

PROGRAM TO PROMOTE THE RETURN TO SCHOOL OF PEOPLE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 16 AND 24



LEARNING'S GREAT WHEN I CAN **RELATE!**

ANDRAGOGICAL
FRAMEWORK

Québec 

**INSPIRING NEW
EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS**

**Andragogical framework for learning and support services adapted
to the needs of people between the ages of 16 and 24 who have little
education or have dropped out of school**

LEARNING'S GREAT

WHEN I CAN RELATE!

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FOREWORD

According to the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* and the action plan that accompanies it, the Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ) is responsible, in collaboration with its main partners, for implementing concrete measures to facilitate the return to school of 16- to 24-year-olds who have little education or have dropped out of school. The goal is to offer these young people a chance to complete their basic education and to begin the process of social and employment integration. The Program, spread out over a four-year period, reflects the government's intention to significantly increase enrollment in adult education.¹

This action will be carried out in partnership with school boards, local employment centres, external resources with specific mandates in the education of young adults, and other partners, such as youth centres, CLSCs and Carrefours jeunesse-emploi. Partners are encouraged to offer learning and support services mainly to those young people who are beyond the reach of school boards and to those who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school.

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To ensure that the program is implemented under the best conditions possible, researchers in the field met with the partners in order to identify the factors that must be taken into account in adapting services and to determine ways of providing support for school boards and their partners. These factors are described in the Implementation Guide.

Subsequently, the Université de Sherbrooke was given the mandate to develop a document describing aspects to be considered in the implementation of educational environments adapted to the target population, based on current knowledge in the field and the results of the meeting with researchers.

This support document is intended to help local partners implement learning and support services adapted to young people between the ages of 16 and 24.

1. See press release, May 2, 2002.

INTRODUCTION

This document is designed mainly for adult education centre administrators and basic education teachers who are currently working or will eventually work with the target population. As its title suggests, it is intended to inspire new educational environments likely to help young people, who for the most part have experienced difficulties in school, to pursue their education. It is not intended as a standardized framework or a step-by-step guide.

Although the Québec education system is one of the most successful in the world, and although the vast majority of young people in both the youth and adult sectors successfully complete their schooling, too many of them fail, become discouraged and drop out of school, sometimes without acquiring the basic education they need to deal with every aspect of life. How can we encourage these young people to return to school? How can we ensure, this time around, that the process will be successful? Most importantly, how can we avoid proposing a path that too closely resembles the one they just left, one that could very well lead them right back to where they are now? This new program offers an opportunity to create different educational environments that are better adapted to these young people's needs, objectives and life situations.

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On the basis of past experience and research,² the authors describe the main aspects to be considered in the development of adapted services and provide suggestions to help educators implement the program. The document is based on a global vision of the educational environment, which takes into account both the social and andragogical contexts, as well as their attendant processes. The way in which these aspects are organized is one of several possibilities. There is some overlap, which reflects the inevitable interaction between the different factors and the need to take action at various levels simultaneously and consistently.

Some of the observations and actions contained in the document may be familiar to educators who have worked with young people with difficulties. School boards and community organizations have not been waiting for this program to adopt innovative teaching practices, and it is largely thanks to their initiative that we were able to put together the information in this document. The document is consistent with the spirit of the reform that has been under way for several years now in the education system; it refers, for example, to the construction of meaningful learning, cross-curricular competencies, and educational activities integrating and encouraging the sharing of knowledge.

2. In March 2002, the MEQ met with university researchers in the fields of sociology and education in order to survey current knowledge in the field.

This document is neither exhaustive nor definitive. Rather, it was designed as a step in the implementation of the program, to be taken concurrently with research intended to gain a better understanding of original and particularly successful activities in the field. This better understanding should result in the gradual construction of a model that will provide theoretical and practical information about the factors essential to the success of these educational activities.

This document contains 12 aspects based on research and data about young people and illustrated with examples. While some aspects have a greater impact than others, they are all important, since they are all interrelated. Since each environment is different, readers are free to focus more closely on those aspects that best meet their needs at the moment. The way in which the aspects are organized may also help readers review the strengths and weaknesses of past actions. Some passages may also be used to spark discussion in team meetings or workshops. A bibliography is included for those who would like to delve deeper into one or more of the aspects addressed.

Annie loves her two-year-old daughter. She is such a happy, intelligent little girl! Raising a child is something Annie is proud of, unlike her experience at school. But life as a young mother can be difficult: unemployed, with no babysitter, Annie often feels isolated. Thank goodness her mother is there to encourage her when she is feeling down. At times like these, Annie wonders about her role as a mother. She especially wants to make sure her daughter doesn't end up the way she did. Annie is 22 years old.

Leonardo is disappointed and angry that he has lost his job yet again. For once, he had found a job he liked, at a better salary than minimum wage! But Leonardo is getting used to this: he has had six jobs since he left school. And employers always ask for the Secondary School Diploma he doesn't have. But he is definitely not going back to school. Sitting there all day racking his brains, he's had enough of that, at least for the time being. But how can he find a job he can keep for more than six months? Leonardo is 20 years old.

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Once again, **Serigne**'s mother has turned him out of the house after a bout of fighting and yelling. Since he left school, he hasn't found a job and she is always on his back! He told her that there aren't any jobs, and that it's worse when you're Black. But, as usual, she didn't believe him. He is the eldest, fatherless, and must be responsible—he's heard it all before. This time, however, will be different. Serigne will take his mother at her word and live with three of his friends who have an apartment in town. Finally, he will be able to have fun and not worry about being lectured! Serigne is 17 years old.

Samantha finished her individualized path for learning three years ago. She left school after her last practicum, without much confidence in her ability to get a job. She has such trouble reading, not to mention writing and filling out job applications! She always had trouble with English and math, even in Elementary I. When she left school, she was told she should enroll in adult education. Although she was in Secondary IV, she is now enrolled full-time in a literacy program because of her results on the placement tests. She likes the atmosphere, the pace and the group support; however, she sometimes feels that she is not making enough progress, that she is not getting anywhere, and that she will always be in special education. But what else can she do? Samantha is 23 years old.

Two years ago, **Jim** left his parents' house in the suburbs to live on the streets of Montréal. He was fed up with a family that didn't understand him, fed up with his mother's depression and his father's bouts of anger, fed up with school and teachers who didn't understand anything, fed up with rules, adults and a society in which he felt he didn't belong. At least his street friends accept him and respect his values. He lives life day by day; of course there's the cold, and sometimes there's hunger, insecurity and an urge to flee yet again, but he can't think of any other way to realize his dreams. Jim is 19 years old.

A few months ago, **Georg** enrolled full-time at the adult education centre where he is taking Secondary I English, Secondary II French, and he will soon be finishing his Secondary III math. If he wants to finish Secondary V, he will have to work harder than ever, harder than when he was in secondary school. He has to get down to it, even if he's a little bored, if he finds it takes forever for the teacher to answer his questions. At least if he could listen to music, doing his exercises all by himself wouldn't be so dull! Every day, Georg tries to muster a bit of enthusiasm; he wants so badly to get his diploma. Everyone tells him he needs one if he wants a job! But he's finding it harder and harder to get out of bed in the morning. Georg is 19 years old.

Annie, Leonardo, Serigne, Samantha, Jim and Georg are only a few of the thousands of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 without a Secondary School Diploma. They all share a desire to develop, learn, earn a living and find their place in society. They want someone to recognize their worth and to trust them. Sometimes their expectations are unrealistic, involving vague dreams and indefinite plans for feeling better about themselves or obtaining recognition for what they are or what they are becoming.

