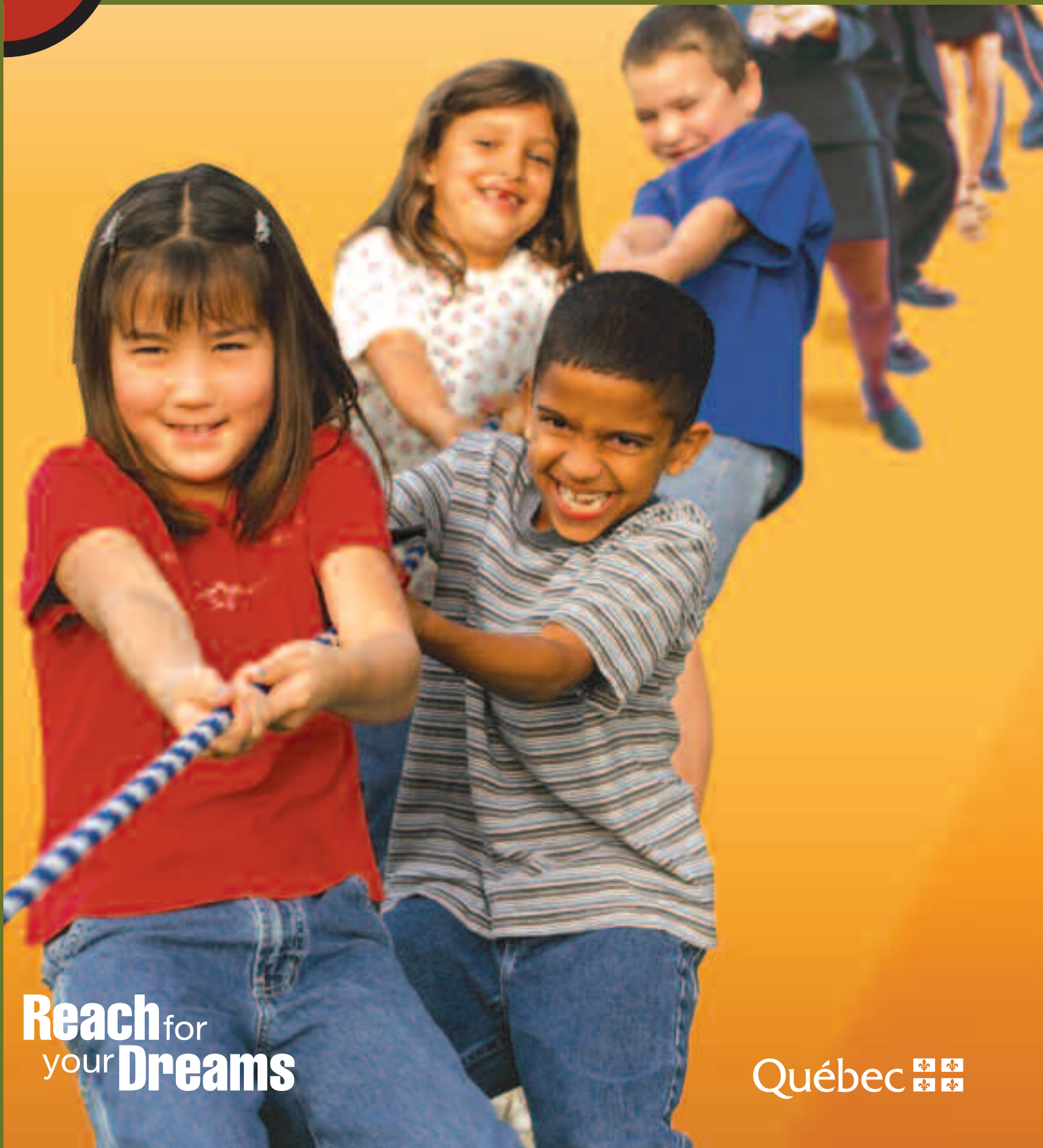




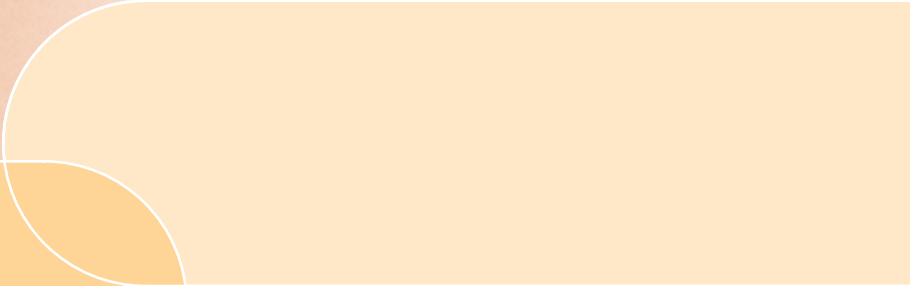
Learning difficulties

Reference framework for intervention



Reach for
your **Dreams**

Québec 



Learning difficulties

Reference framework for intervention

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Learning difficulties are of ongoing concern to the educational community. These difficulties experienced by some students constitute veritable challenges for the staff members who work with them, in particular for the teachers. They also call for a great deal of energy on the part of the parents.

This reference document is intended for all school staff members who are involved, directly or indirectly, in working with students with learning difficulties. It is designed for teachers, student services staff, counsellors, administrators and parents, and sheds new light on how best to provide assistance to students with learning difficulties and facilitate the search for effective intervention measures that meet their needs.

The first chapter presents a few facts and figures concerning students with learning difficulties. The context of the reform and the elements of this context that have a specific impact on the intervention measures used to help these students are also discussed. In addition, information is provided on the services and resources available to them.

The second chapter focuses on four orientations, which serve as a guide for interventions. These orientations form the backdrop for the intervention measures advocated for supporting children with learning difficulties.

The third chapter deals with support for these students, which is based on a fair evaluation of their situation, quality intervention measures and educational services that are organized with a view to achieving success for all students.

The fourth chapter presents the courses of action that should be taken in order to provide adequate support to students with learning difficulties. These courses of action apply to the preschool, elementary and secondary levels and target elements that are essential to effective intervention.

The fifth and last chapter outlines management practices that target student success. This chapter highlights the main elements required to gear management practices to the orientations of the reform.

Background

Learning difficulties affect a significant number of students in a variety of areas of learning. While various authors and tenets associate the term learning difficulty with different realities, for the purposes of this document, learning difficulty refers to the problems a student may experience in his or her learning progression in terms of the outcomes of the Québec Education Program. Learning difficulties may be experienced by students who are at risk, disabled or have severe behavioural problems.

This method of envisaging learning difficulties is quite different from a definition of difficulties by category. It focuses more on students' needs, whereas the category-based approach, which is used for administrative purposes, is not designed to respond to the needs of each individual.

This chapter presents a few facts and figures concerning students with learning difficulties and discusses signs of learning difficulties and certain factors that can help explain them. In addition, it examines the impact of the reform on the organization of services offered to students with learning difficulties and on the intervention measures that must be implemented to help them. Lastly, a brief overview of the available services and resources is provided.

1.1 Learning difficulties: a few facts and figures

The data collected from school boards in 2000-2001 put the proportion of at-risk students¹ with an individualized education plan at roughly 11%. A large majority of these students experience learning difficulties. However, these statistics do not take into account students with disabilities, many of whom have learning-related difficulties.

Other data show that a substantial proportion of students with learning difficulties repeat grades. This is especially true for the first year of both the elementary and secondary levels. Almost twice as many boys as girls repeat grades.

In addition, many students with learning difficulties never manage to obtain their Secondary School Diploma or Diploma of Vocational Studies. Many of them also end up dropping out of school.

1.2 Signs of learning difficulties

Learning difficulties sometimes originate in the school environment, but can also be present well before the child begins school. Although occasionally linked to some of the student's individual characteristics, they are often the result of a process, which begins early in life, within the family, and continues at school. For example, a child who has received little stimulation in terms of writing will be more likely to encounter difficulties as he or she progresses through school.

Learning difficulties are manifested in terms of the competencies set out in the Québec Education Program. More specifically, they affect students' ability to read, communicate verbally or in writing, and use mathematics.

Learning difficulties generally arise in cases where students have problems using cognitive and metacognitive strategies and properly applying certain cross-curricular competencies. Furthermore, they frequently go hand in hand with certain deficiencies, especially as concerns attention and memory. They often entail motivation and self-esteem problems, and can either stem from or cause behavioural problems.

1. At-risk students are students who experience difficulties that may lead to failure, exhibit learning delays, have emotional disorders, have behavioural difficulties or disorders, have a developmental delay or a mild intellectual impairment. See Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Students With Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Difficulties: Definitions* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), p. 4.

1.3 Explanation and intervention

There are numerous factors that can explain learning difficulties. For some, these difficulties are biological in nature. For others, environmental factors (family, school, social background and cultural community) play a decisive role.

The ways in which learning difficulties are explained have an impact on the actions taken. For example, those who see learning difficulties as being biological in nature have a tendency to focus their interventions exclusively on the student, whereas those who attach more importance to the environment tend to address several elements simultaneously and emphasize prevention.

This document is written from an interactional viewpoint. Thus, learning difficulties are perceived as being the result of the interactions among the student's characteristics and those of his or her family, school and living environment.

This concept of learning difficulty results in a more systemic vision of intervention, and prompts us to take into account anything that constitutes a strength or represents an obstacle to learning. It also encourages us to ask questions about the student's personal characteristics, for example, "What is his learning profile?" "In which areas do her strengths lie—personal relationships? Science? The arts?"

This concept also calls for an analysis of what is being done in the school. "How is this student being supported in his learning progression?" "How is she being helped to make the most of her strengths?" "Is the school's organizational structure designed to meet her needs and ensure adequate intervention measures, or to comply with more prescriptive rules?"

Finally, this concept calls for an examination of family-related factors and the establishment of a dialogue with parents in order to correctly identify all possible means of helping students learn.

1.4 Education reform in Québec

During the 1990s, several studies and reports highlighted various problems in the school system, including the high number of students with adjustment or learning difficulties, an increase in the dropout rate, and an alarming proportion of illiterate adults. These observations called the school system into question and led to the current education reform.

In 1997, the policy statement entitled *Québec Schools on Course*² set the broad orientations of the current reform. This policy statement emphasized the importance of ensuring success for all students. It called for "a curriculum based on essential learnings,"³ the diversification of educational options to meet the needs and interests of all students, and a more flexible organizational model for schools.

This meant that numerous changes had to be made to the Education Act, the Basic School Regulation, the curriculum and the Policy on Special Education, in order to apply the orientations set out in *Québec Schools on Course* to today's context.

1.4.1 Education Act

Several sections of the Act have been amended in order to fulfill the imperatives of the reform.⁴ Some of these sections have a direct impact on the services offered to students with learning difficulties.

It should be noted that the Act underscores the need to enhance the qualifications of all students, in particular those with learning difficulties, by referring explicitly to the "qualifications" component of the school's mission. This mission, which is to impart knowledge to students, foster their social development and provide them with qualifications, must be pursued within the framework of an educational project and implemented by means of a success plan.

Greater powers have also been devolved to the decision-making authorities. Several responsibilities that used to fall to the school boards have now been transferred to the schools. Given their familiarity with the students they serve, schools are better equipped to adapt the services they offer to students' characteristics and needs.

2. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Schools on Course*, educational policy statement (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1997).

3. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Education Program* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2001), p. 2.

4. See Appendix I.

Schools are also reaching out to the community through their governing board. Parents, students, school staff members and representatives of the community are encouraged to take part in defining, implementing and evaluating the educational project. Moreover, the governing board is responsible for adopting the educational project and approving the school's success plan.

The Act also refers to the obligation to establish an individualized education plan for disabled students and students with adjustment or learning difficulties. By encouraging parents, resource persons and the student to work together to better meet the student's needs, the individualized education plan is an excellent tool for the student's success.

Lastly, the Act contains provisions for the integration of such students into regular classes, unless it has been established that such a measure would not facilitate the student's learning or social integration or would impose an excessive constraint or significantly undermine the rights of the other students. In such cases, special schools or classes may be required.

1.4.2 Basic School Regulation

The Basic School Regulation⁵ obliges each school board to establish a student services program that includes the following four components:

support services

school activities

counselling services

promotion and prevention services

Twelve services are provided for in order to implement these four program components, including remedial education services. These program components are interrelated and complement the instructional services and special services offered. They call for joint action and teamwork among the various players. A recent document⁶ published by the Ministère provides more information on student services and their implementation.

The Basic School Regulation⁷ provides for a maximum of six years for the completion of elementary school studies, although under the Act, a student who has not achieved the targeted outcomes is entitled to an additional year of elementary schooling. However, this year should be used not merely as a repetition of what has already been taught, but rather to enable the student to continue his or her learning progression.

The Basic School Regulation sets out new guidelines for the organization of instruction, which is now divided into three two-year cycles at the elementary level and two cycles at the secondary level. This cycle-based organization is intended to help students make continuous learning progress.

1.4.3 The new curriculum

As part of the reform, work is being carried out to review all three aspects of the curriculum, i.e. subject content, evaluation and certification. As a result, subject content is now geared more closely to the development of competencies, evaluation is focused more specifically on the assistance to be given to students, and certification is a more accurate reflection of their success.

The Québec Education Program

The Québec Education Program attaches particular importance to the learning process and makes students the principal agents thereof. This program focuses on the subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies⁸ students need to acquire knowledge, foster their social development and obtain qualifications.

The development of competencies aims to make the knowledge acquired in school a "tool" that can be applied to everyday life situations. This has a considerable impact on the way intervention measures are developed.

5. See Appendix II.

6. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, Direction de l'adaptation scolaire et des services complémentaires, *Complementary Education Services: Essential to Success* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2002).

7. See Appendix II.

8. For more information on the components of the Québec Education Program, see pages 6 and 7 of the *Québec Education Program*.

If students are to develop competencies, it is not enough to simply transmit knowledge to them. Instead, they must be placed in a context conducive to helping them build knowledge and determining when and where it will be useful to them. Such an approach ensures that students are active and learn to mobilize their resources and adjust their actions.

Helping students develop competencies also means taking into account what they know and what interests them, and respecting their pace of learning. However, in a classroom, the students' knowledge, fields of interest and paces of learning can differ widely, and therefore the intervention measures used cannot be the same for everyone at all times. They must therefore be differentiated.

A differentiated approach is not the teacher's responsibility alone. It must be used in collaboration with the school staff, in particular the cycle team.⁹ Each individual's expertise must be relied on in order to support each student in his or her learning progression.

In addition to subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies, the Québec Education Program underscores the importance of broad areas of learning, which are defined as "issues that are of particular concern to young people."¹⁰ Properly used, in interaction with the various competencies, they encourage students to learn from meaningful situations and construct their own world-view. Projects in which different subjects are interdependent constitute enriching, motivating situations for students. All players, including teachers and student services staff, are called upon to make the most of the broad areas of learning.

Students' different school experiences help them structure their identity and determine their strengths and limitations. It is important to encourage students with learning difficulties to make the most of their talents, express their viewpoints and affirm their values while respecting those of others. At the secondary level, they also need help planning for the future, by learning about occupations that correspond to their talents and fields of interest. The guidance-oriented approach¹¹ is of particular interest in this regard. All players are encouraged to ensure that their students' experiences at school are enriching and help them better structure their identity.

