

THE PERSONAL ORIENTATION PROJECT :

A New Program for Secondary Cycle Two Students
as Part of the Education Reform

FINDINGS DERIVED FROM FIELD-TESTING INVOLVING SECONDARY III STUDENTS

CONTEXT

The Personal Orientation Project (POP) enables students to acquire valuable experience within the process of career exploration undertaken in the context of the Québec Education Program at the secondary level and through a guidance-oriented approach. As part of this structured-process, which emphasizes concrete exploration, students take a proactive approach to developing their identity and learn to build their own academic and career projects.

In 2004-2005, a study was carried out based on the field-testing of the POP in one school. A research study using similar methodology was conducted in four schools in 2005-2006. The objectives of these two studies were:

1. To define conditions conducive to the implementation of the POP and to describe action taken by the staff concerned as well as elements related to the context; to highlight and analyze those elements that seem the most relevant to the career development of students.
2. To assess certain effects of POP field-testing on students and the contribution of each partner (teachers, guidance counsellors, pedagogical representatives, school administrators, parents).

The main findings derived from the data analysis are not definitive, and it will be possible to measure the impact of the POP in greater detail only in the

years following its official implementation. The studies that were carried out will nonetheless have made it possible to shed light on the conditions conducive to its implementation, in a field-testing and application context.

We should point out that the comments we received in 2004-2005 from both educators and students tended to confirm the relevance of allotting 100 hours for the POP, in order to give students sufficient time to become involved in a conscientious career exploration process and to allow for the appropriate follow-up.

CONDITIONS CONDUCTIVE TO IMPLEMENTING THE POP

The availability and variety of experiential tools and properly equipped POP classrooms are factors that appear to influence the extent to which both students and their teachers are committed to the POP. The information gathered shows that the POP requires a particular type of school organization, which must be carefully planned to address students' needs in a climate that encourages them to be autonomous and responsible for their own learning. Likewise, the involvement, complementary efforts and cohesiveness of the teachers and non-teaching professionals associated with the POP remain important for the successful implementation of the program.

PERCEIVED EFFECTS

In general, the students interviewed consider that the POP allowed them to discover new occupations and trades, among other things, and to become involved in their own process of career exploration. Most of the students interviewed felt that the POP had helped them obtain a clearer idea of one or more professional fields that interested them, particularly by enabling them to try out various concrete tasks associated with the trades or professions in question. They also indicated that the POP allowed them to know themselves better, expand their knowledge of computers and make more informed choices at the Secondary IV level. Several students also said that this approach enabled them to become more resourceful and autonomous and to persevere throughout the year.

The results from the student questionnaires also tend to show that the POP has a positive effect during the school year. In fact, the students who were involved in field-testing the program stood out from the students in control groups in that they achieved better overall results in all aspects of career preparation. This progress was particularly apparent among girls, who were proportionally more undecided with respect to their academic aspirations at the beginning of the year, and among the students who chose to try out the POP. Nonetheless, students who planned to enroll in secondary school vocational training tended to achieve higher than average results on the different indicators calculated. It should be said that proportionally more boys planned to enroll in vocational training. It may be supposed that

these boys were more on the look-out for career possibilities, since they saw themselves taking the kind of training that would get them into the job market more quickly. The fact that they would soon have to make career decisions could, in part, explain such high results.

WHAT THE EDUCATORS AND PARENTS SAY

The different educators interviewed consider that the POP leads students to take an interest in their own career paths, while enabling them to consciously embark on a process of career exploration at their own pace. It thus allows students to realize that they have control over their future careers and makes academic subjects more meaningful to them. In this context, the information gathered show that it is essential that teachers and guidance counsellors continue to assist and guide students, sometimes in a more structured manner, so that they feel supported every step of the way.

Lastly, it should be emphasized that most of the parents questioned consider that, for the most part, the program meets their children's needs.

A full report on the results of the field-testing of the POP can be found at:

www.mels.gouv.qc.ca