These are the people for whom these learning and support services are intended. How can we ensure that the services meet their needs and expectations?

TWELVE ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN IMPLEMENTING ADAPTED EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

1

Build on young people's learning



Not all dropouts are poor, isolated, delinquent or illiterate. Yet the tendency may be to view them in terms of their failings rather than their strengths. They have acquired other knowledge, strategies and competencies outside of school that can be recognized and put to good use.

It is true that their experience in school often ended in failure or ostracism. Because of their grades, their parents and other students label them “good-for-nothings,” and they sometimes agree with that assessment (Pinard 2002). They feel rejected by the school and therefore reject school, along with any kind of authority they might find threatening (Dubet 2001). But this attitude toward school does not mean that they do not want to, or are unable to, learn.

Indeed, they continue to learn all sorts of things every day, outside of school (Bélisle 1995; Bourdon and Bélisle 2002). At home, they learn to get by on a tight budget. Playing video games, they learn how to manipulate abstract symbols, develop complex strategies and apply these strategies at a moment's notice. On the street, they learn new dress, artistic and language codes, which allow them to become part of a group and adopt a certain lifestyle (Rouleau Berger 1991). Sometimes they have serious reading and writing difficulties and learn to get around them or even hide them.

Other young people have to deal with the responsibilities of parenthood. In 1998, approximately 10 000 young women under the age of 20 were pregnant, and more than 3 600 of these gave birth (Roy 2001a). For many young women, becoming a mother is a way of achieving greater autonomy and independence. Although young mothers with little education often live in poverty and isolation, many deliberately choose to have a baby in order to bolster their self-worth and obtain the recognition that they have been denied by their family or school (Charbonneau 1998). Becoming a mother is particularly conducive to increased awareness, life changes and the acquisition of new learning.

Other young people drop out of school to get jobs, leave home and, consequently, become more autonomous. As a result, many of them have had to invent new ways of overcoming life's difficulties, by developing what is sometimes known as “experiential competencies”: working under the table, learning to improvise in an emergency, reacting quickly when there is a problem, or showing leadership by managing neighbourhood tensions (Rouleau-Berger 1999).

It is important to remember that these young people may have already enrolled in individualized paths for learning or in a sociovocational integration program; they have probably done practicums and developed occupational competencies and competencies related to living in a group. They also have a variety of interests: computers, the Internet, art, music, the outdoors, science fiction. Although many of them think they have poor language skills, they may still have an interest in creative writing (Bélisle 2001). But such knowledge and interests are for the most part unexplored and unrecognized, both by the young people themselves and by the institutions that evaluate their scholastic learning.

Research suggests that good schools are those that offer young people a variety of opportunities to discover their interests and artistic and athletic talent and improve their development at the personal (autonomy) and social (friendship, social skills) levels (Finn 1989, McNeal 1997 and Rutter et al. 1979, cited in Janosz, Fallu and Deniger 2000). Also, young people would like teachers to act as “tutors,” helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses, develop their strong points or overcome their difficulties and identify and showcase special talents (Pinard 2002). For young people in search of their identity and the right career path, helping them identify their learning and competencies could prove more helpful than having them take career choice education or sending them to the guidance counsellor.

In short, young people’s education should be consistent with the concept of lifelong learning. These young people have acquired learning in school and elsewhere, whether it is related to parenting, manual skills, artistic expression or teamwork. We must build on these experiences and help young people recognize them and use them at school, in the workplace and in the community. Identifying their knowledge and skills will help them acquire self-confidence.

Building on young people’s prior learning is all the more important since, according to the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*, the official recognition of learning is a major lever, one that makes it possible for people to avoid taking unnecessary training for competencies or knowledge they already possess in whole or in part (MEQ 2002b). Among other things, the action plan suggests facilitating the establishment of a record of learning in basic education and implementing certification systems in the workplace (MEQ 2002a). This concern directly affects young people between the ages of 16 and 24, whose knowledge acquired in the youth sector may have, in the past, been underestimated upon their enrollment in the adult sector. They should now benefit from the principle whereby “people whose learning has been recognized under one of these systems should have that learning be recognized by the other system” (MEQ 2002b, p. 24).



Consequently, adult education programs for 16- to 24-year-olds should **recognize and build on their learning**. The following are examples of how this might be done:

- Attribute more importance to young people's first visit to an adult education centre in order to determine their prior experiences in school and to develop a more detailed record of learning in order to avoid the discouragement that might result from improper placement. Obtaining a clearer understanding of their learning will make it possible to establish a better learning plan and to avoid repeating what happened in the youth sector. A revision of traditional placement procedures may lead to other possibilities, such as longer periods of intensive upgrading.
- Allow young people to recognize, identify and state their learning on the basis of their competencies. Many educational environments, both in school boards and in community organizations, have successfully used the approach developed by the Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes with respect to strengths. This approach allows adults to identify the strengths they have developed throughout their lives and to observe their benefits (Bélisle 1995).
- Allow young people to benefit from their peers' competencies, thereby creating a rich source of horizontal learning. As a result, the group becomes a place to share ideas, support and knowledge. This process favours the participation, autonomy and accountability of young people in their learning by emphasizing mutual assistance, collaboration and cooperation with both peers and teachers (Boivin 2001).
- Allow young people to share competencies, like interests and aptitudes, and use these opportunities as a springboard for group learning plans. Such an approach will yield interesting topics, the young people's knowledge and skills serving as material for discussion (the Internet, drug abuse, couple relationships).



Many young people targeted by the program have learned to adopt an attitude toward academic learning that is not only negative, but passive as well. Course content is often so far removed from young people's immediate concerns that it is neither interesting nor useful to them. Because it has not been learned, course content remains something foreign and imposed, which they endure passively.

Having experienced failure in the form of grade repetition and enrollment in special classes, they feel that they have endured rather than chosen their path. This feeling goes beyond school, given the constraints and obligations of government programs such as social assistance; they will take steps, but without much hope for success. Subject to family and peer pressure, they react to constraints, do things for other people, because other people ask them to.

Moreover, because of these constraints, their objectives or career aspirations are often vague, inconsistent and unrealistic. They are rarely based on an in-depth exploration of possibilities or on adequate self-knowledge. For many young people, obtaining a Secondary School Diploma is one of their more or less realistic dreams, given their difficulties and past experience in school. Since they have never learned to see too far into the future, the four or five years of "sacrifice" between them and their objective can be discouraging.



An adapted educational environment must therefore **encourage learners' active, voluntary participation**.³ Although other people also bear responsibility for their situation, the young people in question are the main players in their own education and integration. They must commit, with full knowledge, to an educational path (Pinard 2002). They must be motivated in order to learn.⁴ They must therefore be encouraged to commit to a learning plan that interests them, that is based on their world and on their current concerns and experiences.

3. Eggert, Seyl and Nicholas (1990, cited in Janosz, Fallu and Deniger 2000, p. 137) list different conditions for successful implementation: the students must participate willingly, be able to choose their mentor, accept the program objectives and commit to providing their peers with positive support.

4. To achieve the targeted objectives, students must be motivated to participate in and commit to the learning plan. If the learning plan is to be successful, if the participants are to become involved and adopt a positive attitude, it is important that they be at least content, if not proud, to participate in it (Boivin 2001, p. 9).

Building on young people's plans often helps them learn more about themselves. A vague identity and poor self-knowledge are often the source of uncertain commitments that may lead them to give up yet again. Young people must be given the opportunity to recognize their strengths, gradually identify their interests and set objectives. But perseverance requires more than the ability to consider the future; focusing on a single distant goal can be demotivating. Young people must be able to focus on short- and medium-term intermediate objectives that are both realistic and feasible, and whose concrete results can encourage and reassure them in their choices.