Evaluation of learning

Work stemming from the curriculum reform led to the drafting of a new policy on the evaluation of learning, which focuses on the main purposes of evaluation, i.e. to support learning and recognize competencies. It also deals with the certification of studies.

Support for learning is central to evaluation. It is essential to the success of all students, especially those with learning difficulties, and has an important role to play throughout the learning process.

This form of evaluation is based on systematic observation of the students in order to support their learning progression. It requires that teachers adjust their pedagogical interventions and that students regulate their learning. Moreover, it encourages the use of differentiated activities.

The recognition of competencies is used at the end of a cycle or a training program, or when a student drops out of school or decides not to complete an educational path. In the form of an end-of-cycle progress report, it acts as a yardstick for the development of competencies. It also affords resource people an opportunity to exchange information on the occasion of students' promotion from one cycle or integration path to another. The recognition of competencies makes it easier to implement assistance and enrichment measures.

In the case of a student who has dropped out of school or interrupted his or her studies, the recognition of competencies allows the student's prior competency level to be determined. A report on the competencies developed can be a useful tool. Such a report can make it easier to pursue the training by enabling prior learning to be taken into account, and facilitate the student's entry into the job market.

9. The cycle team is made up of the teachers in that cycle and the student services staff.

10. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Education Program - Secondary Cycle One* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2002), p. 9.

11. To find out more about the guidance-oriented approach, see the document entitled *Making Dreams Come True: Achieving Success Through The Guidance-Oriented Approach* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2002).

The recognition of competencies also includes the recognition of school and extracurricular learning. It enables students to gain recognition for learning achieved through personal or professional experience that is equivalent to the competencies defined by the Québec Education Program.

Certification of studies

Certification of studies must allow for the recognition of students who have successfully followed different educational paths. Various titles bear witness to their achievement, including the Diploma of Secondary Studies and other certificates and attestations set out in the Basic School Regulation.

Certification of studies is based on a set of identical rules that govern all students; however, accommodations may be agreed upon regarding the evaluation conditions or criteria for certain special-needs students. For example, the time allotted for the evaluation may be increased, or students may be given access to sound recordings of texts enabling them to solve mathematical problems. However, these accommodations must in no way bias the evaluation. In all cases, any decision to make changes must be taken as part of an individualized education plan.

1.4.4 Policy on Special Education

The changes brought about by the reform resulted in a review of the Policy on Special Education and the development of a plan of action in order to help schools implement the policy. The basic orientation of this ministerial policy, unveiled in January 2000, is as follows:

To help students with handicaps or social maladjustments or learning disabilities succeed in terms of knowledge, social development and qualifications, by accepting that educational success has different meanings depending on the abilities and needs of different students, and by adopting methods that favour their success and provide recognition for it.

To help school communities meet the challenge presented by this orientation, six lines of action were defined,¹² each intended to guide the intervention measures for students with learning difficulties.

The first line of action stresses the importance of prevention and is at the root of the second orientation of this document, which advocates early intervention.

The second line of action recommends that all those working with special-needs students make the adaptation of educational services a priority. The intervention measures advocated in this document are based on the diversification and adaptation of services.

The third line of action exhorts those involved to organize educational services based on the evaluation of individual students' abilities and needs, with a view to integrating them into regular classes. The fifth chapter of this document, which deals with service organization, is largely based on this line of action.

The fourth line of action encourages school representatives to create a true educational community, starting with the students and their parents and continuing with community organizations and partners working with young people. This vital component of intervention is addressed in Chapters 3 and 5.

The fifth line of action recommends that particular attention be devoted to at-risk students, particularly those with learning difficulties. Its concern is with improving knowledge and determining the appropriate methods of intervention. It also aims to help resource persons acquire a comprehensive, integrated view of the difficulties experienced by young people and the best ways of assisting them. This is the main rationale for this document.

The sixth and final line of action prompts those involved to develop methods of evaluating students' educational success in terms of knowledge, social development and qualifications, assess service quality, and report the results. Chapter 4 looks at the importance of this evaluation approach in ensuring service quality. A number of worthwhile avenues of exploration are suggested.

12. See Appendix III.

1.5 An overview of services and resources

In elementary school, students with learning difficulties are generally integrated into regular classrooms. However, such is not the case at the secondary level, where a large proportion of such students are directed to temporary or ongoing individualized paths for learning.

Various services are offered to students with learning difficulties, instructional services first and foremost. These are accompanied by remedial education services, psychological services, speech therapy services, academic and career counselling services, psychoeducation and special education services, as well as health and social services.

At the elementary level, remedial education is one of the main services offered to students with learning difficulties. Although models of collaborative consultation¹³ exist in various environments, remedial specialists seem to work mainly outside of the classroom.¹⁴ The situation seems to be changing, however, with new intervention methods being explored.

In secondary school, few students receive remedial education services. Individualized paths for learning are most commonly used, although this method of organizing services, based on categories, is increasingly being called into question.

Both in elementary and secondary school, grade repetition is still frequently used as a means of helping students who have not achieved the required competency level. However, research findings show that grade repetition is ineffective for the vast majority of students and that it does not make them any more successful in their progression through school.

Schools implement a broad array of measures to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties, including workshops, support measures, individualized teaching units, remedial units, tutoring, etc. Innovative projects are also being piloted in various communities. These projects augur well for the development of effective intervention measures for students with learning difficulties.

With regard to resources, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation made the following observation in 1996: "[...] the statistical data of the Ministère de l'Éducation indicate that the resources available to meet these special needs, that is, to support students in their progression through school and the teaching staff in their interventions, are stable or growing, whereas the educational community claims that these resources are diminishing, or at least that they are not increasing in proportion to needs."¹⁵

The same observations are still being made today, even though the Ministère de l'Éducation has implemented an entire set of measures further to the plan of action that accompanied the Policy on Special Education. Thus, over \$120 million has been invested in order to reduce the number of students per group at the pre-school level and in Elementary Cycle One. Expenditures amounting to some \$36.5 million over three years have also been allocated in order to boost the number of professionals assigned to assist teachers and work with students. The goal is to create an additional 860 positions, particularly in the fields of special education, psychology, speech therapy and psychoeducation. Funds have also been committed to make information and communications technologies more accessible, to at-risk students among others, and to develop research.

In addition, support and expertise teams have been set up in each of Québec's regions. These teams are mandated, among other things, to provide support to schools in their efforts to assist students with learning difficulties.

We must thus question ourselves as to how the resources available can best contribute to achieving positive results. Work methods must also be reviewed to ensure that intervention measures are as effective as possible. Furthermore, consensus must be reached among the various school communities, and certain orientations promoted in order to better guide actions.

13. For more information on collaborative consultation, see the works of Lise Saint-Laurent.

14. Georgette Goupil, *Les élèves en difficulté d'adaptation et d'apprentissage* (Boucherville: Gaëtan Morin, 1997), p. 112.

15. Québec, Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *L'intégration scolaire des élèves handicapés ou en difficulté* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1996), p. 30 [Free translation].

Orientations

Learning difficulties can take different forms. Some are temporary, while others persist throughout the student's schooling. This situation makes it more difficult to determine which intervention measures to use. For this reason, four orientations have been chosen to guide actions, namely, targeting success, taking preventive action, viewing the student's situation globally and using differentiated teaching.

2.1 Targeting student success

The concept of success is based on criteria that are specific to certain beliefs, eras and cultures, and can differ substantially from one country, decade or society to another. It is also closely linked to social recognition, and is associated with a feeling of personal accomplishment and the satisfaction of having achieved specific goals.

For many years, a diploma or a certificate was the sole symbol of academic achievement. More and more, we now refer to this concept as “educational success” and have a broader vision thereof. In fact, our understanding of educational success derives directly from the three components of the school's mission: to impart knowledge to students, foster their social development and provide them with qualifications. No longer is it based solely on a student's ability to obtain a diploma of secondary or vocational studies, but rather on the recognition of the progress he or she makes. The evaluation of this progress is based on the learning already achieved, with a view to pursuing this learning throughout the student's life. This idea of learning progress is thus not compatible with that of grade repetition, which implies going over something that has already been done.

Intervention measures based on this concept of learning progress prevent students from experiencing the apathy and demotivation often associated with a feeling of failure, and encourage resource persons to focus their

energies on achieving a goal rather than merely seeking the cause of learning difficulties. This concept of success in no way entails lower expectations; on the contrary, expectations remain high, but are better tailored to each student's strengths, pace of learning and needs.

The Policy on Special Education recommends that we help students succeed and that we accept that this success may be manifested in different ways, while targeting maximum development for each student and maintaining our expectations as close as possible to the norm.

Helping students succeed means holding the same expectations for all students while using differentiated methods. In some cases, it also means having different expectations based on the specific needs of some students. The decision to implement adapted methods with a view to helping students progress to the best of their abilities must be made within the framework of an individualized education plan.

The diversification of educational paths is another way of helping young people to succeed in different ways. These educational paths allow for the building of bridges to ensure that students do not find themselves caught in a dead-end program. It goes without saying that official recognition is needed in order to confirm young people's success.

Each school is obliged to produce a plan designed to improve student success. This plan must contain measures intended for students with learning difficulties. These measures can help reduce the dropout rate and lead to an increase in students' qualifications, in particular students with difficulties.

The Ministère has also put in place other means to ensure the success of the greatest number of students possible, for example, the guidance-oriented approach and the New Approaches, New Solutions program.

The guidance-oriented approach is aimed at helping students get to know themselves better, boosting their academic motivation and establishing links between their experiences at school and their professional aspirations by encouraging them to develop career goals. This approach begins in elementary school and continues through to the end of secondary school.

The New Approaches, New Solutions program, implemented in certain secondary schools located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, aims to enhance student retention and educational success.

According to Snow et al.,¹ there are three main categories of prevention:

- primary prevention
- secondary prevention
- tertiary prevention

Primary prevention is concerned with reducing the number of new cases (incidence) of an identified condition or problem, and concerns all students. It corresponds to what certain researchers² refer to as universal prevention. The implementation of learning conditions that facilitate educational success for all students is part of primary prevention, and differentiated teaching is an example thereof. An educational institution that fosters the optimal development of all students is also using primary prevention.

Secondary prevention is concerned with reducing the number of existing cases (prevalence) of an identified condition or problem. It targets students who are vulnerable due to their personal characteristics, school environment or family or social background. The strategies used must act as protection against the factors likely to cause difficulties. Secondary prevention corresponds to what certain researchers³ call targeted prevention.

Offering children who are growing up in poverty a stimulating preschool environment, where emphasis is placed on literacy,⁴ is an example of secondary prevention. The implementation of prevention measures that facilitate the transition from preschool to elementary school and from elementary school to secondary school for at-risk students is another illustration thereof.

Interventions targeted specifically at students who, owing to their personal characteristics, are likely to encounter learning difficulties, can also be considered secondary prevention. Lastly, attention given to students who are going through a difficult situation (divorce, death of a friend or relative, etc.) also falls into this category.

IN SHORT

Helping students succeed means encouraging them to realize their full potential, go beyond their limits and become full-fledged members of society.

There are different ways of helping students succeed. Most of the time, the idea is to hold the same expectations while using different methods. In some cases, expectations must be adjusted. The decision to implement adapted methods must be made within the framework of an individualized education plan.

Helping students succeed means giving them access to differentiated educational paths so that they can continue their studies. It also means providing for measures to support them in their learning, foster student retention and provide them with qualifications.

2.2 Taking preventive action

Prevention is of paramount importance in a context of educational success. Although it should be carried out rather intensively in preschool and Elementary Cycle One, it must remain a priority throughout the student's entire schooling. Preventing difficulties and making sure they do not become worse must be a constant concern, both at the elementary and the secondary level.

1. Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns and Peg Griffin, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Washington: National Academy Press, 1998), p. 16.

2. Frank Vitaro and Claude Gagnon, *Prévention des problèmes d'adaptation chez les enfants et les adolescents : les problèmes internalisés*, vol. 1 (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2000), p. 7.

3. Ibid., p. 569.

4. The term *literacy* refers to all reading and writing activities, for example, the reading of storybooks.

Tertiary prevention is concerned with reducing the complications associated with an identified condition or problem. This type of prevention takes place once the difficulties have been detected, and the strategies used are aimed at correcting them. For example, teaching word recognition strategies to a student who has specific reading problems can be considered tertiary prevention.

The Policy on Special Education recommends that more emphasis be placed on primary and secondary prevention. This view of prevention obliges key players in the school to be attentive to the risk factors associated with learning difficulties, particularly environmental characteristics or expectations. It also encourages them to consider the protective factors⁵ that can be called into play to prevent students from developing learning difficulties, and requires them to be sensitive to signs that may point to the emergence thereof.

In short, both teachers and other resource persons must take a proactive approach to prevention, by offering students stimulating learning conditions enabling them to develop their abilities to the utmost.

The first years of school attendance are crucial for the prevention of learning difficulties. Attention must also be paid to the first signs of a problem at the secondary level, since these may herald the beginning of a process that could eventually lead the student to drop out of school.

In order to be effective, preventive intervention requires a good understanding of the cognitive and socioaffective development of both children and adolescents. It also calls for joint action on the part of the various resource persons involved and consistent, continuous intervention measures. Finally, collaboration with parents is crucial.

Certain learning difficulties can be prevented by:

- having a good understanding of the development of children and adolescents
- paying attention to the first signs of a problem
- mitigating risk factors and working on protective factors
- working as a team
- ensuring that the intervention measures are undertaken with a view to continuity
- intervening with students and parents

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2.3 Viewing the student's situation globally

Learning difficulties were long viewed as being due solely to the individual characteristics of the student, but this perception is now changing. Learning difficulties are now analyzed more on the basis of a global view of the student's situation. From this perspective, they are considered as resulting from the reciprocal influence of the student's personal characteristics and those of his or her family, social background and school environment.

Research shows that the presence of more than one risk factor⁶ increases the probability that learning difficulties will develop. Thus a study conducted by Werner stresses that "children who were exposed to four or more risk factors at age two (i.e. poverty, stress at birth, parents facing conjugal tribulations, parental mental health problems or alcoholism) are those who showed more behaviour problems at age 10 [...]."⁷

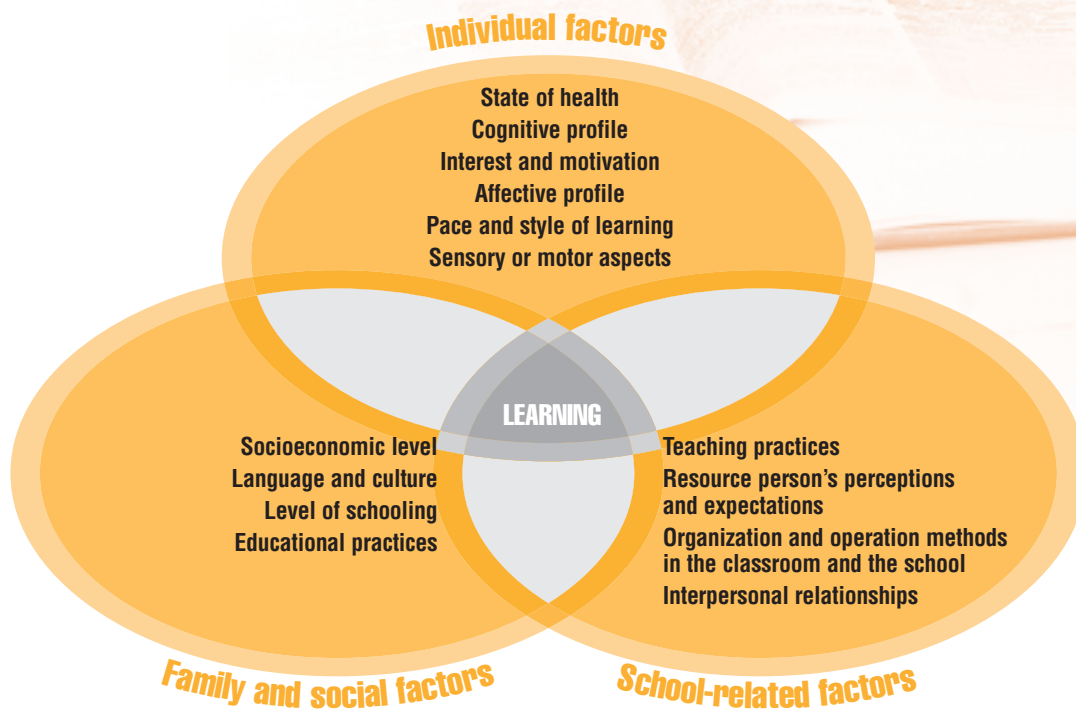
Research findings also show that certain factors increase children's risk of experiencing learning difficulties, for example, growing up in poverty or experiencing emotional problems. The diagram on the following page features the main factors that can impact on learning.

