



Summary

Learning difficulties

Reference framework for intervention



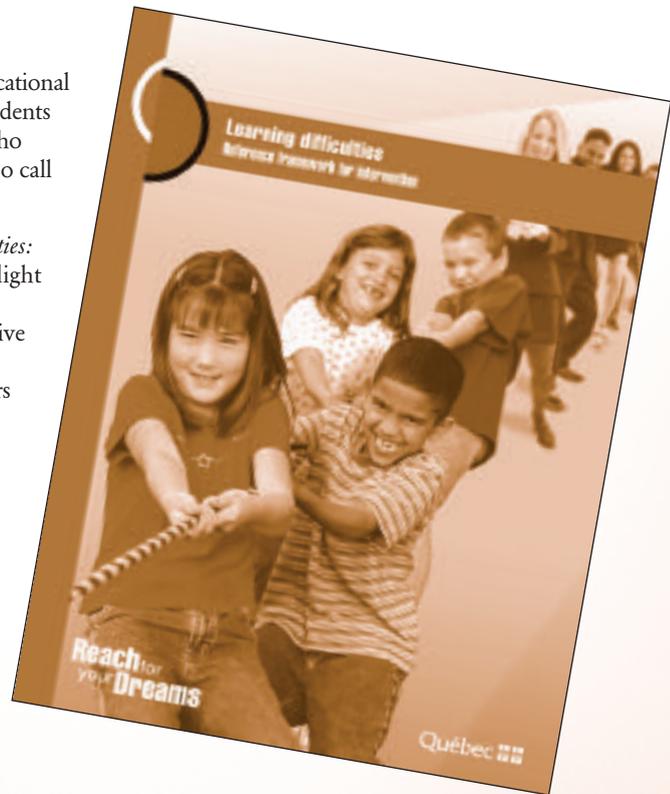
Reach for
your **Dreams**

Québec 

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

The document entitled *Students with Learning Difficulties: Reference Framework for Intervention* aims to shed new light on how best to provide assistance to students with learning difficulties and facilitate the search for effective intervention measures that meet their needs. It is designed for teachers, student services staff, counsellors and administrators, and should also be of interest to parents.

This brochure is a summary of the above-mentioned document and presents an overview of each chapter. More complete information on the various topics summarized in this brochure can be found in the above reference framework on the page numbers indicated in parentheses throughout this document.





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

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

DEFINITION OF THE TERM

LEARNING DIFFICULTY (p. 2)

- Student experiences difficulty in his/her learning progression in terms of the outcomes of the Québec Education Program
- As a result of interactions between the student's characteristics and those of his or her family, school and living environment (p. 5)

FOUNDATIONS OF THE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK (p. 3 - 6)

1. *Education Act*
2. Basic School Regulation
3. New curriculum
 - Québec Education Program
 - Evaluation of learning
4. *Policy on Special Education*

ORIENTATIONS *(p. 15 - 26)*

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

TARGETING STUDENT SUCCESS

(p. 15 - 17)

Helping students succeed means encouraging them to realize their full potential, go beyond their limits and become full-fledged members of society. There are different ways of helping students succeed. Most of the time, the idea is to harbour the same expectations while using different methods. In some cases, our expectations must be adjusted. The decision to implement adapted methods must be made within the framework of an individualized education plan.

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

TAKING PREVENTIVE ACTION

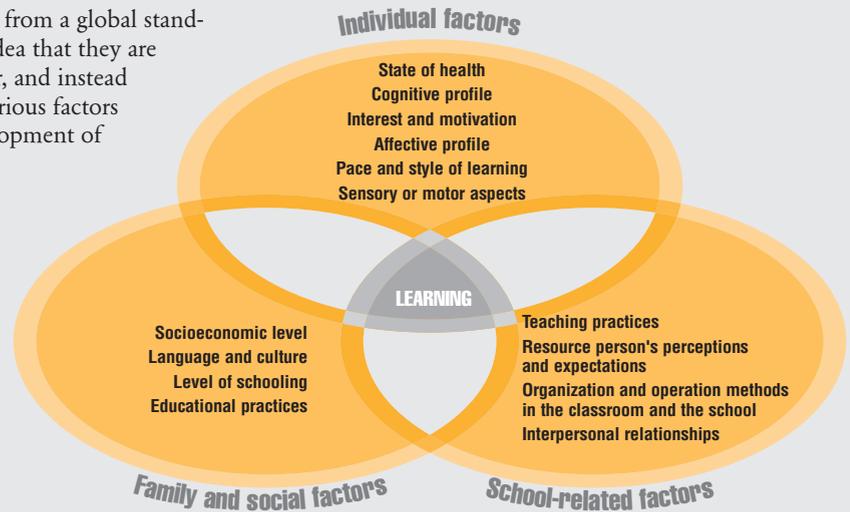
(p. 17 - 20)