In this process, young people learn about themselves as they progress. They must also be able to adjust their learning objectives in accordance with their achievements, constraints and opportunities (employment opportunities, pregnancy, unforeseen difficulties). They must therefore participate actively and steadfastly in the establishment of their educational path. For these young people, who often see themselves as helpless victims, this empowerment is essential if they are to take control of their lives (Le Bossé, Lavallée and Herrera 1996).

The following are examples of how to encourage young people's active, voluntary participation:

- Have them participate in decisions concerning the organization of their education, such as setting their own schedules,⁵ writing a code of conduct or organizing school premises
- Have them participate in the organization of activities and projects. For example, they might form committees in which each member has certain tasks to perform and is accountable to the rest of the group.
- Allow each of them the time to establish their own training plan. This cannot be done instantaneously, since it involves reversing a deep-rooted tendency. For example, they might start with short-term objectives related to self-exploration, putting a bit of order in their lives before setting more distant objectives or ones more specifically related to their education.
- Have them participate in the ongoing revision of their learning plan and include short- and medium-term intermediate objectives aimed at measurable, realistic results. For example, regular meetings might be scheduled to review the learning plan, evaluate the achievement of their intermediate objectives and confront the young person with his or her choices.
- In collaboration with community-based partners who work with young people, set conditions for participation in order to facilitate voluntary commitment.

5. Violette (1991) mentions that, ideally, students would like to set their own course schedules.



In 2000-2001, some 18 000 young men and women left school without a Secondary School Diploma (MEQ 2002c). Many of them are now enrolled in adult education; 12.7 per cent of students switch from the youth sector to the adult sector before the age of 20. This percentage is ten times higher than it was in 1984-1985. For many, this transition is considered a success; more than half of students under the age of 20 enrolled in 1999-2000 in Secondary Cycle Two in adult education obtained their diploma.

But what about the others? How many are there? In 2000 there were almost 160 000 Quebecers between the ages of 16 and 24 who had dropped out of school before obtaining a diploma; almost two thirds of them were young men. The dropout rate increases with age: it is 13.2 per cent among 16- to 19-year-olds, and 21.4 per cent among 20- to 24-year-olds.⁶ Many of these young people are unable to obtain a diploma quickly or easily. They will be placed in a lower grade level if they enroll in the adult sector, which is discouraging enough to make them drop out yet again.

Statistics show that the dropout rate is higher among men than among women; it is especially high in underprivileged areas, and extreme among Native people. French Quebecers are far more likely to drop out of school than new immigrants or members of certain cultural groups. The most problematic regions are Nord-du-Québec, Outaouais, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Montréal and Gaspésie (Hrimech and Théorêt 1997).

Dropping out of school is a process that often begins in elementary school, with the interaction of multiple causes: early and repeated failure, grade repetition and behavioural problems, but also family breakups and problems, early pregnancy, health problems related to drug and alcohol abuse and so on. Young people also drop out of school because they are attracted by the idea of getting a job, being financially independent, taking a stand with respect to the school system or becoming full-fledged members of the adult world. The reasons given by young people themselves include poor grades, financial problems, the attraction of the job market, a lack of interest or motivation, and conflicts with teachers.

In short, young people rarely drop out of school on a whim or even for a single reason; on the contrary, it is usually the culmination of a series of events. While academic failure accounts for a large portion of the dropout rate, the causes are multiple and interrelated. When questioned, most dropouts express a certain

6. Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (2002), Direction des statistiques et des études quantitatives, unpublished data.

regret or ambivalence with respect to their situation; most would like to return to school one day (Bowlby and McMullen 2002). But the hope of obtaining a diploma seems unrealistic for many young people who have dropped out of school or experienced a number of failures; in their case, the prospect is daunting and the result, uncertain.

Indeed, a significant percentage of dropouts have difficulty reading, writing and counting. According to the most recent Canadian literacy statistics, 11 per cent of 16- to 25-year-olds were classified level 1 (the lowest level) on a reading test, while 26 per cent were classified level 2; these levels are deemed insufficient for a person to participate fully in a society that relies increasingly on the written word.⁷ More than ten years of data indicate that at least one third of annual enrollments in school board literacy programs are under the age of 30 and that two thirds are young men. Studies show that these young people almost all experienced academic failure at a very early age and that the delays accumulated throughout their school career. The more serious the failure, the earlier the student will enroll in adult education. This difficult progress through school has a number of consequences in terms of young people's motivation to learn, their self-image and their sociovocational integration (Charest 1992).

Moreover, it is important to remember that not all people without a diploma are dropouts; many young people prepare for an occupation by successfully completing the Life Skills and Work Skills program or by learning a semiskilled trade. Therefore, young people who leave secondary school are characterized by a variety of academic and psychosocial traits. Finally, it is also important to remember that there is a world of difference between 16-year-olds—who have just left school—and 24-year-olds; their life experiences and future prospects, including employment, are quite different, as is the distance that separates them from their time at school.

Researchers have attempted to categorize dropouts, particularly in terms of their progress through school, their ability to succeed, their behaviour and attitudes toward school, and the gravity of their family and social problems (Dubet 1996; Janosz, Fallu and Deniger 2000; Violette 1991). Some studies indicate that about one third of all dropouts have the same psychosocial profile as graduates. Other studies show that young dropouts who were classified as having serious learning or adjustment difficulties experienced more serious problems after leaving school than dropouts with only slight learning difficulties, whose profile resembled that of dropouts who were never classified as having difficulties (Charest 1997). In short, this variety of profiles and experiences only confirms the need to adopt a broad and diversified approach to the goals of learning services, and customized and off-the-rack programs.

7. There are as yet no detailed data on literacy by age group in Québec. See Statistics Canada (1996), p. 43.

In order to take into account the variety of experiences, characteristics and needs of young people without a diploma, **programs and learning services should be varied and target different goals**. Not all young people want to or are able to obtain a first diploma. Some are still carrying around a negative image of their experience at school, others do not necessarily want to start all over again in the adult sector.

These data must be taken into account in developing educational paths other than those that lead to a diploma. By adopting several different goals and adjusting the aims of an institution's success plan, we can offer young people a number of services based on different educational approaches, for example:

- a service focusing on better vocational integration through the exploration of workplaces, meetings with employers or other significant individuals, or even the creation of a small business
- a program designed by and given in a community organization, in which young people learn to take responsibility by participating in a project (e.g. production of a video or newspaper, improv)
- training in life in society, in collaboration with community organizations (e.g. production of radio shows for community radio, artistic creation in a city park, land use planning project)

Finally, certain services can be set up to meet the specific needs of certain groups, for example:

- a program for young Haitians in collaboration with a community organization (e.g. examination of family values and behaviours, greater self-worth through sports or other recreational activities, support for young people still in school)
- a specific service focusing on the needs of young parents (e.g. childcare services, meetings with resource people, discussions on parenting skills), such as the "Ma place au soleil" programs⁸, which are currently experiencing some success
- training designed for street kids (e.g. recruitment and follow-up activities in the street, support for drug-related and mental health problems, flexible programs)

8. According to data provided by the Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille, as of March 31, 2003, 627 young people were participating in "Ma place au soleil" programs.

- training for 16- to 18-year-olds who share the same characteristics and behaviours in terms of their experience in school, as offered through pilot projects in several adult education centres
- a service designed to meet needs specific to young men (e.g. training focusing on exploration and movement, the importance of physical activity and sports, meetings with positive male role models)

These services will allow young people who are disappointed or scarred by their experience in school to gradually reconcile themselves with official learning, gain confidence in their abilities, improve their competencies in a number of areas and complete their basic education even if they do not obtain a diploma.⁹

Finally, these services should be defined in collaboration with community organizations that deal with such problems and that have, over the years, acquired invaluable know-how and established closer contact with young people far removed from the school system.