5. Protective factors are elements specific to the student or his or her school, family or social environment which may contribute to eradicating or mitigating the effects of risk factors.

6. Risk factors are defined as elements that increase the probability that learning difficulties will develop. For example, certain educational policies or family characteristics can contribute to the emergence of such difficulties.

7. Marcel Trudel, *The Contemporary Concepts of At-Risk Children: Theoretical Models and Preventive Approaches in the Early Years*, paper presented at the symposium of the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda (Ottawa, 2000), p. 3.

Table 1 Factors that can impact on learning



If learning difficulties are linked to various factors, then intervention measures must take these factors into account. Research conducted on students with learning difficulties⁸ and on students at risk of dropping out of school⁹ highlights the importance of intervening with regard to several factors simultaneously.

There is no doubt that the individual characteristics of some students can affect learning. For example, neurological or genetic problems can accentuate learning difficulties. A slower learning pace, personal problems or a visual or hearing impairment can also contribute to the development of such difficulties. Care must thus be taken to offer teaching approaches that are adapted to the characteristics and needs of each student.

8. Santiago Molina Garcia, "El fracaso en el aprendizaje escolar : Dificultades globales de tipo adaptivo" (Malaga: Ediciones Aljibe, 1997), in *La prévention des difficultés d'apprentissage : Entre le mythe et la réalité*, Jean-Pierre Brunet, text taken from a conference given in Cuba in 1999.

9. Laurier Fortin, Égide Royer, Diane Marcotte and Pierre Potvin, *Les facteurs personnels, sociaux et environnementaux les plus associés aux élèves à risque de décrochage scolaire*, paper presented at the Faculty of Psychology, Université de Rennes 2, France, n.d.

The family environment plays a fundamental role. Certain characteristics such as poverty, lack of adherence to the values of the school or a low level of schooling on the part of the parents can have an impact on whether students develop learning difficulties. However, close collaboration between the family and the school can act as a protective factor with respect to these difficulties. For this reason, it is important to establish a true partnership with the parents and consider them as teammates, rather than as people who need to be told what to do. In this way, parents are more likely to develop a positive vision of the school and become more involved.

Teachers and other resource persons also have an impact on students' learning, and have the potential to influence their success. Their interventions can act as either risk or protective factors. Thus, instructional practices tailored to students' needs and positive, frequent interactions between teachers and students are conducive to creating winning conditions. On the other hand, inappropriate educational interventions and a negative classroom or school atmosphere can increase learning difficulties.

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Considering learning difficulties from a global standpoint forces us to set aside the idea that they are caused by a single isolated factor, and instead to consider the interaction of various factors and their influence on the development of these difficulties.

2.4 Using differentiated teaching

The Québec Education Program underscores the fact that schools are responsible for guiding students to success, regardless of their learning pace, abilities, talents and areas of interest. This objective can only be met by differentiating the intervention measures used, i.e. by considering learning as a different action for each individual student.

Perrenoud defines differentiating as breaking with pedagogical practices that advocate the same lessons and exercises for all, and implementing organizational methods and instructional mechanisms that ensure optimal learning conditions for all students.¹⁰ This does not necessarily mean individualizing teaching or abolishing all instances of group work, but rather offering students various means that enable them to follow their own educational path. Meirieu cautions us against the tendency to excessive individualization as follows:

It is dangerous to use differentiation as a means of destroying group dynamics or "respecting" people's differences and imprisoning them therein. I do not "respect" differences, and I say this very simply. I take them into account, which is not at all the same thing. For example, if someone is incapable of abstract thought, I will not adopt a stance that amounts to saying, "I respect that person's differences, he is incapable of abstract thought so I'll make sure that he deals only with concrete concepts." I take his differences into account, that is, I begin where he is and help him grow.¹¹

Przesmycki¹² and Tomlinson¹³ advocate several differentiation measures that focus on taking into account students' learning methods and paces. These authors suggest using a variety of processes, content, products and structures. Table 2 shows the main elements of differentiation intended to facilitate students' learning progress.

10. Philippe Perrenoud, "Concevoir et faire progresser des dispositifs de différenciation," *Éducateur magazine*, no. 13, 1997, p. 20-25.

11. Philippe Meirieu, "Différencier c'est possible et ça peut rapporter gros," *Vers le changement... espoirs et craintes*, Proceedings of the first forum on the renewal of elementary education, Geneva, Département de l'instruction publique, p. 11-41, n.d. [Free translation].

12. Halina Przesmycki, *Pédagogie différenciée* (Paris: Éditions Hachette, 1991).

13. Carol Ann Tomlinson, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2000).

Table 2 Main Elements of Differentiation

Processes	Content
• strategies • aids used • time	• instructional material • subject matter • level of difficulty
Products	Structures
• length of the task • product • presentation methods	• type of grouping (alone or in teams) • environment

Certain difficulties experienced by the students can require more far-reaching adjustments, for example, with a view to helping students with severe difficulties or disabilities make progress.¹⁴ In such cases, an individualized education plan is indispensable.

Differentiated teaching requires in-depth knowledge of the learning process at play in the development of each competency, as well as a good understanding of how children and adolescents develop. It also requires thorough knowledge of the Québec Education Program, which is indispensable for targeting essential learning. Finally, the role of evaluation must be clearly understood. Differentiated teaching is first and foremost the teacher's responsibility, but the contribution of the cycle team, especially the student services staff, is essential.

For example, the remedial specialist, the speech therapist, the psychologist and the psychoeducator can establish, in conjunction with the teacher, individualized objectives for certain students, and intervene in or out of the classroom; the remedial specialist can help clarify the student's needs and implement strategies enabling the latter to progress as much as possible; the psychologist or the psychoeducator can advise the teacher on behavioural management. Appendix IV contains examples of collaboration presented by Lise Saint-Laurent during a lecture entitled *La différenciation de l'enseignement*.¹⁵

The Québec Education Program aims to guide all students to success. Since not all students progress at the same pace, this objective can only be achieved if their differences are taken into account. Differentiated interventions are thus essential.

This method of intervention calls for the collaboration of all resource persons, particularly the cycle team, which includes the student services staff.

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The orientations contained in this chapter are intended to facilitate the interventions of the various players involved and to serve as the groundwork for providing effective support to students. They will also enable the implementation of actions fostering the success of students with learning difficulties.

14. Patrick Fougeyrollas et al., *Processus de production du handicap*, CQCIDIH/CSICIDH edition (Québec: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 1996).

15. See Appendix IV.

Providing effective support to students

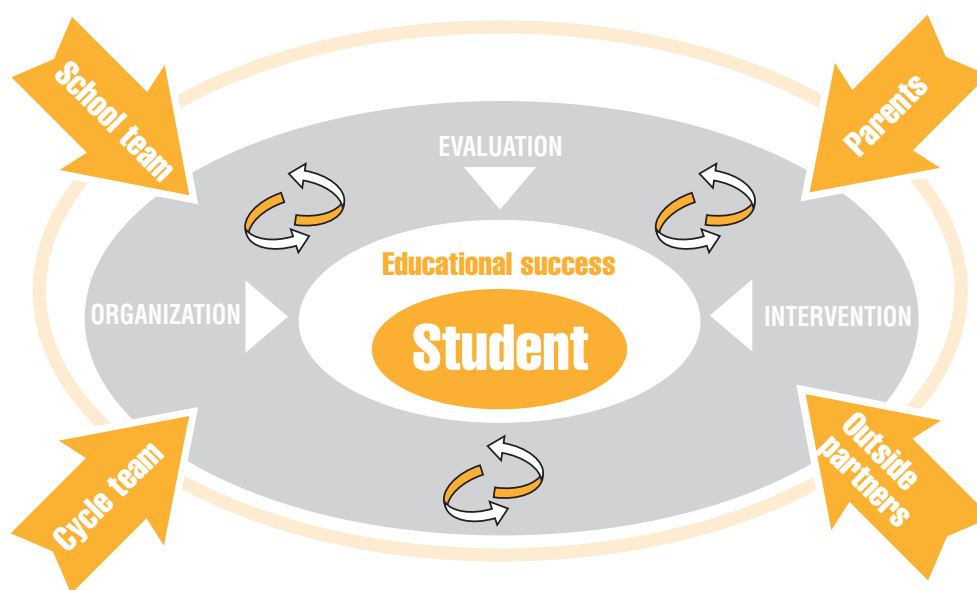
Any approach used to support students with learning difficulties must target educational success and be founded on the principle of educability, which means recognizing that all students are capable of learning, provided the appropriate conditions are put in place. Such an approach must be based on the Québec Education Program, which makes students the principal agents of their learning process, and rely on differentiated interventions in order to meet each individual's needs.

Support for students who have learning difficulties or are at risk of developing them is primarily focused on the act of learning and everything related thereto. It also addresses elements that can obstruct the learning process, such as emotional or behavioural problems, disabilities, etc.

Where necessary, this support can be provided as part of an individualized education plan. More specifically, an individualized education plan is prepared where a student's situation requires in-depth mobilization on the part of the persons concerned, where specialized resources or various adaptations must be called upon, or where decisions having an impact on the student's educational path must be made.¹

Providing effective support to a student with learning difficulties must be based on a fair evaluation of his or her situation. As shown in Table 3, evaluation is at the heart of a dynamic system, where evaluation is used to intervene more effectively and to better organize the school environment so as to bolster these interventions.

TABLE 3 THE DYNAMICS OF SUPPORT



1. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Le plan d'intervention... au service de la réussite de l'élève*, working document (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003), p. 31.

3.1 Evaluation of the student's situation

Knowledge of the student's situation constitutes the cornerstone of the various actions aimed at providing him or her with support, and evaluation can improve this knowledge. It helps take into account the influences on the learning process of the student's school, family and social environment, and abilities and needs.

The main objective of evaluation must be the student's success. In this context, it must, where applicable, facilitate the adjustment of expectations to the student's abilities. Adjusting expectations has a positive impact on the student's motivation to learn and to self-regulate his or her learning.

Success-oriented evaluation practices go beyond the difficulties encountered. Although their purpose is to pinpoint students' needs, they should first and foremost highlight their strengths, abilities and talents. They encourage evaluators to take into account all the elements that can help the student progress. This is a whole new outlook on evaluation.

Quality evaluation is based on an effective information-gathering process, and everyone involved is responsible for providing as much information as possible, including the student, parents, school administration, teachers, professionals, support staff and resource persons from outside the school. It helps paint a comprehensive picture of the student's situation by providing information both on the student's learning progress and on his or her school, family and social environment.

Data obtained through observation is of considerable assistance in analyzing the student's situation. Self-evaluation, coevaluation and peer evaluation are also very useful.

More targeted evaluation practices are occasionally required for certain students, and can be used to better analyze the intervention strategies adopted. They can also be used to validate certain hypotheses concerning the type of learning difficulty encountered.

In addition, such practices are sometimes required to identify the nature of the intervention measures used or to determine the degree of a student's need. The use of services outside the school, such as rehabilitation services offered by the health care system, can prove indispensable. These services are invaluable in selecting the

appropriate means for supporting the student's learning progress.

Once collected, the information is analyzed. This analysis must allow for an appreciation of both the student's learning progress and the elements that hinder or help it, including school attendance, motivation, emotional state, behaviour, family and school support, etc.

Analysis of the information gathered can prompt action to be taken at the personal, pedagogical, administrative, family, social or other levels. Group intervention can also be used if several students are experiencing the same type of difficulty. For example, a school may decide to set up, in conjunction with community representatives, extracurricular activities in order to instill in young people a greater sense of belonging to the school and encourage them to become more involved in their learning.

It should be noted that the student's participation in analyzing the information is important. This participation promotes a better understanding of the information in question and helps the student activate it in his or her learning process. The collaboration of the parents and the members of the cycle team, including the student services staff, is also vital.

Communication is a key component right from the start of the evaluation process. It can take different forms, but it must always aim to establish close collaboration between everyone involved, including students, parents, teachers and other resource persons.

Clear communication between school staff and the parents of students with learning difficulties is essential, and the process leading to the implementation of an individualized education plan makes this communication easier, since it promotes joint action and the recording of information that is crucial to monitoring the student's progress. It is also indispensable when a decision must be made concerning the promotion from one cycle or level of education to the next. Moreover, it can help in the planning of a transition or training project.

3.2 Intervention

In this text, intervention refers to voluntarily taking part in an action in order to change the course thereof. Teachers can thus be considered as “specialists of educational intervention,”² since they must make a multitude of decisions and use a broad array of methods and actions to support students in their learning. However, this responsibility does not fall to the teacher alone, but must also be shared with a number of partners, including members of the school administration, other teachers, professional student services staff, support staff, parents, etc.

Quality intervention relies on certain key elements, such as well thought-out planning, flexible, strategic actions, and periods of reflection and review subsequent to the planning and actions undertaken.

Well thought-out planning encompasses all the elements that must be taken into account in order to support students’ learning. The conscious choices made during this phase permit more flexibility in the action taken. The intervention must be planned in concert by the school team, the cycle team and the teacher.

The school team has a say in the decisions affecting the pedagogical organization of the school. It may, in particular, help choose the services to be offered to students with learning difficulties.

The cycle team also has decisions to make. It must, among other things, plan how the students should be grouped in order to facilitate their learning progression (temporary groups according to fields of interest, projects, needs, etc.). It must also, in conjunction with the student services professionals, coordinate the various actions to be undertaken, in particular for special-needs students.

The teacher’s responsibility is to plan the learning situations that will take place in the classroom. He or she must make allowances for the changes or adjustments required to meet the needs of certain students. These changes or adjustments may be made in terms of both the tasks to be carried out and the expectations with regard to the students’ behaviours or environment. All the operations pertaining to the planning of learning situations can be carried out by a pair of teachers who are in charge of one group of students per cycle.

For this planning process to be carried out effectively, the pedagogical and educational aims must be clarified. Thus, the teachers and resource persons involved in the intervention must ask themselves, “Which learning situations will be suggested?” “How will evaluation be carried out?” “How will the school environment be managed?” “Which measures will be adopted in order to meet certain students’ specific needs?”

