

INCLUSION: YESTERDAY AND TODAY



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Disabled, or “special-needs” students, are attending institutions of higher learning, in greater and greater numbers—a fact due to the students themselves, educators and other professionals, managers, outside partners and, in many cases, parents. That presence, together with the nature of the disabilities in question, has posed new and stimulating challenges for the college and university communities. Given this fact, the need for awareness-raising, information and training for college teachers and other professionals cannot be ignored. The latter, despite their best intentions, do not always have the tools to meet the demands of this population. The need for suitable structures to meet the growing needs of these students must also be considered. In this article, we deal with the educational and social context surrounding these students, after first discussing the vocabulary used to describe them.

The terminology used in the field of impairments, disabilities and handicaps is constantly changing. For the past 30 years, we have been reading or hearing about “functional limitations”, “disabilities” and “disabling situations”. This last expression, which forms part of Quebec’s conceptual model of the disability creation process (DCP), emphasizes social participation rather than disabilities:

Based on an ecological model, [the DCP model] does not focus as much on impairments or disabilities as on the various obstacles or facilitators that, when interacting with such impairments or disabilities, can affect lifestyle and compromise daily activities and social roles. In other words, individuals are either capable of fully participating in society or disabled. This model takes account of the interaction between risk factors (causes), personal characteristics (organic systems and aptitudes), environmental factors and lifestyle. (Bonnelli, Ferland-Raymond and Campeau, 2010, p. 7) [translation]

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INCLUSION

In the early 1980s, a group of hearing-impaired students attending the Lucien-Pagé composite school in Montreal demanded access to post-secondary education, intending to pursue their

schooling with the help of Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) interpreters. Around the same time, two hearing-impaired women at the Université de Montréal asked the provincial Ministère de l'Éducation [Department of Education] for interpreters to help them access information and education. These events marked the emergence of the first population of disabled students. The efforts of the aforementioned high-school students were successful; their college attendance was made possible by a pilot project at the Cégep du Vieux Montréal. That project was subsequently developed in other CEGEPs. The Department then assigned the Cégep de Sainte-Foy and the Cégep du Vieux Montréal the task of monitoring integration-assistance services for disabled students in the eastern and western regions of the province, respectively. In the case of the Université de Montréal, the Department agreed to fund sign-language interpreting services. It was therefore because of the students’ determination and commitment that the doors of advanced education were finally opened. Over the 1982-1983 academic year, the CEGEPs provided support services to a few dozen disabled students (Bouchard and Veillette). In addition to recognizing their needs by facilitating their integration into college or university, the Department also paved the way for a number of disabled individuals with the required intellectual skills to successfully make their own way—first, into postsecondary programs, then within those programs—and take on vital roles in society.

The first services offered by institutions of higher learning to disabled populations were interpretation and note-taking (hearing-impaired students not being able to take notes while watching the instructor and following the interpreter). When visually impaired students in turn expressed certain needs, including access to Braille textbooks and safe wayfinding through campus buildings, new services were required. At the Cégep du Vieux Montréal, it was a psychologist who first met with such students; surprised to learn that special services existed for hearing impaired students but not for the visually impaired, she took measures to ensure their needs would be taken into account. Other disabilities, such as motor dysfunction, paraplegia and muscular dystrophy, also began to emerge, illustrating the fact that individuals with motor disorders were forming an increasingly large percentage of the population in all spheres of human activity, including advanced studies.



A few years later, when educational institutions began accommodating those with learning disabilities, attention-deficit disorders, mental-health problems and autism-spectrum disorders, they were actually meeting the particular needs of a fourth emerging population—one made up of students with “nonvisible” disabilities. Whether because they wish to remain anonymous or out of a fear of being stigmatized, these students have long remained in the shadows, often disclosing their problems in order to obtain assistance only after being confronted with several obstacles, significant academic problems and often a few failures. For students in this population, as for those who have sensory or motor disorders, the most common means of support include guidance, customized classrooms, audio books, computer programs and tools and extra time for evaluations (see the *Pédagogie collégiale* Facebook page for an exhaustive list of the services and accommodation measures or modifications to the physical environment available to disabled students).

In short, since the early 1980s, students with a sensory or motor impairment have had access to postsecondary education thanks to funding from the Quebec government for support services and as a result of a general acceptance of the concept of inclusion. However, it was the publication of the *Accueil et intégration des personnes handicapées au collégial* [Intake and Integration of Disabled College Students] program (MESS) that outlined the policies, guidelines and roles of all stakeholders. Further details were contained in the *Guide pour compléter un plan individuel d'intervention* (Service d'aide à l'intégration des élèves (SAIDE), Cégep du Vieux Montréal and Direction générale de l'enseignement et de la recherche), which aimed at establishing an individualized education plan for each student. This guide outlines the various components of such plans (more accurately called “service plans”, as they describe which services and accommodation measures are provided by educational institutions, on one hand, and which are funded by the Department, on the other). This description is used in submitting the relevant funding applications.