9. An action research project conducted in France among hundreds of unemployed 16- to 25-year-olds with very little education included a practicum in the workplace. Each young person was teamed up with a tutor and practicum coordinator in order to promote learning. At first, the instructors and tutors were shocked by the young people's ignorance. Three months later, they could not say enough good things about the trainees and observed that there had been drastic changes in behaviour. The young people were now talking, asking questions and harassing their tutors, interested in everything, demanding courses, staying after class and taking charge of their education. Their abilities showed immense improvement; they were dealing with information and organizing their work time. They even learned things that required basic learning that they did not have. In hydraulics, electricity and mechanics, they acquired relatively complex knowledge before they learned the basics. (Schwartz, cited in Charlot and Glasman 1998, p. 44-45)

Offer a variety of flexible educational paths



Young people without a diploma are at risk of spending their working lives on the margins of the job market (Grenier 1998). Indeed, they are the least likely to benefit from stable employment or collective agreements, and the most likely to work part time and suffer numerous transition periods between jobs (Dandurand 1993).

This situation could become worse in Québec as in a number of industrialized countries. In recent years, there has been a decrease in the number of jobs held by people without a diploma to the benefit of those who have completed at least some postsecondary education or earned a university degree (MEQ 2002d).

The difficulties experienced by undereducated youth in entering the work force lead to more poverty and social marginalization. Poverty is an even greater problem for some groups, such as young women, especially single mothers, young men who live alone, the most undereducated, and the handicapped (Gauthier and Mercier 1994). Youth poverty has numerous consequences that affect young people's ability to pursue their education: serious concerns related to survival, nutritional and health problems, loss of identity or faith in the future.

In short, non-graduates are not all excluded, but they are at a higher risk of becoming so than those with more education. For many, education is a springboard to finding a job as quickly as possible. However, since the vocational integration of non-graduates is fragile, they fear that by returning to school they may lose what little they have gained. The need to provide for themselves and be financially independent makes it even harder for them to reconcile work and school. Consider young single mothers faced with their new role as parents; young people working swing shifts; those who cannot decide between the immediate advantages of a new job and the more distant advantages of education. Finally, with respect to lifelong learning, it is not unusual that training periods should alternate and combine with periods of work.

These elements illustrate how young people without a diploma need flexible programs that allow them to meet the needs of a difficult and demanding job market without losing the ground they have already gained. They also confirm the need to take into account young people's poverty and precarious position.



There is therefore **a need for a variety of flexible educational paths**, original options adapted to the living conditions of young people and to their situation in the job market. The following are examples of how this might be done:

- Emphasize the possibility of working full- or part-time, while taking courses during the day or in the evening. Intensive courses might even be given on the weekend.
- Consider adopting a continuous intake and exit approach in some cases, even though it might make it more difficult to build team spirit.
- Emphasize work-study programs, which appear to have been successful in the youth sector and for semiskilled trades. They help young people rekindle an interest in school and acquire useful attitudes and behaviours. This approach might be even more successful if school-business relationships are clearly established and if the focus is on the integration of learning (Bilodeau et al. 1997).
- Facilitate the transition between general education and vocational training. This will be particularly helpful in learning plans focusing on a specific trade.
- Design “mixed” programs that call upon several teaching services: the program offered might combine Secondary I credits, for example, with certain vocational integration services.
- Offer short programs with specific goals and quick, tangible results in order to reach young people who do not want to, or cannot, at this point in time, commit to longer programs.



In an increasingly knowledge-based society, our relationship with knowledge throughout our lifetime is crucial.¹⁰ We must be familiar with and understand the relationship that young non-graduates have with knowledge in order to be able to adapt teaching strategies accordingly.

Many dropouts did not have access, as children, to a stimulating environment or a family culture that supported or strengthened academic learning. Although research indicates that families in disadvantaged areas show real concern for their children's success in school, many young dropouts have parents who themselves have little education, did not show much interest in school, don't think very highly of the school system and have low expectations with respect to their children's success. These young people therefore experienced two forms of solitude, constantly navigating between two worlds entirely foreign to each other (Lahire 1995).

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Their experience in school in a way confirms the void between the knowledge transmitted by the school and their daily lives. Early failures, delays, grade repetition, learning and adjustment difficulties: this tortuous path cannot but have deeply affected their confidence in their ability to learn and to succeed. Many young people have accumulated a jumble of theoretical knowledge that is meaningless to them, since they are still unable to integrate it into their everyday lives. Many still have great difficulty reading, have not mastered the basics of writing, and have a hard time doing mathematical operations to solve problems. The same goes for other areas, such as communication, geography or history. For example, reading is still considered part of "English," and defined in terms of grammar and spelling, rather than being seen as a useful or relevant skill or a means of accessing other knowledge. Yet, many young people have a richer and more creative relationship with the written word than they know (Bélisle 2001).

This construction of knowledge is also based on young people's perceptions of teaching and learning. Since they often experienced difficulty or failure, many of them associate learning with boredom and frustration, with rote learning and the unilateral transmission of facts by teachers, with questions and answers (filling out work sheets, finding the correct answer), and with repetitious exercises unconnected with reality, all of which leaves them passive, absent and feeling helpless. Many are therefore ambivalent with respect to such knowledge: they are averse or "allergic" to anything related to school, although they still want to repeat the experience.

10. According to Charlot (1997), an individual's relationship with knowledge is his or her relationship with the world, others and himself or herself confronted with the need to learn. It is also all of the relationships an individual has with everything related to learning or knowledge.

Resistance to school-related knowledge is more common among young men. These difficulties automatically lead to opposition, even rejection, which in turn inevitably leads to repeated failure (Hardy 1996). This “confrontation” with school-related knowledge also leads to difficulty concentrating and dealing with delays and frustration, and places full blame on the learning process.

Young people’s relationship with knowledge can be revived by adapting teaching strategies. Researchers emphasize the importance, in programs designed for dropouts, of teaching learning strategies and social skills, aspects that are often neglected to the detriment of subject knowledge (Janosz and Deniger 2001). Most young people in these programs remain dependent on “protected” educational environments, since they have not acquired the competencies needed to act autonomously. According to researchers, it is necessary to help young people develop these competencies rather than simply help them “catch up” using the same ineffective strategies and behaviours. Modular teaching, as it is practised in the adult sector, is perhaps not appropriate for some undereducated youth with discipline and behavioural problems, who must receive support in order to acquire the autonomy and sense of responsibility they need to pursue their education (Boivin 2001; Janosz and Deniger 2001).



It is therefore necessary to **adapt teaching strategies** in order to place dropouts in a context that will prevent them from repeating the same experiences and will favour their gradual awareness of and openness to new learning strategies. The following are examples of how this might be done:

- Gradually lead the students to adopt a structured learning approach, i.e. take the time to reconcile them with the idea of participating in their education.
- Place more importance on the learning process rather than simply on learning outcomes. Help the students review their strategies, identify conditions and means conducive to learning, determine the causes of their mistakes and so on.
- Form stable groups and have the students confront, construct and share their knowledge within these groups. Indeed, their sense of belonging should extend to their peer group, the need to socialize being characteristic of their age.¹¹ In an appropriate framework, the group’s scrutiny and example are more acceptable tools for self-reflection, since they are closer to the young people’s reality than those proposed by educators.