The intervention measures used with students with learning difficulties must originate in the classroom, since that is where most academic learning takes place. Effective classroom actions must satisfy certain conditions; for example, they must be flexible because they call for constant adjustment, and they must be strategic because they are centred on the means that best enable the students to learn.

Flexible action means that the intervention measures must be constantly regulated, based on the information obtained through observation of the students. This regulation is carried out concurrently with the classroom activities.

The aim of strategic action is to focus on the student’s learning approach. It must thus take into account his or her prior knowledge and level of motivation, using cognitive and metacognitive strategies. It also makes transfer of learning a priority.

Strategic action encourages students to get involved, and thus is largely given over to cooperative learning. Furthermore, it is based on learning situations that reflect the emphasis placed on adhering as closely as possible to the students’ fields of interest and abilities. This emphasis is particularly important when it comes to helping motivate students with learning difficulties.

Flexible, strategic action gives priority to differentiated interventions and makes the collaboration of the student services staff an essential element. To this end, the work of the remedial specialist is indispensable in terms of the assistance to be given to students with learning difficulties. This work, like that of other professionals, must be done in the classroom insofar as possible. Thus, everyone must explore innovative ways of intervening.

2. Claude Lessard, “L’obligation de résultats, de moyens ou de compétences : l’affaire de tout le monde ou l’affaire de chacun?”, *Vie pédagogique*, no. 125, November-December 2002, p. 22. [Free translation].

Intervention, as described above, can be adapted to both special and regular classes, and is just as relevant in secondary school as in elementary school. However, regardless of whom it is used with, it must be evaluated.

Periods of reflection and review can be useful in conducting this evaluation. They allow for critical analysis of the actions undertaken and the results obtained, and for constant fine-tuning of the intervention.

Although periods of reflection and review are primarily an individual undertaking, they also have a collective dimension. Thus, all those who work with a student must evaluate the scope of their interventions in concert. This cooperative approach helps make the most of each individual's resources and talents, and also fosters mutual support and the exploration of new ways of doing things.

Reflection and review is a gateway to innovation. Unique approaches are developed by examining past actions and constantly seeking methods that best meet students' needs.

3.3 Organization

Good educational organization is key to providing effective support. This organization must promote the use of intervention measures that are consistent, monitored and established in partnership.

Educational organization is a responsibility that must be shared by all resource people in the school. Moreover, each individual must help implement methods and measures that meet the cognitive and emotional needs of the students.

Effective educational organization reflects a concern for the situation of all students and for the choices made with them in mind. It must therefore help prevent the use of practices that do not contribute to the students' success.

Effective educational organization must:

- focus on consistent intervention measures that provide continuity with those already undertaken
- optimize the competencies of the various resource persons in the school
- give priority to winning educational practices aimed at

avoiding grade repetition

- establish a solid partnership with parents and the community
- provide adequate supervision

3.3.1 Focus on consistent intervention measures that provide continuity with those already undertaken

Intervention measures designed to help students with learning difficulties are often fragmented. Certain actions are undertaken at a given point in the student's educational path, but are not continued due to the turnover of resource persons, the various transitions experienced by the students during their progression through school or insufficient interaction with services offered outside the school. The school must make considerable efforts to ensure the use of consistent intervention measures that are based on a comprehensive vision. It must also see to implementing collaboration and consultation practices with all of its partners.

These practices require time. Several schools have explored different ways of freeing up time, in particular for the purpose of scheduling meetings among the members of the cycle teams. For example, some schools have changed students' schedules. Regardless of the formulas chosen, time must be set aside to allow resource persons to learn to work differently and in concert.

3.3.2 Optimize the competencies of the various resource persons in the school

Intervention for students with learning difficulties must be envisaged from a problem-solving perspective whereby each resource person's expertise is optimized. Thus, the members of the student services staff must make their contribution to supporting students, either by working directly with them or by assisting the teacher.

Remedial specialists play a role of paramount importance, and their contribution to the work of the cycle team is essential. Their intervention measures must be based on the courses of action presented in Chapter 4 of this document, and must be carried out, wherever possible, in collaboration with the teacher and in a classroom setting.

Only by taking full advantage of each individual's competencies can resource persons truly hope to help students with difficulties without running the risk of wearing themselves out. This is also the best way of finding alternatives to grade repetition.

3.3.3 Give priority to winning educational practices aimed at avoiding grade repetition

Some resource persons in the school believe that grade repetition is an effective way of helping students with learning difficulties. However, on the whole, the findings of scientific studies show that the opposite is true. One such study, a longitudinal research study conducted on two groups of low achievers, one that repeated a grade and one that did not, shows the ineffectiveness of grade repetition. This study shows that "two years after having repeated a grade, the grade repeater's academic results are comparable to those of a student of equal strength, who has been promoted to a higher grade."³ In addition, most researchers report negative consequences such as loss of self-esteem, lack of motivation and dropping out of school.

These conclusions exhort resource persons to do everything in their power to avoid grade repetition. The decision to have a student complete an additional year in a given cycle, after having already spent two years in that cycle, should be a rare occurrence, and it is important that such a decision be taken only once all other possible courses of action have been contemplated. Several of these courses of action are presented in Chapter 4 of this document. The system of multiyear cycles is another option.

Although they represent, first and foremost, a space-time in which students can progress at their own pace, multiyear cycles are also a form of organization that facilitates assistance for students with difficulties. This system allows the cycle team, including the student services staff, to explore various methods that are more conducive to supporting the students' learning. It also helps the team plan, organize and evaluate different ways of better satisfying students' needs.

The system of multiyear cycles is conducive to differentiated teaching. It allows students to be grouped according to their fields of interest, their needs, or a particular project, and enables the sharing of tasks. Thus, members of the student services staff can equip the teacher so as to facilitate his or her pedagogical management.

In addition, the system of multiyear cycles encourages resource persons to use innovative teaching supervision formulas that meet students' needs more effectively and prevent them from having to repeat grades. It facilitates the use of intervention measures not only at the end of an educational path, but throughout the cycle.

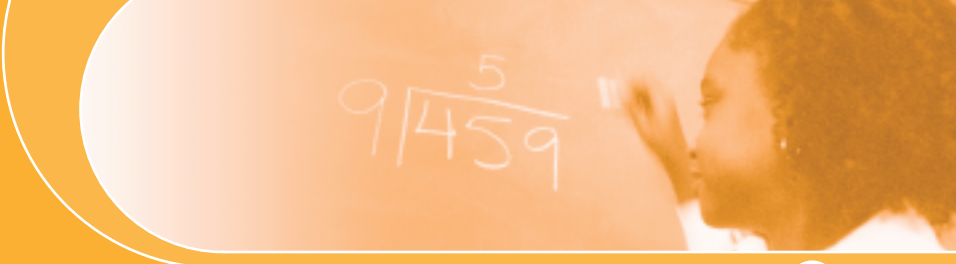
3.3.4 Establish a solid partnership with parents and the community

A solid partnership with parents is essential to students' success, in particular to those with learning difficulties. Numerous studies have shown the positive effects of school-family collaboration on students: increased motivation, improved behaviour, more positive attitudes toward school and schoolwork and a reduction in the dropout rate.

Parental commitment is just as important in secondary school as it is in elementary school, although it may take different forms. It is indispensable for the support of any student experiencing difficulties.

There are also numerous community resources that can contribute to students' success at school, including municipal services, cultural groups, CLSCs, social services, and so forth. Several projects have been developed in this regard.⁴

3. Louise Pouliot and Pierre Potvin, "La puce à l'oreille au sujet du redoublement," *Vie pédagogique*, no. 116, September-October 2000, p. 51 [Free translation].
4. "L'école et la communauté : main dans la main pour la réussite scolaire," *Le Petit Magazine des services complémentaires*, vol. 3, no 1, Fall 2001.

A student is shown from the side, writing on a chalkboard. The chalkboard displays a long division problem: 5 is written above the 4 in 459, and 9 is written to the left of 459. The student's hand is visible, holding a piece of chalk.
$$\begin{array}{r} 5 \\ 9 \overline{) 459} \end{array}$$

The school-community partnership can sometimes take the form of a service offer to the community. For example, some schools develop projects aimed at getting their students involved in the community. Such projects serve the twofold purpose of bolstering the students' self-esteem and being useful to the community.

In order to maximize the participation of both the parents and the community representatives, the school administrators, teachers and other resource persons must explore different ways of forging partnerships with them, founded on a climate of trust and collaboration. Two-way communication, with both parties' viewpoint being taken into consideration, constitutes another fundamental aspect. Moreover, the actions undertaken by the various partners must be coordinated by the school administration. They must be part of a global vision and help students along the road to success.

3.3.5 Provide adequate supervision

Schools must be able to rely on adequate supervision in order to create a climate conducive to learning. This requires the establishment of clear rules jointly with the students, and collaboration with the family in order to find common solutions to the problems encountered.

Putting in place an adequate supervision structure also means intervening so as to support students who are at risk of developing behavioural problems. For some of these students, more emphasis may have to be placed on training in social skills, interpersonal communication and problem solving, in conjunction with the competencies in the Québec Education Program.

In secondary school, the creation of stable groups of students for basic subjects, supervised by a teacher-tutor, appears to be a winning condition. In this respect, Vitaro and Gagnon⁵ give the example of a study conducted on a group of students who received such supervision. The findings showed that fewer of the students who were supervised in this way dropped out of school, and the rate of absenteeism was lower than that of the control group four years after the study was conducted.

On the other hand, the students in the control group, who did not receive the same supervision, performed more poorly in school, were absent more frequently and experienced greater self-esteem problems.

The supervision of students with learning difficulties can also take the form of mentoring, although certain conditions must be met if this measure is to be effective. For example, mentoring must be designed to respond to a specific need experienced by the student, and the mentors must be available at all times. Mentoring also seems to be more effective if it is provided by older students or resource persons in the school.

Effective support for students with learning difficulties must be based on an adequate evaluation of their situation and on properly thought-out intervention measures, characterized by flexible, strategic actions and subsequent periods of reflection and review.

Good educational organization is another indispensable element of effective support. Such organization must target consistent interventions, optimal use of the competencies of resource persons, quality educational practices, a solid partnership and adequate supervision.

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5. Frank Vitaro and Claude Gagnon, *Prévention des problèmes d'adaptation chez les enfants et les adolescents : les problèmes externalisés*, vol. II (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2000), p. 134.

Courses of action

The need to support students with learning difficulties underscores the importance of concerted action throughout the system. All resource persons are encouraged to work on implementing concrete actions to support students who have or are at risk of developing learning difficulties. By working together, they can succeed in establishing a common focus and better target their actions.

Eight courses of action are advocated here. The first deals with the period that precedes the beginning of school, while the second focuses more specifically on preschool students. The last six address mainly elementary and secondary students, but can apply to preschool students as well.

The actions suggested must be carried out through the closest possible involvement with the student, i.e. in the school and in the classroom, and in collaboration with the family and the community.

4.1 Ensure the continuity of services when the child begins school

Several factors influence children's development and their subsequent adjustment to the school environment, in particular life habits (diet, hygiene, sleep patterns), behaviour (interaction with adults and peers) and other skills (cognitive, language, motor or attentional). Parental attitudes are also decisive.

Early screening and intervention are just some of the many methods used by the CLSCs to influence the risk and protective factors that have an impact on children's development. For example, some CLSCs offer home visits by nurses in order to assist the parents of newborns or, where necessary, direct them to the appropriate specialized services. Special services are also offered by the CLSCs and rehabilitation centres to very young disabled children or children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Some parents receive the occasional home visit from special education teachers who provide them with guidance in their parental attitudes. These educators are of invaluable assistance in nipping certain problems in the bud, in particular behavioural problems. Other parents belong to groups that are supervised by specialists. Self-help groups are also a source of considerable assistance, since they bring parents out of their isolation and help them develop a network of useful contacts.

In addition, early childhood centres offer services designed to exert a positive influence on children's development. There are also various prevention programs for preschool-age children from socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, some of which target the overall development of at-risk children aged 0 to 4, while others focus more specifically on family literacy and are intended for three- or four-year-olds.¹

1. For more information on literacy programs, contact the Centre de ressources sur l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture at the following address: <http://www.petitmonde.qc.ca/Eveil/default.asp>.

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Children accumulate many life experiences before beginning school, all of which influence their development and adjustment to the school environment. Schools must take into account the interventions that were carried out before the child began school, and their actions must be consistent with what has already been undertaken if the child is to succeed.

4.2 Implement measures that foster student success beginning in preschool

Numerous research findings have demonstrated the effectiveness of early intervention,² but much remains to be done before schools make it a priority. Greater effort must be devoted to implementing the first line of action of the Policy on Special Education, which stresses the importance of prevention and early intervention. It is in this perspective that the implementation of measures fostering student success is advocated starting in preschool.

A study reviewed by Gérald Boutin³ shows that “the majority of school dropouts are students who were low achievers in written language skills as of the first year of elementary school and who, for the most part, come from culturally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.” Martinez⁴ considers that writing-related learning is a way of helping children aged two to six avoid academic failure.

Consequently, the focus must be placed on stimulation to enhance literacy as soon as the child enters preschool. Special attention must be given to children

from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often have had little contact with writing or language-related stimulation before entering kindergarten. Close collaboration must also be established with their parents.

The fourth competency to be acquired by students in the preschool education program is communication using the resources of language. Thus, the intervention measures carried out at the preschool level must promote the ability to read and write, and be applied to meaningful, real-life situations. Offering children numerous opportunities to be in contact with books, to write, and to use reading and writing in a playful fashion are ways of creating a stimulating, meaningful environment. Two videocassettes, entitled *Des mots qui parlent*⁵ and *L'émergence de l'écrit*⁶ provide interesting ideas in this regard.

The effectiveness of interventions in phonological awareness⁷ conducted at preschool and in the first year of elementary school is widely recognized. According to Saint-Laurent, the research “suggests that the development of phonological awareness skills should be a priority for a considerable number of students who are at risk or have difficulty learning to read.”⁸

Activities used to develop phonological awareness must be carried out in a context that is meaningful to students. A five-year-old will find it meaningless to work with sounds where no context is provided, but will enjoy herself considerably trying to find a word that rhymes with the name of a friend.

In addition, preschool interventions must be based on the development of other competencies prescribed by the Québec Education Program: to interact harmoniously with others, to affirm his/her personality, to perform sensorimotor actions effectively in different contexts, to complete an activity or project and to construct his/her understanding of the world. However, they must on occasion focus more specifically on certain behaviours or attitudes that can hamper learning, such as a delay in the development of attentional skills, behavioural problems, etc.

2. Several references to this research can be found in the book by Bernard Terrisse and Gérald Boutin entitled *La famille et l'éducation de l'enfant, de la naissance à six ans* (Montréal: Logiques, 1994), p. 65.

3. Gérald Boutin and Bernard Terrisse, *La famille et l'éducation de l'enfant, de la naissance à six ans* (Montréal: Logiques, 1994), p. 94 [Free translation].

4. Jean-Paul Martinez, “La coopération famille-école et l'apprentissage précoce du langage écrit” in *La famille et l'éducation de l'enfant, de la naissance à six ans* (Montréal: Logiques, 1994), p. 93-104.

5. *Des mots qui parlent*, [video recording], directed by Georgette Goupil (Montréal: Département de l'audiovisuel de l'UQAM, 2000), VHS cassette.