■ A CHANGING POPULATION

About a decade ago, or 20 years after the integration of the first disabled students into the postsecondary system, a distinction began to be made between so-called “traditional” disabilities and those qualified as “emerging”. While the classification of disabilities within these categories is not always the same—varying with authors and stakeholders—motor dysfunctions, sensory disturbances and organic disorders are generally considered “traditional”, and learning disabilities, attention-deficit disorders and mental-health problems are

commonly thought of as “emerging.” Autism-spectrum disorders (or pervasive development disorders) are sometimes placed in one category, sometimes in the other. Over the past five years, the number of students in the postsecondary network with “emerging” disabilities has surpassed that of students with “traditional” disabilities (see article by Ducharme & Montminy in this issue). This is the reason why the matter is so important, and why we will all likely have to deal with the situation. Moreover, according to Fichten et al. (2012), only some disabled students avail themselves of special services—meaning that the actual number of disabled students who could qualify to receive assistance is higher than the statistics would suggest!

■ EFFECTS OF RECOGNIZING THE RIGHTS OF THE DISABLED

“This increase [in the number of disabled students] illustrates the promotion of a “school for all” which seeks to be both efficient and equitable and to facilitate the participation of all in the economic and social development of society.” (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2011, p. 127).

The question of “reasonable accommodation” for disabled students is based on the fight against discrimination and the obligation of educational institutions to treat students equitably. We should stress here that being fair with everyone does *not* mean doing the same thing for all; students with disabilities should be treated in a manner that takes account of their disabilities. Those who, because of duly identified dyslexia, must use reading software are not privileged; rather, measures have been taken to help offset their disability and further their learning by putting them on the same footing as their classmates.

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As underlined by Bourassa and Tousignant (2009), legislation in a large part of the world today promotes the inclusion of disabled students in the classroom. The United States, for example, has passed the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, which sets forth accommodation-measure obligations. Quebec has no such far-reaching legislation, but the province does have the *Act to Secure Handicapped Persons in the Exercise of their Rights*



Disabilities and Higher Education

with a View to Achieving Social, School and Workplace Integration (2011), the *Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* as well as a host of essential reference documents, the province's *À part entière* policies (Office des personnes handicapées du Québec), legal opinions of counsel from the Fédération des CEGEPs' legal department, and the work of university legal counsel and ombudsmen. The disabled can use these same documents—which stipulate that all Quebec postsecondary institutions must provide students who have been diagnosed as disabled with accommodation measures—to have their rights enforced.

These legal considerations have brought about a significant social change: the full participation of the disabled in our society. This change is already reflected in our educational institutions, with the postsecondary network boasting a certain number of disabled employees who are former students.

Consequently, our awareness of the jurisprudence and best practices related to access to education for the disabled has increased significantly. Furthermore, the college network's support measures are increasingly based on research and practices that have, to date, ensured the success of numerous students. That being said, however, much remains to be done to ensure that inclusion is successful on all fronts. While educational institutions and stakeholders from the postsecondary network are now more aware of their obligations, a consensus on how those responsibilities should be met has yet to be reached, and must eventually be adopted by the entire college system.

WHAT NEXT?

VOCABULARY TO SUIT THE TIMES

As we see it, the time has come to rethink our ideas on inclusion and disabilities, as well as the related vocabulary: given the changes mentioned above, some terms have become outdated. Disabilities formerly referred to as “emerging” are in fact less and less so. By way of illustration, students suffering from mental-health problems are not a “new” phenomenon, and students with learning disabilities have been demanding support for about 15 years; similarly, attention-deficit disorders have existed for some time, and we have known for several years that these disorders continue into adulthood. Individuals with such problems do not always see themselves as “disabled” or understand the concept of “disabling situation” as used by the International Network on the Disability Creation Process. First, we must realize that the term “disability” connotes a physical or sensory impairment, and is only infrequently used to describe individuals with psychiatric or

neurological disorders. Second, many people with learning disabilities, attention-deficit or autism-spectrum disorders and mental-health problems already struggle with labels that reveal their “nonvisible” disabilities, and feel those labels stigmatize them. It is therefore easy to understand their reluctance to shoulder an additional label—that of “disabled”! Furthermore, neurological disorders are often associated with mental-health problems for the simple reason that they are described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV). Lastly, the origin of such disorders, our perception of their manifestations and our understanding of them are changing as quickly as the field of neuroscience itself, which means that educational institutions must make adjustments that take account of scientific advancements, not just in terms of approaches and interventions, but also of vocabulary.

APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL METHODS

The increased number of disabled students in Quebec's network of colleges and universities, as well as the complex nature of their disabilities, has necessitated an in-depth review of our ideas on education and learning, whether those ideas are based on behaviourism, humanism or cognitive science. As educators in a special-needs context, we are questioning our practices; we are calling increasingly on non-disabled students to help their peers; we are re-examining our methods of assessment, of helping disabled students reach the level of skill required to successfully complete an internship (where provided by their program), of providing an education that qualifies them for the work force. Educators have also realized that the changes made to assist disabled students have also benefited their non-disabled classmates. Several years ago, we provided interpretation for a hearing-impaired student in a human-biology course. As sign language has its own iconic properties, after a time most other students also began turning to the interpreters, as the latter provided a visual image that, combined with the explanations of the instructor, allowed many students to take advantage of assistance that, in theory, was intended for a single individual. Moreover, from a social-constructivist perspective, both the social dimension of disabled students and the relationship between the latter and their non-disabled classmates can be built on. As both groups interact with each other, everyone has a chance to influence his or her peers. Once the differences are discussed openly and the related taboos are transcended, progress can be made in the inclusion of individuals who, despite and because of their differences, can teach others about perseverance, tenacity, courage and resilience.



SPECIAL RESOURCES

The current context favours the access of some and, at the same time, adds to the workload of others. Stakeholders, especially educators, are feeling that pressure. The associated burnout has been expressed, even condemned, throughout the network—more specifically in the colleges. Ten years ago, CEGEPs and universities were dealing with only one dyslexic student, yet many educators were already asking questions and feeling unequipped for the task at hand. Today, college teachers with only one disabled individual in a given class are in the minority. Although a large number of disabled students have identified themselves as such, many have not; as a result, a single teacher may have to teach various special-needs students in a given term. The attendant increased workload is due, not strictly to the presence of disabled students in the classroom, but rather to their numbers as well as the diversity of their problems. As educators, we naturally feel concerned and want to help these students at all costs, and it is appalling that we have neither the necessary resources nor sufficient time. Some are advocating a decrease in the number of students per class, and hope that the calculations involved will take account of the number of disabled students in each. At present, no one knows what the ideal ratio should be, especially as the statistics differ.

Furthermore, the number of professional resources is growing only gradually—perhaps too gradually to meet the need. The very nature of those resources is also a subject of discussion. Do we need more speech-language pathologists? Reading clinicians? Social workers? Psychologists? Psycho-educators? What role could be played by special education technicians, peer helpers, or university students interning at a disability-services office?

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Much remains to be explored. Certain choices have had to be made immediately; in some cases, these were based on the availability of professional or financial resources, or both. The efficacy of those choices remains to be seen. Moreover, at a time when the lower levels are restructuring in keeping with a non-categorical approach—i.e., one geared toward student needs—colleges and universities seem to be fixated on a process in which a medical diagnosis is essential. Should that process be fine-tuned to take greater account of the needs of each individual student? It is our hope that the college network can develop a meaningful, productive niche in which to

enhance life in Quebec society. In this regard, the Research Centre for the Educational and Professional Integration of Students with Disabilities (CRISPESH), a new College Technology Transfer Centre in Innovative Social Practices (CCTT-PSN) affiliated with the Cégep du Vieux Montréal and Dawson College, seems extremely promising.

GREATER STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

While educators, other professionals and managers are responsible for putting the means required for disabled students to succeed at the latter's disposal, it is up to the students themselves to take advantage of the services available to them.

In a qualitative study comparing a population of U.S. and Canadian workers with learning disabilities, Gerber, Price, Mulligan and Shessel mention the main labour-force challenges involved: disclosure, accountability, reasonable accommodation and the rights of the individual. The higher the educational level concerned, the more each student is responsible for making others aware of his or her condition and needs. Similarly, disabled students may benefit from an increasingly greater degree of social inclusion and self-empowerment as they get older. According to Fichten et al., disabled students' social network, motivation, weekly schedule, reduced number of courses, and the availability of assistance services all help facilitate inclusion. Students alone are responsible for taking control of these factors. ●

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Disabilities and Higher Education

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WE SHOULD ALL KEEP IN MIND THAT:

- *learning disabilities, mental-health problems, autism-spectrum disorders and attention-deficit disorders—i.e., what are being called “emerging” disabilities—are neurobiological in origin, and have absolutely no relation to do with determination to succeed or IQ;*
- *the disabled will have to adopt strategies and use whatever support is available their whole lives;*
- *Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Youth Protection and Bill 56 on integrating the disabled into the work force make everyone responsible for student intake and integration, as well as for accommodation measures;*
- *education is a right for all individuals with an interest in and ability for higher learning;*
- *individuals are not obliged to disclose their disabilities;*
- *there are many examples of disabled individuals who have successfully completed their education and can participate fully in society.*