11. Peer support is often more effective than the teacher’s contribution (Schwartz 1998, p. 27).

- Review methods of teaching the language of instruction, in particular by exploring and enriching the young people's communication practices, which are based on their imagination, pleasure, interests and means of expression (e.g. diary, graffiti, poetry, poster art).
- Suggest various ways of learning that go beyond the theoretical, such as exploration, play, observation, practice and the buddy system.
- Experiment with team teaching, which has been particularly successful in life skills and work skills education. According to some authors, team teaching increases teachers' motivation because they feel that they can better manage the academic differences between the students in the class. They say that working in a team makes them less isolated and limits work-related tension. Team teaching creates opportunities for exchanging ideas about teachers' initiatives and makes it easier to manage unforeseen situations (Baby et al. 1995).
- Come up with a variety of innovative teaching strategies. One service set up in an adult education centre uses five teaching-learning strategies with young dropouts: the traditional lecture for more complex learning; the buddy system, in which students help and teach each other; instructorship, which allows one or more students to teach their peers; and solidarity, a type of cooperative learning (Boivin 2001).

Provide sustained individualized guidance



Generally speaking, people between the ages of 16 and 24 undergo a number of transitions: they move out of their parents' home, get a first apartment, enter into intimate relationships, enter the job market and so on. Many young dropouts often have to face these changes alone, without guidance, at an age when others are still receiving support at school and at home. Also, many young people are still battling some of the situations that led them to leave school in the first place: family conflicts or breakups, lack of parental support and encouragement, physical abuse, violence, negligence, health problems, drug addictions and so on.

Consider, for example, young women and young mothers who have been victims of parental or domestic abuse; new immigrants with little knowledge of English or French who are unfamiliar with our society and school system, especially in urban areas; and friends or members of street gangs associated with prostitution or drug trafficking. Some people leave home at a young age because of family conflicts and must deal with serious housing problems: substandard or unaffordable apartments, difficulties with roommates, frequent moves.

In short, many young dropouts must deal with situations characterized by poverty, precariousness and instability, which lead to conflict with their entourage and to feelings of rejection, frustration and solitude (Boivin 2001). The accumulation of problems can lead to gradual marginalization and to more or less serious forms of psychological distress, including suicidal thoughts or even attempted suicide.

In this context, it is difficult to imagine that education alone can guarantee more successful sociovocational integration. Sustained and meaningful guidance is essential to help young people acquire the physical and psychological prerequisites for such integration. Research shows the importance of meaningful human relationships in ensuring the successful completion of education programs. Having a tutor throughout one's academic career is invaluable, and helps young people learn more about themselves so that they can take advantage of their strengths and develop their talents (Janosz and Deniger 2001; Pinard 2002). In short, reconciling young dropouts with school or education involves reconciling them with educators.

This guidance could even continue beyond school. Indeed, it would help them integrate into an environment that offers far less support and supervision than the educational environment. Deniger's findings suggest that merely completing a program, although helpful, may not always provide young people with a solid foundation that will help them manage on their own. What may be seen as dependence in the program may really be a need for more long-term support. It is therefore necessary to emphasize the development of strategies for the transfer of learning beyond the "protected environment" of the program (Janosz and Deniger 2001).



Obviously, any number of problems or difficult situations can prevent young people from being fully present and willing to pursue their education. The gravity of these problems can monopolize all their attention and energy. Since they often lack confidence in their learning abilities, the accumulation or severity of their problems could discourage them and cause them to drop out once again.

Learning services for young people must therefore be accompanied by **sustained individualized guidance before, during and after their time in school** in order to help them during particularly difficult life transitions. Access to attentive and available listeners will help them solve any problems that may hinder their participation in their education. The following are examples of how this might be done:

- Assign young people to a "tutor" at the outset of the program—someone in whom they can confide during periods of doubt and discouragement. This type of guidance should be coordinated by the different partners; the resources and expertise of community organizations will be necessary.
- Schedule meetings with tutors throughout the year to periodically review and adjust the learning plan to make sure that it still corresponds to the young person's often changing expectations and objectives.
- Organize groups to provide support and favour exchanges of ideas concerning certain common problems.

- Use individual problems as a starting point for collective solutions, such as follow-up in francization and social integration activities for newly arrived immigrants; discussions about intimate relationships to counter violence; and visits with community-based resource people to answer questions about housing. It may also be necessary to provide budget planning tools, discuss the importance of money and consumerism, and so on.
- Ask young people who have completed their education to participate in discussion periods with new students and help welcome them to the school. Annual reunions could also be organized to strengthen the students' sense of belonging and perhaps renew contact and hope in more difficult times.

7

Develop solid, stable teams

Many of the young people targeted by support services have experienced tortuous educational paths along with life paths marked by instability. Often relegated to “alternative” paths, they have had to deal with a variety of educators, whose role they did not always understand and with whom they never worked long enough or intensely enough to establish meaningful relationships. Yet one study reveals that young dropouts are more sensitive than most to the academic and emotional support of educators (Violette 1991).

In an evaluative study of dropout prevention programs in disadvantaged areas, Janosz and Deniger (2001) observed that almost all of the programs evaluated presented organizational problems. The services offered to young people are often based on one-time, discontinuous or threatened initiatives tacked onto regular activities for indeterminate periods of time—often as a result of project funding—and implemented by teams subject to frequent change. Because of organizational and budgetary constraints, staff in these services are often selected at the last minute, have high turnover, and take on these tasks in addition to their regular activities. All of these factors are hardly conducive to the construction of a solid and experienced team.

Although the context of adult education is often marked by the precariousness of its staff positions, it is important to pay particular attention to the creation of **solid, stable teams** in implementing services for young people. An adapted educational environment should be able to rely on educators who want to be there, who are at ease with young people's culture and who can provide reassurance. The different educators must be selected on the basis of their motivation to work with this type of clientele,¹² their versatility and their ability to build meaningful relationships with young people.

In addition, it is important to remember that young people talk to each other, that they share information that is not always accurate, but always crucial in the choices that determine their paths in life. While some young people like to try out new things, many will find reassurance in the reputation of a support team recognized for its experience and recommended by credible peers who have gone before them.

In the medium term, the objective should be to build a solid team based on the complementary skills of educators who have chosen to devote themselves to this group in particular. As Martini points out, the work of an educator is a group effort (Martini 1997). Sufficient time must be allotted to training a significant team and to earning young people's trust. Such an environment and team culture are based on history and rely on the memory of those who are still there, as well as those who have left. In addition to increasing motivation and identification among young people, an experienced team can make use of collective competencies gained from past trial and error. Without reinventing the wheel, an established team will be more capable of innovation because of its common history, the consistency of its members and planning opportunities provided by a more long-term vision.¹³ When members encounter difficult situations that could prove demotivating, the role of the team will extend beyond providing support at work to helping find the motivation needed to carry on (Martini 1997).

A stable team is also essential for individual guidance. It makes it possible to create a tutoring system whose role, as we have seen, extends beyond the school to cover aspects of life that are often more urgent, such as self-knowledge, moral support and referral in periods of personal crisis. The relationship of trust developed within this framework may represent a more adequate approach than help provided by the ad hoc services of a specialist

12. In order to motivate others, an individual must be motivated. Commitment is an almost implicit necessity, since, if the educational situation as a whole loses its meaning in the eyes of the educator, it will be very difficult for him or her to do his or her job (Martini 1997, p. 92-93).

13. For an example of guidance with respect to integration into the work force, see Bourdon (1998).

(Pinard 2002). The more sustained contact makes it possible to learn more about the young people and easier to determine the type of attitude and educational approach most likely to succeed.¹⁴ Sharing this information with the team ensures consistency and increases the beneficial effect of the educational environment.