6. *L'émergence de l'écrit*, [video recording], directed by Georgette Goupil (Montréal: Département de l'audiovisuel de l'UQAM, 2000), VHS cassette.

7. Phonological awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate the sounds of language, i.e. the ability to analyze and reconstruct words from their components, syllables and phonemes (see <www.nald.ca/NALDNEWS/99winter/opening.htm>).

8. Lise Saint-Laurent, *Enseigner aux élèves à risque et en difficulté au primaire* (Boucherville: Gaëtan Morin, 2002), p. 145 [Free translation].

To achieve satisfactory results, intervention requires certain conditions. It must:

- be part of regular classroom activities
- take into account the student's zone of proximal development⁹
- be carried out in collaboration with the parents

Carrying out intervention measures in the classroom on a regular basis ensures that preventive action will be effective. Thus, intervention is more beneficial when carried out several times a week rather than occasionally.

The active participation of parents is another key element. Research in this regard highlights the importance of establishing a partnership with the parents with a view to achieving positive results in early intervention. "Parental participation in an early literacy and learning program points to a positive outcome for the child and, in the long term, a reduction in the rate of academic failure."¹⁰

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Prevention and early intervention aim to reduce the rate of student failure. At the preschool level, actions focus more particularly on stimulation to enhance literacy and the development of phonological awareness, as well as on the development of the other competencies prescribed in the Québec Education Program.

These actions are more effective when they are conducted in the classroom on a regular basis and in collaboration with the parents.

4.3 Focus on the teacher-student relationship

According to certain beliefs, only those factors linked to the student and his or her family and socioeconomic background have a impact on educational success. Other convictions call into question factors associated with the school, particularly the teacher-student relationship. What influence does this aspect have on learning, and what is its impact on student motivation?

Let us look at this question from the viewpoint of young people. When they are asked what a "good teacher" is, their answers converge toward two main elements: quality of human contact and teaching ability. They say, "The teacher is the one who makes all the difference. She's the one on whom it all depends: if she's not interested in explaining things to us, if she's not interested in us, period, then we definitely won't enjoy learning or coming to school."¹¹ These interviews, conducted in 1985, also reveal that young people are sensitive to how they are received in the classroom and the school, and that students want to be respected as persons in their own right and not merely as learners.

A recent study confirms the information gathered in 1985. The following is an excerpt:

Young students give priority to the emotional/relational role when assessing or judging their teacher, and attach great importance to this aspect of the pedagogical relationship. Older students, i.e. those who are completing elementary school or are at the beginning of secondary school, gradually begin to focus on the cognitive aspect of the pedagogical relationship, without totally disregarding the emotional aspect of their relationship with the teacher. Students experiencing difficulties at school tend to give priority to the emotional/relational aspect of this relationship, with some of them even going so far as to build their school experience on their relationship with the teacher.¹²

As can be observed in the above example, the emotional dimension is of paramount importance to learning. Indeed, for students with learning difficulties, whether at the elementary or the secondary level, the student-teacher relationship is the most important thing. They want to establish a positive, motivating relationship with their teacher that is not solely defined by academic learning. Often, this relationship is what sparks their motivation to learn.

9. A student's zone of proximal development is defined as the student's range of ability with and without assistance from a teacher or a more capable peer (see <www.wcer.wisc.edu/step/ep301/Spr2000/Jenna-B/zpd.html>).

10. Gérald Boutin and Bernard Terrisse (1994), p. 102 [Free translation].

11. Luce Brossard and Michelle Provost, "Portraits de bons profs," *Vie pédagogique*, no. 39, November 1985, p. 19 [Free translation].

12. Gaëlle Espinosa, "La relation maître-élève dans sa dimension affective : un pivot pour une différenciation des pratiques pédagogiques enseignantes?," taken from *L'affectivité dans l'apprentissage*, compilation under the supervision of Louise Lafortune and Pierre Mongeau (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2002), p. 164 [Free translation].

An article from the magazine *Vie pédagogique*, published in 1998, sheds interesting light on the attitudes conducive to effective teacher-student communication:

It would seem that teachers who, in general, are stimulating, enthusiastic, encouraging, warm, tolerant, polite, tactful, confident, flexible and democratic, who are not seeking personal recognition, who care little about whether they are liked, who are expressive, who are capable of overlooking young people's prejudices, who are good at expressing their feelings, who know how to pay attention to students both individually and as a group, who place themselves close to students when speaking to them, who use physical contact in a socially appropriate manner, who are genuinely interested in the students, their problems and ideas, who are attentive to any sign of confusion or inattention on their part, who smile, who use humour and who tell personal anecdotes during the course, exert a positive influence on students' learning and well-being.¹³

Like younger students, students with learning difficulties need a healthy emotional climate in order to learn, and this aspect is also important for older students. It should also be noted that all students need to have passionate, motivated teachers.

By listening to young people, recognizing the value of what they have to say and giving them undivided attention, teachers will be better equipped to meet their relational needs.

Many qualities, perhaps, for just one person, but the above list provides several elements for reflection. It is undoubtedly an ideal toward which teachers who wish to build a meaningful relationship with their students can strive.

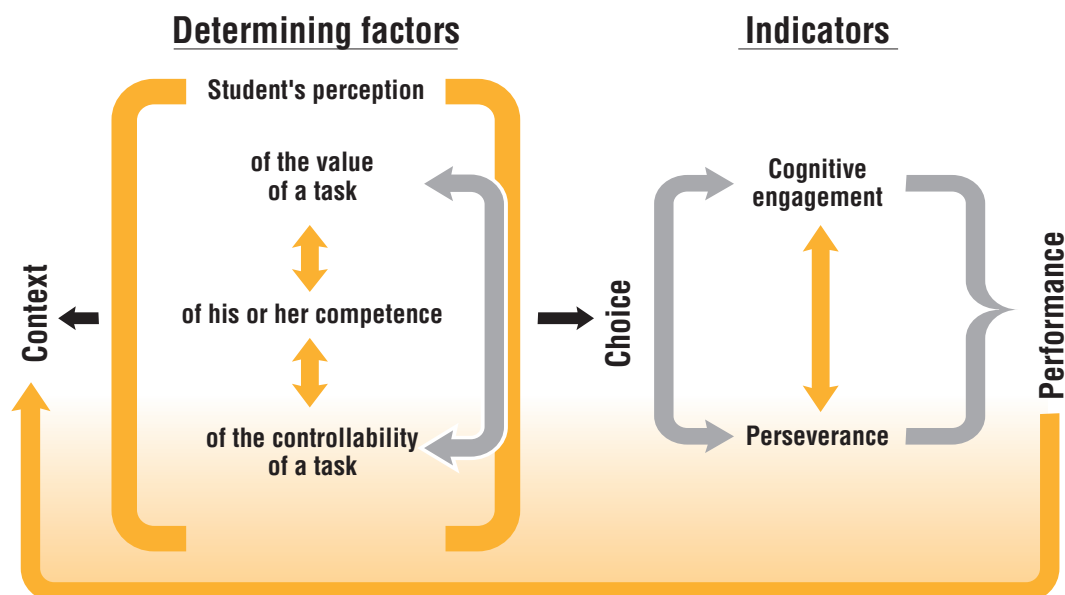
4.4 Use motivation as a lever for learning

Motivation plays an essential role in the learning process. But what makes a student motivated? How can motivation be triggered and then maintained?

According to the sociocognitive approach, motivation is the result of interactions between an individual's behaviour, personal characteristics and environment.¹⁴ Thus, a student's motivation is not determined solely by him or her, but also by his or her family and school environment. All these elements interact to create a motivational dynamic.

According to Viau,¹⁵ there are three determining factors in a student's motivation:

- the student's perception of the value of a task
- the student's perception of his or her ability to carry out a task
- the student's perception of the controllability of a task



*Source: Rolland Viau, *La motivation en contexte scolaire* (Éditions du Renouveau pédagogique: Québec, 1994), p. 32

13. Clermont Gauthier, Stéphane Martineau and Danielle Raymond, "Schéhérazade ou comment faire de l'effet en enseignant," *Vie pédagogique*, no. 107, Québec, April-May 1998, p. 25 [Free translation].

14. Clermont Gauthier et al., April-May 1998, p. 27.

15. Rolland Viau, *La motivation en contexte scolaire* (Québec: Éditions du Renouveau pédagogique, 1994), p. 33.

The student's perception of the value of a task

Students engage more easily in the learning process when the activities presented appear relevant and meaningful. They are also better able to sustain their efforts even when they encounter difficulties. However, if they feel that what they have been asked to do is not relevant, they will give up the task at the slightest obstacle.

"Research conducted on the topic leads us to believe that the level of interest determines not only the quality of students' comprehension and productivity, but also the emotional quality of their learning."¹⁶ The carrying out of meaningful tasks is thus one of the cornerstones of the intervention measures used with students who have learning difficulties.

The goals pursued by students also have an influence on their perception of the value of the task. These goals may be social or educational. Social goals (making friends, being part of the gang) represent, for some students, the main reason for attending school, but they are not sufficient to trigger engagement and perseverance. Educational goals must also be set.

Educational goals encompass everything that is related to learning and are essential to motivation. Indeed, "the more a student considers a task important because it helps him achieve important learning, the more he engages therein on a cognitive level and the more he perseveres in its completion."¹⁷

Educational goals may be envisaged in the short, medium or long term. Young students will focus mainly on short-term goals, but as they grow older, long-term educational goals become more important. Older students no longer engage in the learning process solely for the pleasure of learning, but also with a view to practising the profession or trade of their choice.

Long-term goals play an important role in the motivation of adolescents, conditioning the way they perceive a task. "A student whose aspirations are clear and whose goals for achieving them are planned within a given time frame is better able to perceive the value of a task, even if it provides no immediate reward."¹⁸

Young people who are unable to project themselves into the future and who have few aspirations generally avoid getting involved in activities that require effort and perseverance, preferring those that bring immediate satisfaction.

The guidance-oriented approach is an effective way of helping these young people formulate a vision of the future and establish objectives over the longer term. It can thus contribute to the pursuit of educational goals.

The student's perception of his or her ability to carry out a task

The student's perception of his or her ability to carry out a task influences his or her cognitive engagement and learning perseverance. Cognitive engagement is defined as the use of learning strategies and their adjustment to different situations. For example, a student who has experienced failure on several occasions will avoid getting involved in an activity if he deems that he does not have the abilities required to see it through satisfactorily. Obviously, he will not seek to use learning strategies, and still less to adjust them.

The input of parents and teachers has a direct impact on how a student judges herself. Thus, her parents' comments on her ability to carry out a given learning activity will influence the way she evaluates her competencies. In the same way, she will be affected by the perception of her teachers, their comments and the type of evaluation they use.

Most students with learning difficulties have problems judging themselves accurately, tending to consider their abilities superior or inferior to what they actually are. For this reason, they must be taught to perceive their abilities more accurately. According to Viau, "The ideal way for a student to bolster his opinion of his abilities is to repeatedly accomplish an activity that he did not think himself capable of accomplishing initially."¹⁹

16. Jean Archambault and Roch Chouinard, *Vers une gestion éducative de la classe* (Boucherville: Gaëtan Morin, 1996), p. 118 [Free translation].

17. Rolland Viau, *La motivation en contexte scolaire* (Québec: Éditions du Renouveau pédagogique, 1994), p. 51 [Free translation].

18. Ibid., p. 48 [Free translation].

19. Rolland Viau (1994), p. 61 [Free translation].



The student's perception of the controllability of a task

In order to undertake a task, students need to feel that they have the necessary abilities. They must also be convinced that they have power over the task in question. This is the feeling of controllability, which stems from hypotheses formulated by the student to explain his or her successes and failures. For example, if a student believes that he has failed due to a lack of intelligence, he will feel powerless and discouraged, because he has no control over the cause of this failure. However, if he attributes his failure to a lack of effort or poor strategy, he will tend to feel that he exerts a certain control over the situation, and can thus reason that if he had made more effort or chosen a better strategy, he would have succeeded. He will therefore be more motivated and ready to undertake the tasks assigned to him.

Students with learning difficulties sometimes minimize the importance of making an effort, tending to attribute greater value to intelligence. Indeed, students who succeed with little effort are generally perceived by their peers as being intelligent. It is thus imperative to remind students that effort plays an essential role, and to demonstrate that learning is difficult. Otherwise they will avoid engaging in learning activities they are not certain of accomplishing successfully, in order to preserve their self-esteem and the image they present to their peers. This attitude will only accentuate their difficulties.

To make students with learning difficulties feel that they have power over a task, they must be assigned activities that constitute a challenge for them. If the task is too easy, they will attribute their success to the low level of difficulty rather than their own abilities. If it is too hard, they will refuse to undertake it for fear of failure. In addition, it is better to avoid qualifying the task as being easy to carry out, because if they fail, they will be convinced that they are truly incompetent. "How can I be intelligent and competent if I can't even succeed at the easiest task?" they may wonder. It is better to clearly explain to the students the efforts they will have to make and the importance of using the appropriate strategies.

Thus, an effective means of helping them develop their feeling of competence is to teach them learning strategies and show them when and how to use them. In general, students with learning difficulties do not realize that many of their problems are due to the use of the wrong strategy. "Students with difficulties would have greater confidence in their abilities to use appropriate learning strategies if they were convinced that they have the skills and abilities necessary to use them and believed in the important role played by these strategies in success."²⁰

Like any other students, those with learning difficulties are more motivated when they feel capable of learning, and understand the relevance of the activities proposed. The following intervention measures can be used to sustain their motivation.

- Suggest varied, stimulating, meaningful learning activities that incorporate realistic challenges.
- Use differentiated teaching to enable each student to acquire and improve upon his or her competencies.
- Explain to the students the pertinence of the activities carried out in the classroom, and emphasize the importance of making an effort.
- Encourage the students to pursue educational goals.
- Make the teachers and parents aware of the role they play in motivating their students or children.
- Help students use and manage learning strategies.

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²⁰Jean Archambault and Roch Chouinard (1996), p. 120 [Free translation].

4.5 Foster the development of effective learning strategies

In recent years, research in the field of education has demonstrated the importance of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the learning process. Students with learning difficulties are at a disadvantage, since their strategies tend to be deficient or ineffective.²¹ Some of these strategies—such as memorization strategies—are general in application since they are used in all types of learning.

Memory and memorization strategies

Various research findings, such as those of Jacques Tardif,²² highlight the fundamental role played by memory in the learning process. Students with learning difficulties often have memorization problems.

According to Swanson, the main weaknesses of students with learning difficulties concern working memory.²³ These weaknesses are caused by limited memorization strategies. “With respect to long-term memory, the weaknesses observed among students with learning difficulties are generally considered to result from problems in the earlier stages of the cognitive process (working memory, attention or perception) or the use of ineffective strategies to process information.”²⁴

Intervention measures that promote maximum memory use must be designed to help students achieve success; they must encourage students to use both their working memory and their long-term memory better.

Our working memory has a limited capacity; in other words, it can hold only a small quantity of information at a given time. To avoid overloading their working memory, students must learn to bundle information. Teachers can show them how to use semantic charts, concept networks and other procedures to help them bundle information. It is important to note that a con-

cept network uses only one memory unit, while a series of unlinked concepts can quickly swamp memory capacity.

The working memory can retain information only for a limited period of time. To conserve this information and later place it in the long-term memory, students must use a range of strategies, such as repetition, visualization, bundling by category, or comparison with other information already stored in the long-term memory.²⁵ These are all strategies that students can be taught, especially students with learning difficulties.