It should be recalled that learning difficulties can be prevented by:

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

VIEWING THE STUDENT'S

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



USING DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING

(p. 24 - 26)

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

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

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE SUPPORT TO STUDENTS (p. 28 - 37)

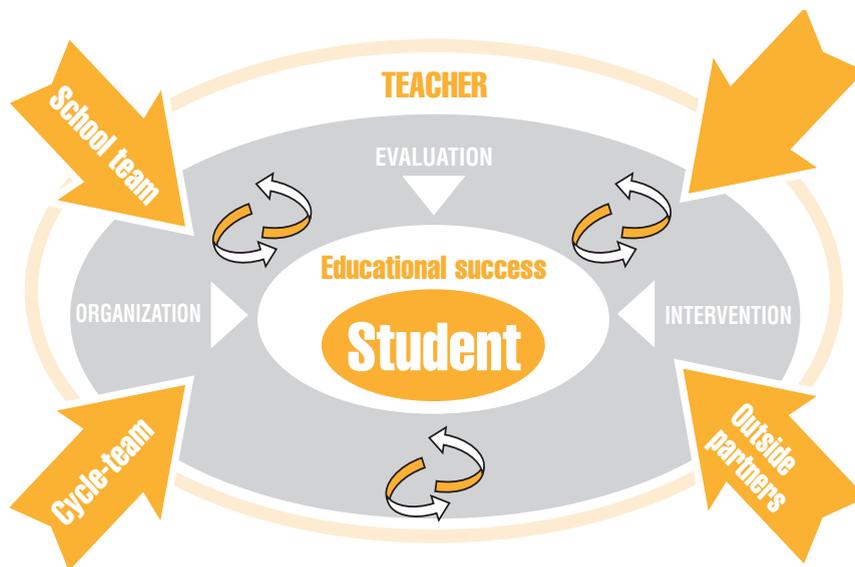
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Any approach used to support students with learning difficulties must target educational success and be founded on the principle of educability, which means recognizing that all students are capable of learning provided the appropriate conditions are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

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

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

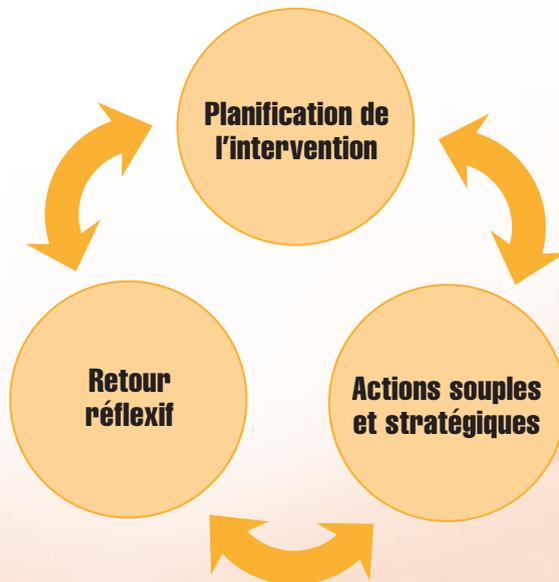
Providing effective support to a student with learning difficulties must be predicated on a fair evaluation of his or her situation. As shown in the table below, evaluation is at the heart of a dynamic system where evaluation is used to intervene more effectively and to better organize the school environment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



EVALUATION OF THE STUDENT'S SITUATION *(p. 28)*

- Gathering of information on the student's abilities and needs as well as the school, family and social environment
- Aim of this evaluation: to support the student's learning progression

INTERVENTION *(p. 30 - 33)*



ORGANIZATION *(p. 33 - 38)*

- Consistent, concerted intervention measures that provide continuity with those already undertaken
- Optimization of the competencies of various resource persons
- Winning educational practices aimed at avoiding grade repetition
- Solid partnership with parents and the community
- Adequate supervision



The need to support students with learning difficulties underscores the importance of everyone concerned working together in a systemic fashion. All resource persons are encouraged to implement concrete actions to support students who have or are at risk of developing learning difficulties. By working together, they can succeed in establishing a common focus and carrying out better targeted initiatives.