The following are examples of how **a solid, stable team might be created**:

- Implement the program gradually in order to facilitate the consolidation of the team. Educators should be selected long enough in advance so that they can learn to work together before the students arrive.
- Have the educators participate in a team-building activity before the beginning of the year. If the team is already solid, the students might participate as well.
- Encourage a strong sense of identification with the team and the service. Perhaps the team or the room can be named jointly by the students and the team.
- Throughout the year, provide for periods of discussion, resourcing and professional development for the team, as well as periods of evaluation in order to adjust actions taken with the students and preserve a consistent team vision of the adapted services.

14. For example, with asocial adolescents (those with psychopathic characteristics), the educator must be patient, gentle and firm, while remaining accommodating, quick to act and understanding rather than punishing. With conformists (immature adolescents), the educator must become a big brother or big sister who shows the way, expressing his or her confidence and demonstrating his or her interest; he or she must constantly use positive reinforcement. With anxious neurotics, the educator must be able to work with groups with little structure and cooperate with his or her clientele (Le Blanc et al. 1998, p. 22).

Create an engaging living environment



Some authors suggest that the main reason for dropping out of school is not academic failure, but rather a mental kind of giving up that the student has been manifesting for a long time (Caouette 1997). In their opinion, this process is caused by poor interpersonal relationships at school; learning content that is meaningless to students; and a feeling of alienation, of not being taken into consideration, of being unable to develop or exercise their autonomy or sense of responsibility. Young people at odds with school consider it at best a necessary evil, a foreign land or even a prison. Young people with difficulties are also less likely to participate in school activities and their approach differs considerably from that of their peers (Hardy 1996). In short, most dropouts have little sense of belonging with respect to their school.

Yet many young people participate in a variety of cultural activities as the “heirs of educational and cultural democratization” (Garon 2000). They particularly like to go to the movies; they also frequent discotheques, festivals, bars and other entertainment venues, all of which involve considerable socializing.¹⁵ In general, they perceive creativity and expression as means of social integration and openness to others (Boily, Duval and Gauthier 2000). Also, despite decreased participation in the past 10 years, young people are still more active in sports today than older people, and that is because sports provide an opportunity to establish social contacts, obtain social and personal gratification, and find pleasure (Boily, Duval and Gauthier 2000). Moreover, according to Boily, Duval and Gauthier (2000), their predilection for new experiences (e.g. skateboarding, snowboarding, mountain biking) reflects values such as risk-taking and the pursuit of marginality and freedom.

But not all young people participate in major cultural trends and identify with subcultures or even groups, or go out and lead a physically active lifestyle. Some, for reasons such as poverty, distance from large centres, recent geographical mobility or poor social skills, have very limited social networks and mostly live in solitude, isolation and idleness.

Because our economy and the job market focus on performance, activities involving self-expression, the arts and sports satisfy young people’s need for individual and collective self-affirmation by giving them the opportunity to

15. That is, opportunities for interaction with a number of individuals.

proclaim their uniqueness and their values (Garon 2000). But their culture is not necessarily mainstream culture and their attraction to marginality and so-called marginal cultures is often at the heart of their identity. For these young people with fragile identities, rejection or even ignorance of their culture can mean their own rejection or ostracism. For example, faced with the obligation of leaving her boots at the door, a young punk rocker may hesitate to enter the school and, even if she does, a large part of her will remain outside.



The implementation of an educational environment must therefore help break the isolation of young people lacking social contacts. The environment must also respect and even rely on the need of many for cultural uniqueness, so as to create, for and with the young people, **an engaging living environment** conducive to their participation and growth.

The need to socialize through sports and cultural activities must also be taken into account to ensure the achievement of educational goals. It is also essential to encourage young people to develop a sense of belonging to the group as well as to take charge of the physical environment. The following are examples of how this might be done:

- Assign the group a permanent room other than a regular classroom. For example, set up a kitchen and lounge area with a couch and a table around which the young people can eat and socialize during their breaks.
- Have the young people take charge of their physical environment, setting it up and decorating it according to their taste. These activities can take place at the beginning of the year and be repeated when you sense that the group needs a change. The students should also help keep the room clean.
- Team up with the young people to organize creative and interesting activities (e.g. sports, art, theatre) in which they will want to participate and in which they can integrate the learning of more official content. These activities must be consistent with their cultural universe, using their artistic references and preferred sports. It might be interesting to set up permanent sports teams, with a view to organizing eventual school (or intramural) tournaments in order to set long-term objectives and increase their sense of belonging to the group (Pinard 2002).

- Use music, which plays a role in most young people's daily activities (Boily, Duval and Gauthier 2000) and is a way of exploring their identity, in learning activities, working on lyrics, organizing a student radio station or putting on a show. Students might simply be allowed to listen to their choice of background music as they work in small groups or do other activities.
- Provide access to the Internet, which plays an important role in young people's lives, even if those targeted by the program are often not frequent users. Although it has been observed that young people surf the Internet mainly for entertainment rather than work or their studies (Boily, Duval and Gauthier 2000), constant access to one or more computers in the room—or the creation of a small Internet café near the lounge area—might increase their sense of belonging, spark their curiosity and encourage informal reading and writing activities.



Provide logistical support



The young people targeted by this measure are often confronted with problems related to housing, transportation and, often, extreme poverty (Gauthier and Mercier 1994). Some researchers point out that the main obstacle to pursuing their studies or returning to school is related to the need to support themselves (Pinard 2002). In a study on learning services offered to teenage mothers, the lack of adequate childcare services was cited by both young mothers and educators as the main obstacle to participation (Roy 2001b).

Some young people are isolated, which reduces their access to the support that their entourage might provide in delicate or difficult situations, such as a worrisome doctor's appointment or a move.

Many young people must work to support themselves while they are at school. But although working can have a positive effect on social integration, there is a close correlation between working too many hours (in general more than 20 hours per week) and dropping out of school (Conseil permanent de la jeunesse 1992).

In addition, for young people who live in the street and whose best friend is a dog, a rat or a lizard, having to leave their companion may constitute enough of an obstacle to returning to school.



For a large number of young people, adapting the educational environment also involves **providing logistical support** to help improve the organizational and material conditions surrounding their education. An effort to provide such support can, for young people who often feel neglected, illustrate the importance placed on their continued education.¹⁶ The following are examples of how this might be done:

- Give travel allowances or organize car pools for young people in larger territories.
- Ensure access to adequate childcare services near the school. The childcare service can also play a role in the young people's education, for example, by organizing occasional activities involving both parents and children. For these young mothers who are still insecure in their parental role, being near their child can make all the difference.
- Set schedules to take into account constraints related to transportation and family obligations.
- Make room for important companions. Some services might tolerate or even provide appropriate spaces for pets.
- Provide administrative assistance to students who need to support themselves outside the program. For example, offer a referral service, help them fill out an application for social assistance or provide support in legal matters.

16. See *Woww!*, Solidarité Jeunesse newsletter <<http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/francais/utilitaires/publications/jeunesse.asp>>.

Take families and networks into account



The strong influence of the family on young people's school career has long been recognized and, despite the efforts that have been made to democratize education since the 1960s, children whose parents have more education and a higher income are always the most likely to succeed in school (Kellerhals and Montandon 1991; Statistics Canada 2001). This can be explained by the greater importance placed on education by parents with more schooling (Hrimech and Théorêt 1997; Knighton and Mirza 2002; Teachman and Paasch 1998) and by their involvement and their greater expectations (De Broucker and Underwood 1998; Knighton and Mirza 2002). The family can be stimulating in terms of the material and financial resources that they provide and that facilitate a student's progress through school (Knighton and Mirza 2002).