The long-term memory has unlimited capacity, and can store information for extended periods. For ease of access, the information must be organized. The use of diagrams is a good way to improve organization.

Students’ ability to memorize information can be developed if, as suggested by Saint-Laurent,²⁶ they are shown how to do so. First, the teacher must act as a model, by telling the students how to proceed in order to retain a particular piece of information. Next, the teacher must help the students establish links between their existing knowledge and the information they have just received.

Memory functions are improved by a proper use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in school subjects.²⁷ The strategies must be targeted as essential elements in the intervention measures used with students with learning difficulties.

21. Lise Saint-Laurent et al., *Programme d'intervention auprès des élèves à risque* (Boucherville: Gaëtan Morin, 1995), p. 32.

22. Jacques Tardif, *Pour un enseignement stratégique* (Montréal: Logiques, 1992).

23. H. L. Swanson, “Information Processing: An Introduction,” in D. K. Reid, W. P. Hresko and H. L. Swanson (ed.), *Cognitive Approaches to Learning Disabilities*, 3rd edition (Austin, Texas: Pro-Ed, 1996), p. 252-286.

24. Lise Saint-Laurent, *Enseigner aux élèves à risque et en difficulté au primaire* (Boucherville: Gaëtan Morin, 2002), p. 152 [Free translation].

25. According to Jacques Tardif, long-term memory is a “vast reservoir of knowledge that includes all that a person knows about the world, whatever the type of knowledge concerned.” The knowledge can be social, emotional, motor or intellectual.

26. Lise Saint-Laurent (2002), p. 152.

27. Bernice Wong, *Learning about Learning Disabilities* (British Columbia: Academic Press, 1998), p. 146.

Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies are procedures used to solve a problem or carry out a task. They are of primary importance in the learning process, and it is important to teach them, especially those relating to reading, writing, problem solving and memorization. The following table presents several examples of strategies that can be used in these areas.

Possible cognitive strategies

Target area	Reading	• Explore the structure of the text to guide the search for meaning • Skim the text in order to get an idea of the content (title, illustrations, subtitles, sections) • Predict what will happen next based on what has already been read • Retain the main elements of the information gathered from the content²⁸
	Writing	• Specify the purpose for writing and keep it in mind • Predict the sequence of events or the content of the text • Refer to the information of the writing project or to outside support • Ask oneself whether what is written is actually what one means²⁹
	Problem solving	• Use various reference frameworks to address a problem or situation • Refer to similar problems solved in the past • Ask questions • Explore possible solutions
	Memorization	• Repeat the information • Visualize the information • Bundle the information by category • Establish links with previously acquired information

Knowledge of learning strategies makes learning easier, and also improves motivation. Showing students how to read an informational text, take notes or solve a problem, for example, is an excellent way to help them control a task, become more engaged therein and, as a result, learn more easily. In addition, if the strategies become automatic, space will be freed up in the working memory and it will be more functional. For this reason, it is important to practise the strategies repeatedly to ensure that they are applied automatically.

Metacognitive strategies

Metacognition is “knowledge about one’s own mental processes and the use of that knowledge to manage or control them.”³⁰ Metacognition is based, first, on the knowledge a person has of his or her own way of learning and of learning strategies; and, second, on his or her ability to regulate or adjust those strategies.

Metacognitive strategies can be used to plan or evaluate a task, as well as to support motivation and control emotions. Most students with learning difficulties, however, find it difficult to use metacognitive strategies, and this tends to maintain the negative learning experience/low motivation dynamic. Teachers must show students how to use metacognitive strategies to break out of this vicious circle.

28. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Education Program* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2001), p. 91 [Free translation].

29. Ibid, p. 93 [Free translation].

30. Louise Lafortune, Pierre Mongeau and Richard Pallascio, *Métacognition et compétences réflexives* (Sainte-Foy: Logiques, 1998), p. 314 [Free translation].

Use of strategies for intervention

It is possible to improve students' chances of success by encouraging them to use strategies properly. "However, simply teaching the strategies does not seem to have a significant effect on the students' motivation to use them; other intervention measures must also be used to address emotional and motivational variables."³¹ This is why students must be helped to establish the connection between their own efforts and success and failure. They must also be made aware of the need to use the strategies properly in order to achieve success. Lastly, they must realize that a strategy that works for someone else may not work for them.

There are certain guidelines that must be followed in teaching strategies effectively. The main guidelines are as follows:

- the strategies must be taught in context, in other words in connection with a task
- it is better to teach a few strategies in depth than many strategies superficially
- the first strategies to be taught should be those of recognized effectiveness
- the students must be taught when and how to apply the strategies so that they can use them in a broader context
- the teacher must supervise the application of the strategies and provide feedback

Cognitive and metacognitive strategies play a key role in the learning process. If used effectively, they increase the chances of success. Students with learning difficulties have memory-related deficiencies because they use the wrong strategies to retain information. In addition, in many areas of learning at school, these students find it difficult to use appropriate cognitive and metacognitive strategies in a range of subjects.

This is why they must be taught a variety of strategies, particularly memorization strategies, such as repeating, visualizing or bundling information. Emotional and motivational aspects must also be taken into account.

4.6 Focus on reading at the elementary and secondary levels

The ability to read plays a fundamental role in the learning process. It is essential in the development of a range of academic competencies and has an important influence on them. For example, it is hard for a student to solve a problem or complete a project if he or she cannot understand written information. This, however, is a daily reality for many students with learning difficulties.

Ninety per cent of students with learning difficulties have reading problems,³² which begin at elementary school and continue into secondary school. For example, 75% of students who have reading problems in the third year of elementary school still have problems when they begin secondary school,³³ and reading problems are the main reason for failure at the secondary level.

Reading difficulties can be caused by individual factors or, in certain cases, be linked to pedagogical variables—for example, the overall concept of the act of reading. Some students are not focused on the meaning of reading, because the messages they receive lead them to believe that reading is a process of decoding.

In addition, research has shown that many students with learning difficulties show "weakness in terms of the metacognition needed both to identify words and manage comprehension,"³⁴ and that these students tend to avoid contact with books and writing.

Intervention must, as a first step, address the concept of the act of reading. Books must be placed in a prominent position in the classroom. The students must be encouraged to develop the desire to read, for example, by ensuring that they are surrounded by model readers. Reading to the students, and discussing what they themselves have read, is a powerful incentive.

Intervention must also target the effective use of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies, at both the elementary and secondary levels. The impact of intervention will be increased if it is incorporated into, and becomes a regular part of, everyday classroom life.

31. Jean Archambault and Roch Chouinard (1996), p. 142 [Free translation].

32. Lise Saint-Laurent (2002), p. 140.

33. Ibid., p. 137.

34. Lise Saint-Laurent (2002), p. 164 [Free translation].

Most people who work with students with learning difficulties believe that they should be given shortened or simplified texts to read. However, research³⁵ has shown that, like other students, students with learning difficulties benefit more from reading unabridged, interesting and substantial texts. Most students can read different types of texts, and even books, if they are given the necessary support.

Cooperative learning and peer tutoring are two interesting ways of varying reading approaches. Another way is for students to listen to a recording of texts that they will have to work with. Reading circles, which give students an opportunity to share their opinions on various types of text, are another tool that can be used.

Guided reading and reciprocal teaching³⁶ are two effective approaches for helping students with comprehension problems to practise reading while developing their ability to understand texts. Other approaches include story mapping and recall.³⁷

Teaching students to read is one of the main focuses of the early years of elementary education, but reading tends to get less attention as students progress through the school system. Research has shown, however, that it is necessary to accentuate the focus on reading, especially at the secondary level where reading is a fundamental competency that underlies all kinds of learning. It has been reported that “50% of secondary school students, or even 92% in certain cases, have difficulty reading effectively in order to learn.”³⁸ Particular emphasis should be placed on reading in the first years of both elementary and secondary education.

Various strategies have been designed to help students learn through reading. These strategies target secondary school students considered to be at risk in a reading-based learning context, and are summarized in the table below.

TABLE 6*

Characteristics of students with learning difficulties and intervention strategies for reading-based learning	
Possible characteristics of students with learning difficulties	Intervention strategy of relative effectiveness
Low general academic performance and reading ability • Reading comprehension problems • Difficulty processing information in texts other than narrative texts • Difficulty summarizing text • Information retention problems • Behaviour patterns aimed at avoiding reading • Perception that they receive a great deal of assistance from teachers • Reliance on a strategy requiring the teacher to read the texts	• Introduce study guides adapted to the student's needs and, at times, use them to direct discussion about reading • Introduce visual organizers and, at times, use them to direct reading • Explicitly teach various learning and self-regulation strategies that are useful in a classroom context • Present an audio recording of a text in addition to having students read it (integrate learning strategies during the reading) • Emphasize structured peer tutoring (practices and feedback) • Implement training sessions to acquire vocabulary (in the short term)

* Source: S. Cartier, *Apprendre en lisant à l'école : étude des interventions effectuées auprès d'élèves du secondaire qui éprouvent des difficultés d'apprentissage* (publication forthcoming) [Free translation].

35. Jocelyne Giasson, “L'intervention auprès des élèves en difficulté de lecture : bilan et perspectives,” *Éducation et francophonie*, online scientific journal XXV, no 2, Fall-Winter 1997, p. 4 (in French only), <<http://www.acelf.ca/revue/XXV2/articles/r252-05.html>>.

36. See Appendix V.

37. Ibid.

38. Sylvie Cartier and Manon Théorêt, *Lire pour apprendre : une compétence à maîtriser, mise en œuvre en première secondaire*, research report, September 2002, p. 5 [Free translation].

Regardless of the strategies used, intervention measures for reading must be differentiated, since this is one of the most effective ways to reach various types of readers. Support or remedial measures for students experiencing the most difficulty should also be planned.

In order to differentiate the intervention measures used for reading, all providers of student services must collaborate. For example, remedial specialists can help plan intervention measures intended to prevent reading-related learning difficulties. Speech therapists can help prepare and implement activities to develop phonological awareness. Psychologists can suggest approaches for teachers that will help the students acquire certain reading strategies.

Reading is extremely important for the development of many different competencies, and reading skills become increasingly important in many subjects at the secondary level. This is why reading must be made a focus of intervention at both the elementary and secondary levels, especially during the first cycle at each level.

Intervention approaches should use unabridged texts on topics the students find interesting. They should also be designed to encourage the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and to accommodate the application of differentiated teaching.

4.7 Remain aware of male/female achievement patterns

In recent years, a great deal of attention has been paid to the academic situation of male students, since it is clear that, in general, they are less likely than girls to achieve academic success. Although boys succeed as well as girls in mathematics and science at the elementary level, they succeed less well in reading and writing, a situation that continues right up to the end of secondary school.³⁹

During the preschool years, boys are twice as likely as girls to experience learning or adjustment difficulties,⁴⁰ and the situation continues throughout their years at school. Boys are also three times more likely to drop out of school than girls.

The differences in academic achievement between boys and girls seem to be linked, to a large extent, to their attitudes toward school. Girls display behaviour patterns associated with academic success: listening, participation, compliance with rules, etc., whereas boys tend to be more turbulent and more interested in games and sports than academic subjects.

Overall, girls have a culture made up of values, attitudes and behaviours that promote academic success, whereas boys have a culture that leads to difficulties and academic failure. However, neither culture nor social background alone can dictate success or failure.⁴¹

Some authors specifically identify two factors that can influence boys' and girls' attitudes toward school: gender and social background. According to this view, boys and girls perceive social roles based on the values promoted by their families, socioeconomic environment and peers. "In general, students (whether boys or girls) are more likely to achieve academic success if they are from a privileged background. Concerning gender as a variable, it is clear that girls perform better at school than boys, regardless of their social background, and that the gap between boys and girls is greater among students from more disadvantaged backgrounds."⁴²

Parents from a less privileged socioeconomic environment tend to promote gender-based values. For boys, types of behaviour seen as typically masculine are encouraged, i.e. individuality, aggressiveness, competition. For girls, another set of behaviour patterns, including gentleness, the ability to listen, and availability are promoted as more feminine.

39. Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *Pour une meilleure réussite scolaire des garçons et des filles* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec), 1999, p. 32.

40. Ibid., p. 32.

41. Pierrette Bouchard, Éric Meunier and Diane Veillette, *Comprendre et intervenir pour réduire les écarts de réussite scolaire entre garçons et filles*, microprogram on academic achievement, Université Laval, 2001-2002 school year, p. 8 [Free translation].

42. Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (1999), p. 33 [Free translation].

Teachers also have a role to play in the reproduction of gender-based stereotypes. The values they transmit and the behaviour patterns they promote for one or both genders influence the attitudes of their boy and girl students. Thus, girls are perceived in a more positive light than boys, because they are more likely to meet teachers' expectations.

Regardless of whether the differences between boys and girls are due to the persistence of gender stereotypes or other reasons, there is no longer any doubt that intervention measures must be differentiated, up to a point, for boys and girls. The emphasis must be placed on finding the best ways to achieve this objective.

Possible solutions

Several possible solutions have been explored in order to respond specifically to the different needs of boys and girls. The solutions are sometimes general, and sometimes more targeted. Most have received consensus support, but some are still hotly debated.

Opinions are divided as to the best way to meet the supervision needs of boys and girls. There is also controversy concerning a return to segregated, gender-based classes or schools.

With regard to student supervision, several authors state that intervention measures for boys and girls must necessarily be differentiated. In their view, boys require more supervision, particularly during adolescence. On the other hand, Chouinard and Blondin state that "the same standards of behaviour must be enforced and the same disciplinary techniques used for students of both sexes."⁴³

Some people have suggested that grouping students by gender is the best way to meet the respective needs of boys and girls. Others believe that segregation increases the rivalry between boys and girls, reduces the potential for friendship between the two sexes, and increases stereotyped behaviour patterns.⁴⁴

In this document, the emphasis is placed on a non-segregated approach based on differentiated teaching. Flexible organizational models, sometimes involving students of the same sex grouped for a limited period of time, are used.

Aside from the small number of elements on which they disagree, most authors tend to concur on several possible solutions. They suggest:

- making parents more aware of the effects of gender stereotypes on academic achievement
- helping fathers understand the importance of contributing to their children's emergent literacy
- presenting male role models that emphasize academic achievement
- ensuring that both boys and girls can develop a sense of belonging to their class and their school
- leaving students room to move around freely and take part in more physical activities
- keeping students interested by creating a rich environment that appeals to both boys and girls; for example, students can be offered a range of stimulating projects, and the use of computers in the classroom can be encouraged
- developing reading and writing skills among boys as well as girls by integrating reading and writing into a range of activities likely to appeal to all students; boys are generally more interested in action and adventure, while girls prefer texts that focus on emotions and interpersonal relationships
- paying more attention to the learning styles of students of both sexes
- making school staff more aware of the role they play in reproducing certain gender stereotypes, for example by providing information on teenage development and behaviour

43. Roch Chouinard and Eugénette Blondin, *Différences d'attitudes et de comportement en classe selon le sexe de l'enseignant et des élèves*, paper presented at the symposium *Organisation de la classe*, REF 98 colloquium, Toulouse, p. 14 [Free translation].

44. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

In an approach based on differentiated teaching, boys are as likely as girls to achieve educational success. The implementation of the reform should ensure that several new ways of meeting the needs of all students are explored.