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

The suggested measures and approaches must be carried out as closely as possible with the student, i.e. in the school and in the classroom, and in collaboration with the family and the community.

ENSURE THE CONTINUITY OF SERVICES WHEN THE CHILD BEGINS SCHOOL *(p. 39 - 40)*

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

IMPLEMENT MEASURES THAT FOSTER STUDENT SUCCESS BEGINNING IN PRESCHOOL *(p. 41 - 43)*

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

These measures are more effective when they are carried out in the classroom on a regular basis and in collaboration with the parents.

FOCUS ON THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP (p. 43 - 45)

Like younger students, students with learning difficulties need a good emotional climate in order to learn.

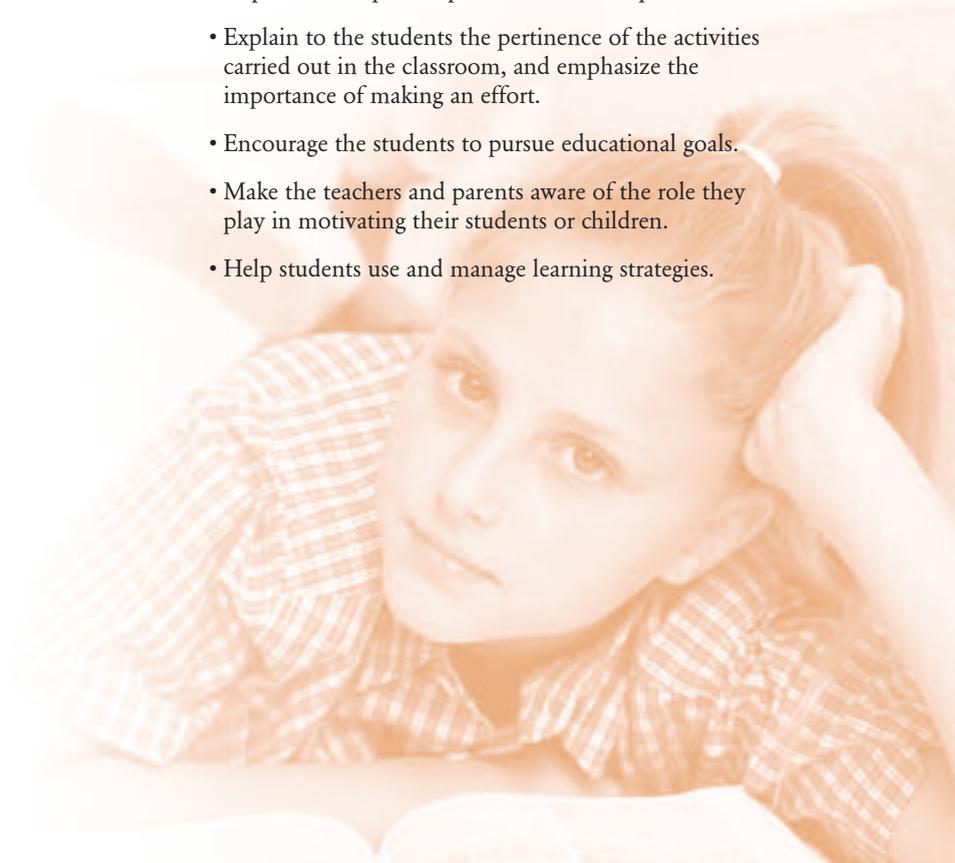
This aspect is also important for older students. It should also be noted that all students need to have passionate, motivated teachers.