In many cases, however, the family can also create obstacles, as is the case in unstable families (Bowlby and McMullen 2002) or when parents mistrust or reject school as a result of their own negative experiences. Research has shown that the quality of parent-child relationships is a determinant for receiving some form of support in school (Attias-Donfut 1995; Molgat 1999). The family's influence on students' school career is therefore not always positive, but it is always there (Saint-Jacques, Drapeau and Cloutier 2001). When it is positive, parents' contribution is very important and parents should be given a prominent role in the educational environment. When parents are absent or shut out by their children, it may be necessary to compensate for the lack of parental involvement through increased support from other significant adults, including educators (Gauthier and Mercier 1994).

Moreover, at this age, influences are far from limited to the family circle. Indeed, in comparison with older age groups, people between the ages of 15 and 24 spend three times more time with their friends and half as much with family members (Pronovost and Henri 1996). Adolescence is generally the time when our social network is the largest and most varied. In addition, its influence is often considerable. For example, young people who leave secondary school without a diploma are less likely to have close friends who went on to college (Statistics Canada 2002).

The importance of the social network in general must not overshadow the fact that some young people experience serious isolation for a variety of reasons. This isolation can also be a considerable obstacle to their participation in school because it limits access to an important source of support and because it is often associated, among young people, with difficulty mastering basic social skills, which can inhibit their participation in educational activities.

Young dropouts can also experience a sense of belonging to the street and try to build an identity by embracing marginality, most often in the city.

The precarious paths of young women are influenced by emotional breakups and early pregnancy (Nicole-Drancourt 1994). Moreover, participation in community activities is associated with success in school, and it has been observed that the more hours are devoted to volunteer activities, the less chance there is of academic failure (Gosselin, Lanctôt and Paquette 2001).



These different influences and constraints illustrate the importance of **taking families and networks into account** when developing and implementing actions in an adapted educational environment. The aim is, on the one hand, to reduce the impact of the negative influences and constraints imposed by families and networks on the young people's progress through school and, on the other, to encourage positive input by the family and enrich social networks by providing an opportunity to develop a sense of belonging and openness to new relationships that are rewarding and conducive to their development. The following are examples of how this might be done:

- Be sensitive to transition periods (leaving the family home, first apartment, intimate relationships), develop appropriate learning activities and adjust requirements accordingly. For example, if a young person is moving into a new apartment, mathematical concepts could be integrated into a budget planning exercise.
- Whenever possible, try to harness students' family resources in order to favour their success. To get parents and siblings on board, you might hold an open door activity early in the year to introduce the service to parents and to get to know them. It is important, though, to be aware of the tension surrounding emancipation from parental authority, which can be particularly acute among young people entering adulthood.
- Take into account the role of peers, friends, parents, siblings and spouses in students' life choices (support, indifference, violence, dependence). You might set up group discussions on violence or gangs. It would also be helpful, during individual follow-up sessions, to help students identify the influences on their choice of path, and to put them in perspective.

- Ensure an atmosphere in which differences are respected, and integrate activities aimed at the development of interpersonal skills and peaceful conflict resolution. You might also hold discussions on racism, homophobia or any other form of intolerance.
- Take into account constraints associated with pregnancy and parental obligations by adjusting certain schedules and offering the appropriate logistical support.
- Promote a sense of belonging and contacts between the young people in order to break their isolation. In addition to sports and cultural activities, you might also organize workshops devoted to suicide prevention, active listening and peer counselling.



Often, while still in school, dropouts have developed low self-worth and lost confidence in their ability to learn. Many of them have internalized the fact that what they learn in school will only have meaning later on. School and, by extension, any type of structured education, can only be boring. Yet some young people state that they perceive education as more than a means of qualifying for a job; they believe that it can give meaning to their lives by providing an interesting activity. The educational activity therefore has intrinsic value and is an end in itself rather than simply a stepping stone to the job market (Pinard 2002). According to another author, learning activities are not disconnected paths embarked upon without rhyme or reason. On the contrary, in his opinion, the most successful students in school have found reasons for being there and for what they are learning – reasons that give meaning and value to the learning content and activities, for their cognitive and cultural value in the here and now. Their education will not only have meaning “later on” (Rochex 1995).

Consequently, it is important to propose learning that young people will appreciate and that will provide concrete results in terms of gaining a better understanding of or control over their lives. Thus, the development of group learning plans for young people and, especially, in collaboration with them, is a worthwhile option. The objective is to encourage them to be more active and to ensure that they are in control of their own education. According to Boutinet (1993), developing a plan helps us carry out our intentions. A plan involves behaviour intentionally aimed at a goal; it helps realize and communicate thoughts and integrate learning.

Group projects make it possible to learn various means of communication, teamwork, negotiation and autonomy. The learning takes place in complex situations in which the students develop their own strategies. Such projects help young people learn to set goals for themselves, ask questions and solve problems. Knowledge and skills are expressed as actions that appeal to and motivate them.

For example, cultural projects are useful in helping young people assert themselves and project a positive image in public. According to one researcher, young people's cultural practices contribute significantly to the process of identity building, which characterizes this stage of their existence. In response to their need for individual and group assertiveness, culture offers young people a venue for expressing their uniqueness, through the more or less total rejection of forms of expression practised by previous generations, or through their own original approaches. Unlike the workplace and the economy, which have little room for today's young people, culture provides an opportunity for self-affirmation and social experimentation (Garon 2000).

Also, if the learning acquired by young people is to be useful and meaningful, it must have a positive impact on the community. This calls into question the importance it is given in the social and community spheres. Thus, the message that the Secondary School Diploma is a thing of value, although well-founded, causes greater anxiety among those who don't really think they will ever earn one. In addition, the view that the community and their entourage have of young people who live "alternative lifestyles," whether because of their values or their general appearance, is often negative. There is a growing intolerance for juvenile transgressions and for young people who adopt marginal practices. According to one researcher, there appears to be an attempt to "prevent adolescence," as if it were a pathology rather than a normal risk-taking stage.¹⁷

17. According to Parazelli (1999, p. 62), adolescence is, by definition, a necessary risk, the risk of fulfilling one's desires while testing one's limits.



It is therefore preferable that learning be acquired through **projects that are real, useful and meaningful**. In addition, young people must see themselves, and feel that they are seen—by the community, by their family—as doing something meaningful and useful, even if not all paths necessarily lead to a Secondary School Diploma. The following are examples of how this might be done:

- Aim for the social reintegration of street kids through the creation of murals in the neighbourhood. This is a project that can both integrate official learning and make use of young people's interest in art, and that will allow them to feel recognized and valued by the community, which appreciates more legitimate forms of expression than tags and other types of graffiti.
- Start a small business for the duration of the program to provide a context conducive to the development of sociovocational skills and to provide new experiences for participants. The products created could have social value (e.g. inexpensive meals for students at the centre, books to be donated to the library).
- Prepare a series for community radio. The young people will feel that they are being asked to act professionally and their feelings of self-worth will grow, since their production is socially recognized.
- Propose activities in which the young people might talk about their experiences or transmit their knowledge, for example, teaching Elementary Cycle Two students to use the Internet, or talking about drug abuse, art or parenting with secondary school students.



A number of organizations (e.g. local employment centres, Carrefours jeunesse-emploi, Solidarité Jeunesse, community organizations, education centres) provide young people with information and referral services, as well as a variety of measures or programs for the purpose of upgrading, reintegration or training. These resources, however, are not always harmonized, each one having its own admission requirements and conditions, such as special status required to enroll in a program, quotas for special Emploi-Québec measures, time limits for participating in certain measures, waiting periods between measures, and different conditions for the employed and the unemployed.