Boys' educational achievement is a concern for schools, given that boys are more likely to fail and that more boys than girls drop out of school. A contributing factor to this phenomenon seems to be the notion of perpetuated sexual and social stereotypes.

Although it is clear that intervention is needed to ensure that stereotypes are not perpetuated, the initial focus must be on consideration of different ways of learning. Students must be offered learning conditions that are adapted to their individual characteristics, regardless of gender.

It is extremely important to continue to seek way to intervene in order to lessen the difficulties encountered by boys, while continuing to encourage the educational achievement of girls.

4.8 Take into account periods of vulnerability

During their academic careers, students sometimes experience situations at school or in their lives that can lead to learning difficulties. Examples include the various transitions between the preschool and secondary levels, and the range of problems they may encounter outside school, such as the separation of their parents, illness, death, etc.

4.8.1 The transition from preschool to elementary school and from elementary to secondary school

The transition from preschool to elementary school and from elementary to secondary school often undermines the continuity of students' education. These transitions should be designed, however, to allow students to continue to develop from one stage to the next.

For this reason, various ways to resolve the problems linked to the preschool-elementary transition are explored below, along with ways to establish bridges between the different levels of education.

Preschool-elementary transition

For students, there is a considerable difference between what they experience at the preschool level and what they experience when they reach elementary school. In preschool education, they are used to working in small groups and being able to move around in the classroom, handle objects and chat with their friends. Activities are often play-oriented and carried out in the form of projects.

In most elementary-level classrooms, starting immediately in Grade One, students have less freedom to move around and work in small groups only occasionally. In addition, activities are generally more static and rely less on the handling of objects. Children sometimes have to read, write or count as part of activities that are seemingly unconnected to their everyday lives or to a specific project.

It is important to reduce the gap between preschool and elementary education, and initiatives in this regard have already been undertaken in several schools. For example, some schools organize joint projects involving students from both preschool and Elementary Cycle One. Other schools schedule a visit by kindergarten students to an Elementary Cycle One class, at the end of the school year. These initiatives are promising, but are not enough to eliminate the difficulties that students encounter during transition from one level to the next. To ensure a more harmonious transition, adjustments must be made to the curriculum at both the preschool and elementary levels.

As pointed out by Martinez, "The pedagogical methods and practices emphasized at the kindergarten level are determining factors in whether or not a student will succeed in learning at school. The idea is to ensure learning continuity between the kindergarten level and the start of elementary education, rather than emphasizing the interruption between childcare-based kindergarten and essentially learning-based elementary classes."⁴⁵

45. Jean-Paul Martinez (1994), p. 97 [Free translation].



In preschool education, pride of place must be given to emergent literacy. The preschool education program deals with this aspect as part of the competency “to communicate using the resources of language.” As mentioned above, reading-related activities should be carried out in a meaningful context. Students should not be asked to learn a series of letters by heart or to do a series of exercises. Instead, teachers should take advantage of all the opportunities presented by the lives of five-year-olds to further their learning.

Children can also be gradually introduced to slightly more structured activities in which listening becomes increasingly important. They can also learn to focus more on controlling their behaviour. Obviously, this approach requires teachers to remain attentive and assist students experiencing difficulties.

In Elementary Cycle One, especially Grade One, time must be set aside for more play-oriented activities. The classroom must also be set up to allow students to handle and explore objects, and to take part in activities other than those based on pencils and paper. For example, each classroom should have a corner set aside for mathematics, where the students can measure, construct and explore objects. It is also a good idea to introduce cooperative writing activities.

The introduction of the new Québec Education Program should help establish activities based on children’s everyday lives and carried out as part of projects. Since one of the main goals of the program is to make students the principal agents of their learning process, classrooms should offer more activities in which students play an active, physical role and are able to move around. This should help establish a more continuous link between preschool and elementary education.

In addition, discussions between preschool and elementary-level teachers concerning student learning can help cement this link. It is also essential to share information on the individualized education plans of the students concerned.

All possible steps must be taken to ensure a smoother transition from preschool to elementary school. The steps include better harmonization of pedagogical practices, and greater cooperation among teachers.

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Elementary-secondary transition

In general, students arrive at secondary school at a time in their lives when they are already experiencing all the upheaval of puberty. According to Simmons and Blyth,⁴⁶ several changes that occur simultaneously, especially at the beginning of adolescence, can lead to problems for students, and these problems can be made worse by some of the characteristics of the school or student concerned.

Characteristics of the school

The size of the school is a factor that can influence the students’ ability to adapt. A large school, although it offers many opportunities to make friends, can also create isolation and communication problems. For some young people, dealing with a large number of new faces is a major challenge. Simmons and Blyth⁴⁷ state that, when girl students move to a large school, their self-esteem and leadership drops. In addition, both boys and girls tend to participate less in extracurricular activities than they would in a small school, and their academic performance is weaker. Lastly, they state that boys are more likely to become victims in a larger school, pointing to the need to create havens within big schools to instill a sense of belonging.

46. Dale A. Blyth and Roberta G. Simmons, *Moving into Adolescence, the Impact of Pubertal Change and School Context* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987), p. 304.

47. Ibid., p. 308.

The organization of instruction is another aspect that must be considered in terms of the students' ability to adapt to secondary school. In elementary school, students are part of a stable group supervised by a single teacher, whereas in secondary school they have to change classrooms, groups and teachers frequently. In addition, instruction is subject-specific, which can make things more difficult for students. Certain organizational models should therefore be reviewed in order to adapt and diversify the services provided.

Characteristics of the student

Students with high self-esteem, who are popular with their fellow students and get good marks, are likely to experience transitions positively, even if they are facing other changes inherent to adolescence. On the other hand, students who have learning or behavioural difficulties or low self-esteem, or who lack family support, are more likely to experience difficulties when they graduate to secondary school.

Intervention measures aimed at facilitating the transition from elementary to secondary school

To facilitate the transition from elementary to secondary school, it is important to reduce the number of changes students have to deal with. During the first years of secondary school, it may be a good idea to create a structure resembling elementary school, with students assigned to the same teacher for several subjects. In large schools, one wing could be set aside for Secondary Cycle One students. It may also be beneficial for teachers at the elementary and secondary levels to exchange information about their teaching methods, so that elementary school teachers can tailor some of their methods to the secondary school approach. Similarly, secondary school teachers could adjust their methods to ensure continuity with what their students experienced at the elementary level.

In addition, a key element in transitions is being able to maintain contact with peers. It appears that membership in a group has a positive influence on educational success and behaviour. Feldman and Elliot⁴⁸ describe a study in which some schools kept peer groups together

during transitions. The students in these peer groups had better academic results, adapted better and had fewer psychological problems than those in the control groups where students were not kept together. Monitoring over a four-year period showed that twice as many students in the control groups eventually dropped out of school.

The transition to secondary school occurs at a time when students have to face many different changes in their lives, and it is often difficult for them to deal with all the changes at the same time. Schools must reduce change to a minimum by offering students an environment that is not too unlike what they are used to. They must also improve students' ability to adapt by preserving their networks of friends. In this way, school will become a protective factor.

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4.8.2 Specific problems experienced by the student

Students can encounter various problems during their schooling. These problems, for example, divorce, the death of a relative, teenage pregnancy, physical and emotional abuse, etc., constitute risk factors and can be detrimental to their educational success.

Internalized and externalized problems are also risk factors for students' progression through school. It is important to note that teachers and other staff seem to be less concerned by internalized problems than externalized problems, even though the former impact on student success.

Internalized problems, such as simple phobia, separation anxiety, hyperanxiety and major depression,⁴⁹ affect girls more than boys. According to a survey by Santé Québec, girls have higher levels of psychological distress than boys.⁵⁰ They also have a higher hospitalization rate following suicide attempts, a situation that is not without consequences for their academic learning.

48. S. Shirley Feldman and Glen R. Elliot, *At the Threshold, the Developing Adolescent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 218.

49. Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *Pour une meilleure réussite scolaire des garçons et des filles*, (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1999), p. 29.

50. Ibid., p. 31.

Boys, on the other hand, tend to have more externalized problems such as hyperactivity, oppositional defiant disorder and behavioural problems.⁵¹ In addition, suicide is more common among boys than among girls.

Aggressive behaviour by elementary school students can continue into secondary school and lead to academic failure. “We may conclude that boys who are considered to be the most aggressive at a particular time prior to secondary school run a high risk of failure, and that boys with an ongoing aggressive condition have practically no chance of ‘survival’”⁵² (the author uses the term “survival” to mean the potential for pursuing one’s studies and not dropping out).

Aggressive behaviour during childhood seems to be part of a continuum that includes delinquent behaviour during adolescence. Often, this type of behaviour leads to alcohol and drug abuse.⁵³ It is thus important to act early, at the preschool stage, to bring into play the protective measures that can reduce risk factors. Prinz et al.⁵⁴ have identified three protective factors that can reduce the risk of behavioural problems, drug and alcohol abuse and academic failure. They are: family and social support, a positive school atmosphere and mastery of reading.

The importance of students’ life experience must not be minimized, and support must be provided as soon as they run into a difficult situation. The influence that one factor may have on another must also be taken into consideration. For example, for girl students, poverty and low academic achievement increase the risk of pregnancy during secondary school. The same factors may be the consequence of motherhood during adolescence, since teenage mothers are more likely to encounter academic difficulties and to experience difficult financial situations.

Teachers and student services staff play a crucial role for students who encounter problems, whether those problems are internalized or externalized. They must carry out their work in partnership with the health and social services and community resources concerned, as required by the situation.

Various factors such as divorce, the death of a relative or physical and emotional abuse can have a negative impact on academic achievement. The same is true of any problem, whether internalized or externalized by the student.

Students experiencing difficulties of this sort must be given support. Protective factors can also be used to reduce risk factors, whether provided by the family, the school or the social environment.

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This chapter discusses many different options concerning the transition from preschool to elementary school, and from elementary to secondary school. However, attention must also be given to students who graduate from school to the workforce, since some of them need support in order to achieve social or vocational integration.

This transition must be planned within the context of an individualized education plan, and carried out in collaboration with the various partners concerned, including health and social services institutions, employment agencies, etc.

Students with learning difficulties may need support as they move from one level of education to another. The support should, ideally, be defined by management practices that target student success, as discussed in the following chapter.

51. Conseil supérieur de l’éducation (1999), p. 29.

52. Richard E. Tremblay, “Les enfants violents à l’école primaire : qui sont-ils et que deviennent-ils?” in *La violence chez les jeunes* (Montréal: Sciences et culture, 1995), p. 138.

53. Ronald J. Prinz et al., *The Early Alliance Prevention Trial: A Dual Design to Test Reduction of Risk for Conduct Problems, Substance Abuse, and School Failure in Childhood* (New York: Elsevier Science Inc., 2000), p. 288.

54. Ibid., p. 288.

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54. Ibid., p. 288.

Management practices targeting student success

The objective of the reform, to ensure that as many students as possible achieve educational success, calls for a review of certain management practices. In particular, it is important to target:

- **an organizational structure focused on the school's mission**
- **diversified services adapted to students' abilities and needs**
- **a management style that fosters participation**
- **organizational choices made with a view to integrating students into regular classes or the neighbourhood school**
- **evaluation of the actions undertaken and their outcome**
- **a fair and transparent distribution of resources**
- **a concern for ensuring professional development for all school staff members**

5.1 An organizational structure focused on the school's mission

Schools must focus on their mission, which is to impart knowledge to students, foster their social development and provide them with qualifications. The various partnerships that schools establish with the community must be compatible with this mission, pursued within the framework of an educational project and implemented by means of a success plan. One of the goals of a success plan is to make it easier to determine the conditions that will allow all students, including students with difficulties, to succeed.

A school's mandate is primarily educational. In fulfilling this mandate, it must work in concert with health and social service providers and other partners, but assert its leadership for actions carried out within its walls. Although schools have considerable leeway in choosing the means that will enable them to fulfill their mission, they must always ensure that the actions other parties may propose are consistent with its own educational project.

5.2 Diversified services adapted to students' needs and abilities

Schools must take up the challenge of adapting their services to the needs and abilities of all students and of distancing themselves from a category-based approach to learning difficulties. This is a change that will require the collaboration of all partners.

Methods must be developed to identify students' needs and abilities and ensure a suitable response thereto, in particular by using individualized education plans. It is also necessary to address learning difficulties from an educational standpoint, whereby the identification of needs ensures that the most appropriate intervention measures are selected.

Innovative new methods of supporting students in their learning process must be explored, and schools must continue to tap into their creativity in order to set up a range of services that are genuinely adapted to the needs of their students.

5.3 A management style that fosters participation

The reform of the education system encourages power sharing, as stipulated in several provisions of the Education Act. This is why the choices made by schools and school boards must increasingly reflect a participatory approach in which all players have input in the decision-making process.

Several school boards have already implemented this kind of management style with school principals. Some schools have also adopted this approach to ensure that the school team has a say in decisions concerning pedagogical organization, especially as concerns the services to be offered to students with difficulties.

In a context of decentralization, all school staff members must be encouraged to take part in the organization of services. Moreover, the leadership of the school administration is indispensable in ensuring that all players target student success.

Participatory management ensures decision-making that is more reflective of the concerns of the group and encourages each member to play an active role in upholding these decisions.

5.4 Organizational choices made with a view to integrating students into regular classes or the neighbourhood school

Integration into regular classes and neighbourhood schools should be the first option considered to ensure the educational success of special-needs students. Integration reduces their level of isolation and marginalization, and also prepares them for life in society. However, a large number of students with learning difficulties are currently taught outside regular classes, in particular at the secondary level.

It is important for schools to establish policies and practices that promote the integration of students with learning difficulties into regular classes. To facilitate this integration, various choices must be made. For example, a school may decide to place most of its students with learning difficulties in regular classes, thereby freeing up a resource person to provide support.

In some cases, special classes are required. The decision to opt for this type of service should be made in response to the specific needs of a student or group of students, rather than on the basis of their assignment to a particular category of learning difficulties. It should also be backed up by an individualized education plan.

Ideally, special-needs students should mix with other students in the school, and take part in the same activities. In addition, with a view to consistency, they should come under the same organizational structure as the other students in their cycle.

To genuinely further integration, schools should ensure that special-education teachers have access to the same training programs as other teachers and are part of the cycle team. Schools should also focus on establishing integrated services that are in keeping with their mission and success plan.



5.5 Evaluation of the actions undertaken and their outcome

The actions taken by a school must be evaluated to ensure that they indeed foster success, in particular for students with learning difficulties. This evaluation must be based on individual and collective reflection on the actions taken.

Success plans must be designed for the purpose of gathering and analyzing the information required to evaluate the outcome achieved in terms of success for all students, including those with learning difficulties. In some cases, the analysis of this outcome may result in changes or adjustments to the actions undertaken.

5.6 Resources distributed fairly and transparently

The Ministère de l'Éducation allocates significant funding for services for disabled students and students with difficulties, in particular those with learning difficulties. Under the Education Act, school boards are responsible for ensuring that this funding is fairly distributed among the schools concerned.

The concept of fairness requires that financial resources be allocated according to the needs and characteristics of both students and schools. Transparency requires the school boards to inform schools and the community about the use made of the funding received.

In keeping with these guidelines, schools must implement services that are adapted to the needs of their students. The services may vary; for example, they may be provided by teachers from the cycle team or, if particular expertise is required, by student services staff or outside partners.