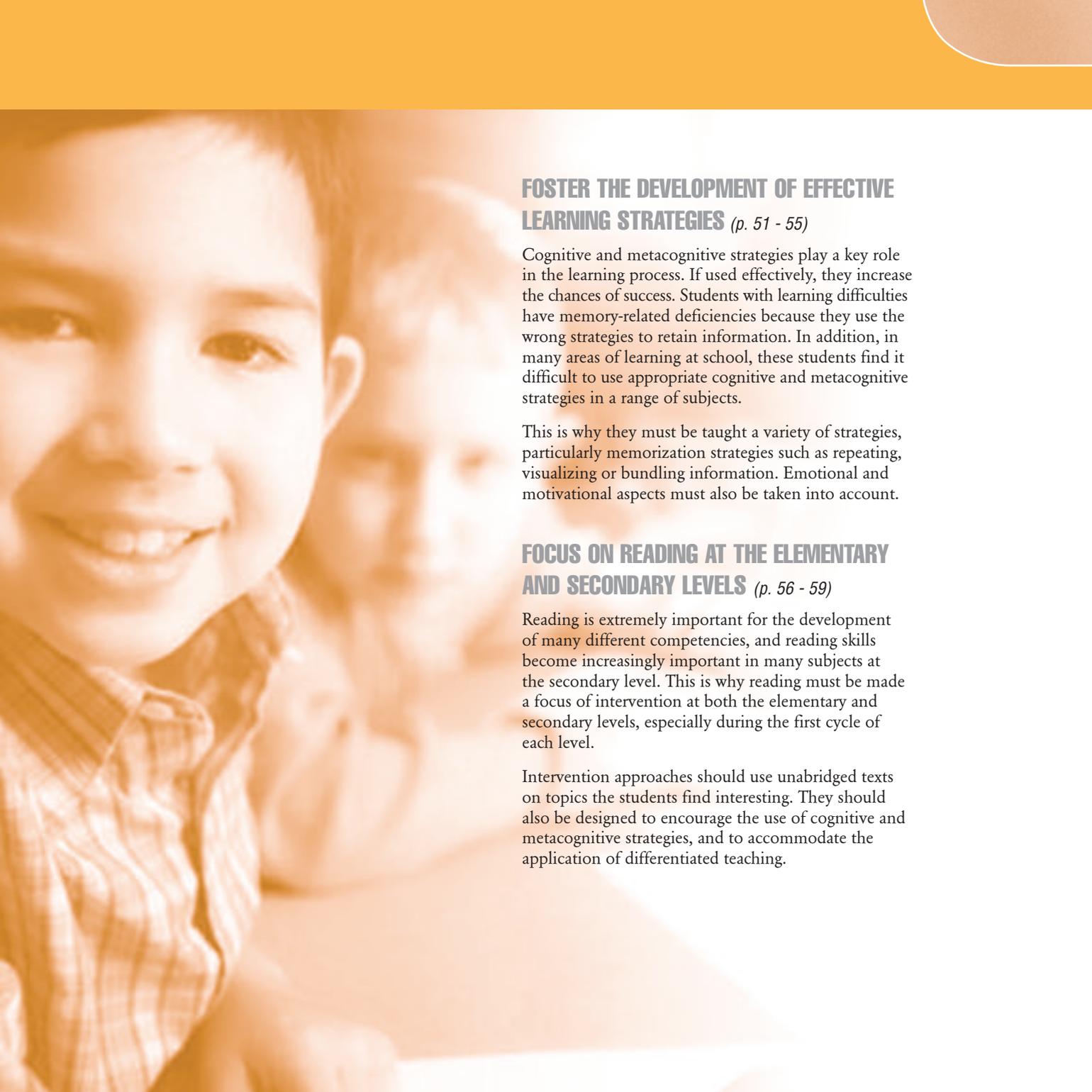
By listening to young people, recognizing the value of what they have to say and giving them undivided attention, teachers will be better equipped to meet their relational needs.

USE MOTIVATION AS A LEVER FOR LEARNING (p. 45 - 50)

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

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





FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES *(p. 51 - 55)*

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

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

FOCUS ON READING AT THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY LEVELS *(p. 56 - 59)*

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

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

REMAIN AWARE OF MALE/FEMALE ACHIEVEMENT PATTERNS *(p. 60 - 63)*

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

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

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

TAKE PERIODS OF VULNERABILITY INTO ACCOUNT *(p. 63 - 70)*

All possible steps must be taken to ensure a smoother transition from preschool to elementary school, as well as from elementary to secondary school. The steps include better harmonization of pedagogical practices, and more cooperation between teachers.

The transition from school to work should also be a major concern of resource persons in the school. This transition must be planned within the context of an individualized education plan, and carried out in collaboration with the various partners concerned.

In addition, students dealing with risk factors such as parental divorce, the death of a relative, or physical and emotional abuse must be given support. Students with internalized or externalized problems also require assistance.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TARGETING STUDENT SUCCESS *(p. 71 - 75)*

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

An organizational structure focused on the school's mission *(p. 71)*

Diversified services adapted to students' abilities and needs *(p. 72)*

Management style that fosters participation *(p. 72)*

Organizational choices made with a view to integrating students into regular classes or the neighbourhood school *(p. 73)*

Resources distributed fairly and transparently *(p. 74)*

Evaluation of the actions undertaken and their outcome *(p. 74)*

A concern for ensuring professional development for all school staff members *(p. 74)*