Young people sometimes find themselves shunted from one resource to another, discouraged by the complexity of the process and the administrative constraints. Given the precariousness of their situation and their negative experiences in school, these difficulties necessarily affect their motivation to pursue their education. The segmentation and multiplicity of measures and programs are called into question by a number of educators, as they are in the report on the first year of the Solidarité Jeunesse program, which mentions the need for an integrated and horizontal approach in order to ensure consistency in the main partners' decisions (MESS 2002). This shared approach in favour of education is all the more necessary given the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*, which calls upon not only educational institutions and community organizations that provide training, but also employers, unions and other organizations that deal with integration (MEQ 2002b).

Within the educational institutions themselves, there is a certain segregation between the youth and adult sectors, and sometimes between general education and vocational training. Especially in the case of young people who switch quickly from one sector to another, it would be helpful to strengthen ties in order to identify what the different sectors are offering, and to avoid duplication and repetition of services. In addition, studies of programs for dropouts illustrate the superficial nature of collaboration between schools and community organizations, which do not always see eye to eye. Researchers propose closer ties and more global and integrated action (Janosz and Deniger 2001).

Also, young people are often unaware of resources that might be useful to them. Studies such as the Solidarité Jeunesse report mention that young participants have little or no knowledge of community resources and services. The services in each community should therefore be made known.



It is therefore important, in each community, **to coordinate efforts to reach young people** in order to avoid duplication, inconsistencies and red tape, which can confuse and discourage a fair number of young people. There is a need to develop a common vision of learning services for young people with difficulties in a given region or neighbourhood, in both the adult and youth sectors, as well as in the community. This shared knowledge will not only serve to standardize or merge services, but also to increase consistency with a view to providing services better suited to young people's needs. Once again, it is a question of avoiding unwieldy approaches. The following are examples of how this might be done:

- Schedule semiannual meetings of all organizations offering educational and integration services to young people in the territory, in order to facilitate referrals and to identify practical solutions to promote the participation of young people and solve administrative problems (e.g. eligibility for measures, allowances for travel and materials, childcare services).
- Invite resource people from community organizations to provide information or assistance with respect to housing, drug abuse, recreational activities and so on.
- Draw up an agreement between a community organization and a school board to provide training for certain young people.
- Within the school board, organize discussion periods with educators and youth and adult sector staff who work with young people with difficulties, so that they can share their knowledge and skills.

CONCLUSION

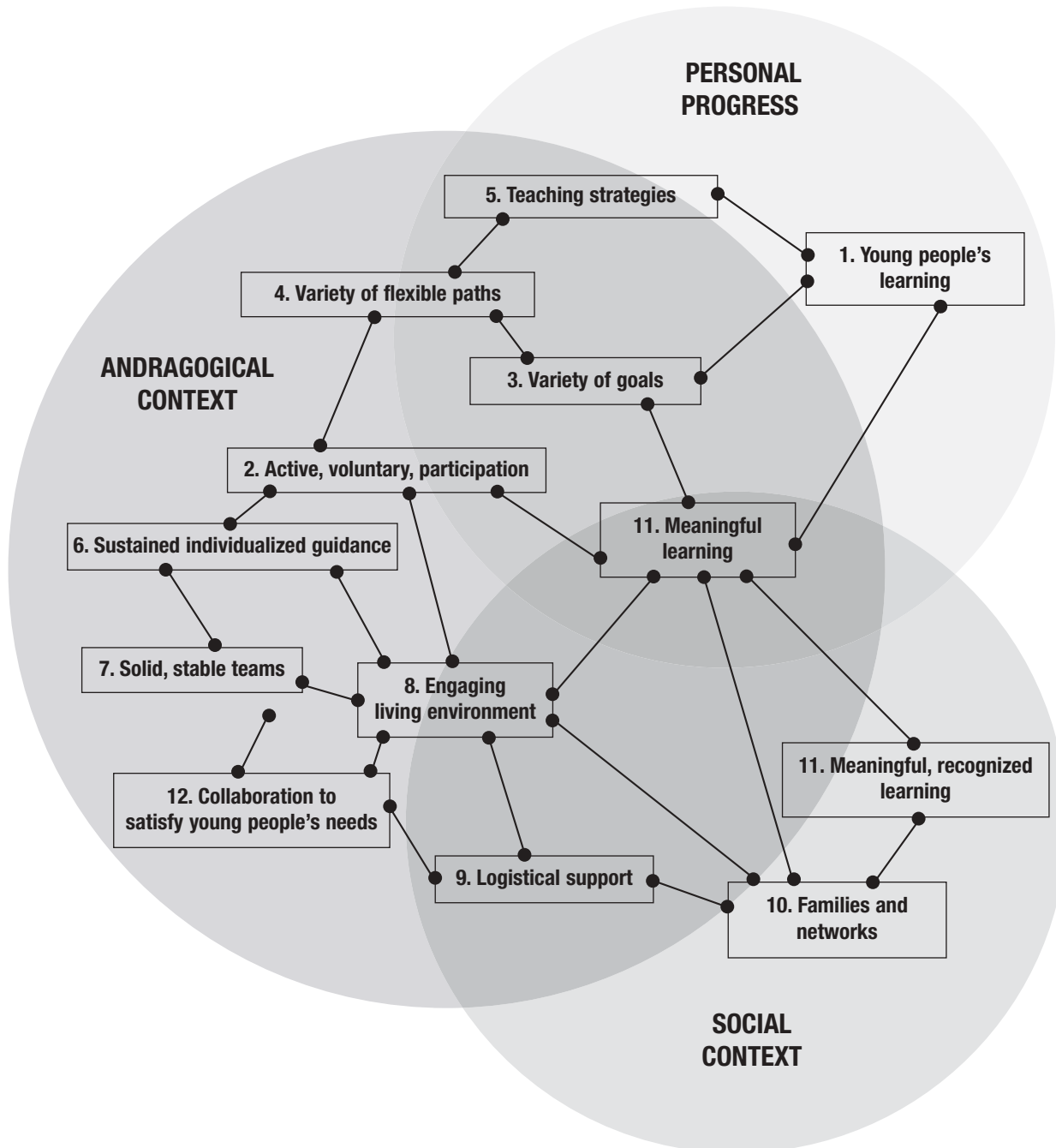
The twelve aspects to be considered in implementing adapted educational environments provide an overview of the personal, family, academic and social aspects involved. This document is based on a number of studies and on several innovative pilot projects under way in different institutions. Our vision of young people is a dynamic one, which, rather than focusing solely on their problems, makes use of their creativity, strengths and ideas. We also favour a holistic and integrated approach, with simultaneous action at several levels and using the various resources in the education community.

The services to be implemented cannot be based on a single model, but must rely on local and regional know-how and take into account the particular situation, learning and needs of each young person, the dynamics of each group and the context of each community. This holistic concept of the educational environment, based on the immediate context, makes it possible to listen to what young people have to say, and takes into account the social and andragogical contexts and the steps taken by each young person. A first draft of the interrelationships between these different dimensions is illustrated in the diagram on the following page.

In more concrete terms, examples of such environments already exist in schools as well as in community organizations, but they are often unknown. Based on the view that they can be important sources of inspiration for services in the future, we will be identifying and describing them in order to gain a better understanding of them, disseminate the relevant information, recognize their expertise, and better meet the expectations and needs of Annie, Leonardo, Serigne, Samantha, Jim, Georg and their peers.

PRELIMINARY DIAGRAM

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