The availability of resources is important but how services are designed and delivered by schools and school boards can be another means of ensuring better use of these resources for supporting students with special needs.

5.7 A concern for ensuring professional development for all school staff members

The numerous changes faced by all school staff members, including administrators as well as those in direct contact with students, can become a burden if they do not have access to appropriate types of professional development.

Professional support is one of the best ways to implement the changes introduced by the reform. Universities must also be involved in creating new training formulas for school staff. In addition, professional networks can be set up to allow teachers to exchange information, training tips and tools. Training can also take other forms, for example, courses taught by peers or experts, research-action, etc.

Regardless of the form the training may take, it must be based on continuity. Time must be set aside for teachers to try out the new approaches and for periods of reflection and review.

Management styles must reflect the orientations of the reform. They must bank on partnership and target student success as their main goal.

To ensure educational success, the needs of all students must be met in a context of integration. In addition, priority must be given to professional development for all staff members.

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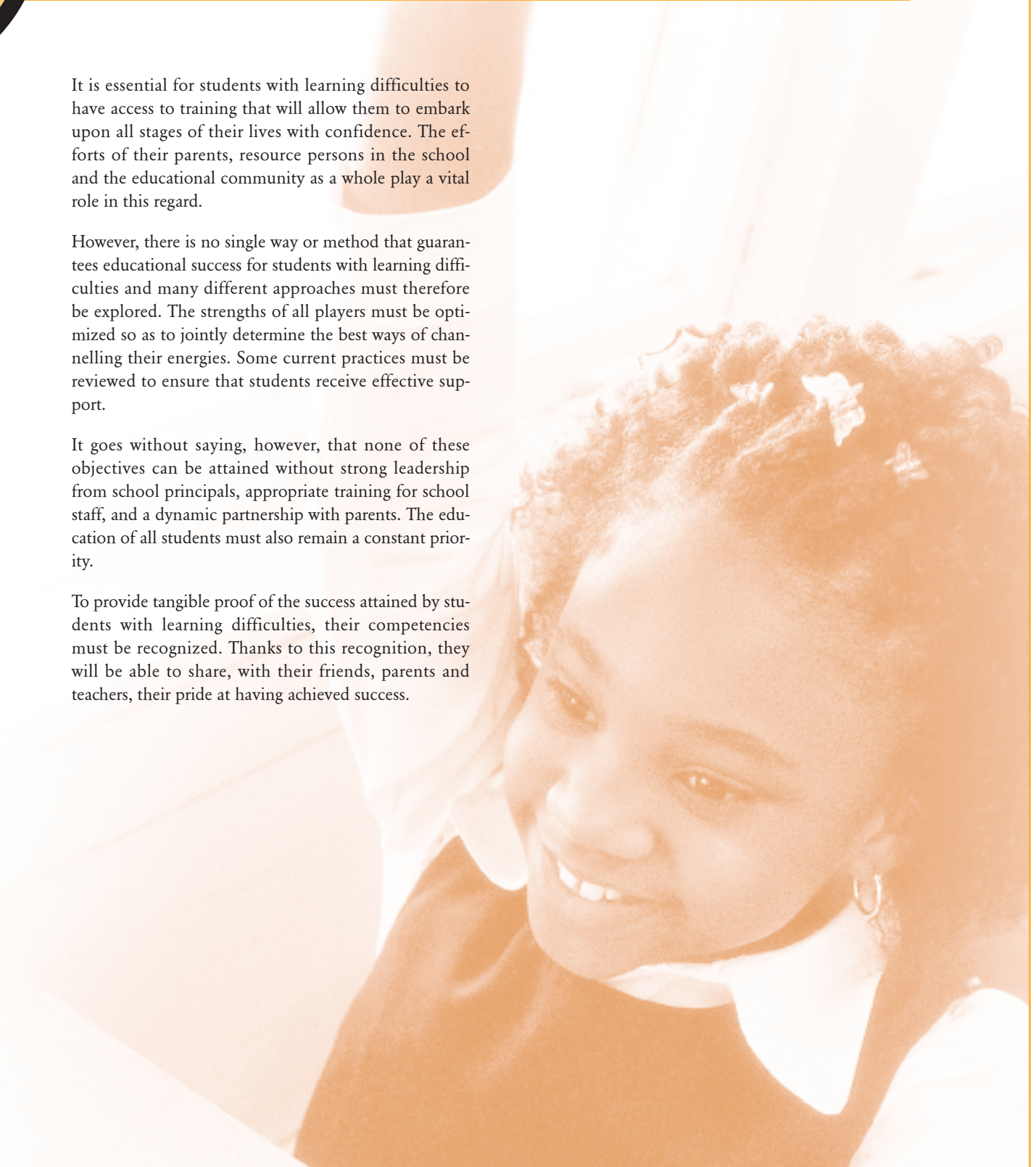
Conclusion

It is essential for students with learning difficulties to have access to training that will allow them to embark upon all stages of their lives with confidence. The efforts of their parents, resource persons in the school and the educational community as a whole play a vital role in this regard.

However, there is no single way or method that guarantees educational success for students with learning difficulties and many different approaches must therefore be explored. The strengths of all players must be optimized so as to jointly determine the best ways of channelling their energies. Some current practices must be reviewed to ensure that students receive effective support.

It goes without saying, however, that none of these objectives can be attained without strong leadership from school principals, appropriate training for school staff, and a dynamic partnership with parents. The education of all students must also remain a constant priority.

To provide tangible proof of the success attained by students with learning difficulties, their competencies must be recognized. Thanks to this recognition, they will be able to share, with their friends, parents and teachers, their pride at having achieved success.





Appendixes

PROVISIONS OF THE EDUCATION ACT THAT AFFECT THE SITUATION OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

THE MISSION OF A SCHOOL:

- is, in keeping with the principle of equality of opportunity, to impart knowledge to students, foster their social development and give them qualifications, while enabling them to undertake and achieve success in a course of study
- is pursued within the framework of an educational project defined, implemented and periodically evaluated with the participation of the students, the parents, the principal, the teachers and other school staff members, representatives of the community and the school board (ss. 36 and 36.1)

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GOVERNING BOARD:

- The governing board shall adopt, oversee the implementation of and periodically evaluate the school's educational project (s. 74).
- The governing board is responsible for approving the student supervision policy proposed by the principal.

This policy shall include measures relating to the use of non-teaching and non-scheduled time for instructional or educational purposes, the organization of extracurricular activities and the development of approaches to foster academic success (s. 75).

- Each year, the governing board shall inform the parents and the community served by the school of the services provided by the school and report on the level of quality of such services.

The governing board shall make public the educational project and the success plan of the school.

Each year, the governing board shall report on the evaluation of the implementation of the success plan.

A document explaining the educational project and reporting on the evaluation of the implementation of the success plan shall be distributed to the parents and the school staff. The governing board shall see to it that the wording of the document is clear and accessible (s. 83).

- The governing board is responsible for approving the approach proposed by the principal for the implementation of the basic school regulation (s. 84).
- The governing board is responsible for approving the overall approach proposed by the principal for the enrichment or adaptation by the teachers of the objectives and suggested content of the programs of studies established by the Minister and for the development of local programs of studies to meet the specific needs of the students at the school (s. 85).
- The governing board is responsible for approving the approach proposed by the principal for the implementation of the student services and special educational services programs prescribed by the basic school regulation and determined by the school board, or provided for in an agreement entered into by the school board (s. 88).

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL:

- The principal, under the authority of the director general of the school board, shall ensure that educational services provided at the school meet the proper standards of quality (s. 96.12).
- The principal shall assist the governing board in the exercise of its functions and powers and, for that purpose, the principal shall:

1. coordinate the analysis of the situation prevailing at the school and the development, implementation and periodical evaluation of the school's educational project

- 1.1. coordinate the development, the review and any updating of the school's success plan

2. ensure that the proposals required under this chapter are prepared and submitted to the governing board for approval

- 2.1. ensure that the governing board is provided all necessary information before approving the proposals made under this chapter

3. encourage concerted action between the parents, the students and the staff, their participation in the life of the school and their collaboration in fostering success

4. inform the governing board on a regular basis concerning the proposals approved by the principal under section 96.15

If the principal fails or refuses to submit to the governing board a proposal concerning a matter within the purview of the governing board within 15 days of the date on which the governing board requests the proposal, the governing board may act without such a proposal (s. 96.13).

- In the case of a handicapped student or a student with a social maladjustment or a learning disability, the principal, with the assistance of the student's parents, of the staff providing services to the student, and of the student himself, unless the student is unable to do so, shall establish an individualized education plan adapted to the needs of the student (s. 96.14).

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL BOARD:

- Every school board shall, subject to sections 222 and 222.1, adapt the educational services provided to a handicapped student or a student with a social maladjustment or a learning disability according to the student's needs and in keeping with the student's abilities as evaluated by the school board according to the procedures prescribed under subparagraph 1 of the second paragraph of section 235 (s. 234).
- Every school board shall adopt, after consultation with the advisory committee on services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities, a policy concerning the organization of educational services for such students to ensure the harmonious integration of each such student into a regular class or group and into school activities if it has been established on the basis of the evaluation of the student's abilities and needs that such integration would facilitate the student's learning and social integration and would not impose an excessive constraint or significantly undermine the rights of the other students.

The policy shall include:

1. procedures for evaluating handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities; such procedures shall provide for the participation of the parents of the students and of the students themselves, unless they are unable to do so
2. methods for integrating those students into regular classes or groups and into regular school activities as well as the support services required for their integration and, if need be, the weighting required to determine the maximum number of students per class or group
3. terms and conditions for grouping those students in specialized schools, classes or groups
4. methods for preparing and evaluating the individualized education plans intended for such students (s. 235)

PROVISIONS OF THE BASIC SCHOOL REGULATION FOR PRESCHOOL ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Student services for which programs are to be established under the first paragraph of section 224 of the Education Act (R.S.Q., c. I-13.3) shall include the following:

- support services designed to provide students with conditions that are conducive to learning
- student life services designed to foster students' autonomy and sense of responsibility, [...] as well as their feeling of belonging to the school
- counselling services designed to help students throughout their studies, with their academic and career choices, and with any difficulties they encounter
- promotion and prevention services designed to provide students with an environment conducive to the development of a healthy lifestyle and of skills that are beneficial to their health and well-being [...] (s. 4)

Student services provided under section 4 must include the following:

- services designed to promote student participation in school life
- services designed to educate students about their rights and responsibilities
- sports, cultural and social activities
- support services for the use of the documentary resources of the school library
- academic and career counselling and information
- psychological services
- psychoeducational services
- special education services
- remedial education services
- speech therapy services
- health and social services [...] (s. 5)

Special services are designed for students who, because of particular circumstances, require welcoming services and services providing assistance in learning French or home or hospital instruction (s. 6).

A student shall be promoted from elementary to secondary school after six years of elementary school studies; a student may however be promoted after five years of studies if he or she has achieved the objectives of the programs of studies at the elementary level and has acquired sufficient emotional and social maturity.

It is up to the school board responsible for the elementary education of the student to determine whether or not that student satisfies the requirements of the elementary level (s. 13).

Elementary education is organized into three cycles of two years each.

Secondary education is organized into two cycles: the first covers three school years and the second, two school years (s. 15).

LINES OF ACTION OF THE POLICY ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

1. Recognizing the importance of prevention and early intervention, and making a commitment to devote additional effort to this area
2. Making the adaptation of educational services a priority for all those working with students with special needs
3. Placing the organization of educational services at the service of students with special needs by basing it on the individual evaluation of their abilities and needs, by ensuring that these services are provided in the most natural environment for the students, as close as possible to their place of residence, and by favouring the students' integration into regular classes
4. Creating a true educational community, starting with the child and the parents and continuing with outside partners and community organizations working with young people, in order to provide more consistent intervention and better-coordinated services
5. Devoting particular attention to students at risk, in particular those with learning disabilities or behavioural difficulties, and determining methods of intervention that better meet their needs and abilities
6. Developing methods for evaluating students' educational success in terms of knowledge, social development and qualifications, assessing the quality of services and reporting results

DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING

(Examples of collaboration between various student service providers)

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ROLE AND ACTIONS OF THE REMEDIAL SPECIALIST

- Collaborative consultation
 - identify individualized objectives
 - suggest intervention measures
- Cooperative instruction
 - teaching of strategies (e.g. revision of texts)
- Cooperative learning activities (reading circle, problem solving)
- Instruction for individuals or small groups
 - in the classroom (guided reading, writing workshop)
 - outside the classroom (Reading Recovery)
- Workshops for parents (SARAW program)
- Organization and supervision of reading tutorials (pool of student or volunteer tutors)
- Adaptation of instructional materials
 - supervision of availability of books required for teaching
- Evaluation (classroom observation, metacognitive questionnaires)

ROLE AND ACTIONS OF THE SPEECH THERAPIST

- Collaborative consultation (support for teachers)
- Leadership of classroom activities (main group and subgroups, for example: phonological awareness workshop)
- Therapy for problem cases
- Collaboration with parents
 - Emergent literacy workshops at the kindergarten level
 - Family literacy workshops in Grade 1 (SARAW program)

ROLE AND ACTIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST

- Collaborative consultation
 - develop individualized objectives (IEP)
 - suggest intervention measures
 - Good-behaviour contract
 - Point system
 - Time-out
 - Reflection on behaviour
- Social skills workshops
 - in the classroom
 - outside the classroom
- Supply of materials for behaviour management
 - reflection sheets
 - behaviour checklists
- Behaviour evaluation (classroom observation)
- Collaboration with parents

* Source: Lise Saint-Laurent

Guided reading

Intervention measure	Instructional strategy designed to help students with word identification and text comprehension, by learning reading strategies through reading and writing exercises
Students targeted	Students with poor reading skills in Elementary Cycle One
Materials	Texts of various types, at a level of difficulty that represents a reasonable challenge for the students
Procedure	• Interactive reading • Interactive writing • Word study
Organization	In small, homogeneous groups (ensure students are not always assigned to the same group in order to prevent stigmatization)
Frequency	

Reciprocal teaching

Intervention measure	• Instructional strategy designed to help students better understand texts and manage their comprehension
Students targeted	• Students who are generally able to identify words, but have difficulty managing their comprehension • Students in all three cycles of elementary school
Materials	Texts that the students are able to read easily
Procedure	• Selection of a text • Separation of the text into sections • Teaching of four strategies • Formulation of questions about the text • Identification of words or sections of the text that are hard to understand and methods to make them clearer • Summary of the part of the text read • Predictions about the rest of the text • Students read the first part of the text to themselves • Modelling of the four strategies by the teacher • Modelling done by each student in turn, supervised by the teacher
Organization	Large or small groups

Story mapping	
Intervention measure	Instructional strategy designed to help students understand and write stories
Students targeted	All students with comprehension difficulties in elementary school and the first years of secondary school
Materials	Stories likely to interest the students
Procedure	• The teacher explains how to use story mapping while reading the text out loud • The teacher asks the students to identify the elements that match the story structure and shows them how to complete the story mapping worksheet • The teacher reads another story and encourages the group to participate by asking them questions about the story structure • Practice in small groups
Frequency	First in large groups, then in small groups

STORY MAPPING WORK SHEET*	
Title of story :	_____
1	Characters
2	Place and time
3	Problem
4	Events
5	Resolution

* Translated from: Lise Saint-Laurent, *Enseigner aux élèves à risque et en difficulté au primaire*, p. 213.

