

PROVIDING GUIDANCE FOR INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT PRACTICES

in Secondary Schools

Instructors and Counsellors



This project was funded by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS).

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Title of original document

L'encadrement des pratiques d'intervention de l'accompagnement individualisé au secondaire: À l'intention des formateurs et des conseillers

English translation

Direction des services à la communauté anglophone – Services langagiers

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This document is available on the MELS Web site:

www.mels.gouv.qc.ca

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Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2015

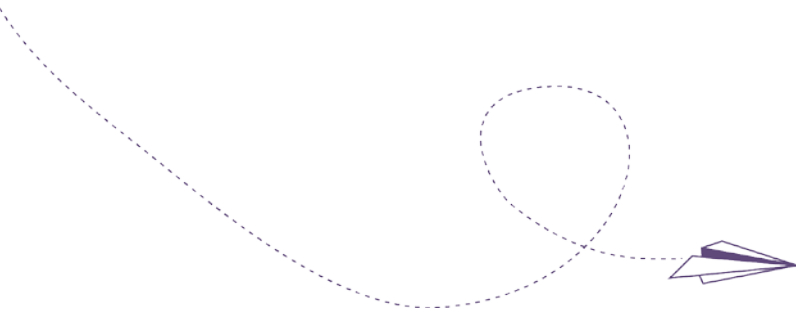
ISBN 978-2-550-70618-2 (PDF)

ISBN 978-2-550-68462-6 (French, PDF)

Legal Deposit – Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2015

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1 The role of instructors and counsellors



Instructors and counsellors work with the teachers. They provide coaching and supervision and follow up on the training put in place by the program managers and planned by the administrators. The instructors and counsellors organize these training sessions for teachers serving as resource persons, and sometimes for parents. They advise resource teachers and provide them with the means to carry out the educational support programs. These tasks may be taken on by complementary educational services staff.

2 Guidance in educational support programs

Educational support programs, also known as advisory or homeroom programs, are presented here as a structure in which an experienced teacher or member of the school staff is teamed up with a small number of Secondary I students, usually 5 to 15. The teacher is released from up to 50% of his or her teaching workload to take on this responsibility. Most often, support is provided in class and in the context of a school-wide program.

2.1 Who coaches the teachers carrying out the educational support programs?

Coaching is provided or organized by the instructor or person designated by the school to support the resource teacher. This coaching may be in the form of initial training before the start of an educational support program or ongoing training during the provision of support.

2.2 The various types of training for resource teachers

According to the research, training given through *study groups*, *teacher networks*, *mentorship meetings*, *working committees* and *research projects* is more effective than training where teachers take courses, participate in traditional workshops or attend conferences.

Training over a longer period of time gives teachers more opportunities to delve deeper into the content and participate in active learning, which is more in keeping with real-life practice and more compatible with their professional goals.

Having teachers from the same school, subject area and cycle participate as a group seems to facilitate learning and have a positive impact on support and guidance.

2.3 Essential components of initial training

Initial training (also called *pre-match training*) for teachers who become involved in educational support programs is considered essential to the success of these programs, even if, in reality, it is not always given. Below are the main components that instructors should always cover.

✓ **Familiarizing resource teachers with the school**

Resource teachers must know how studies are organized at the school and what services it provides in order to be able to inform the students and, if needed, steer them in the right direction. Essentially, this means being familiar with the following:

- the rules and policies governing how studies are organized, which will enable the resource teacher to efficiently monitor the student's commitment and school marks, as well as provide the student with useful feedback at key points on his or her path
- the conditions for pursuing studies, eligibility for specific school and extracurricular activities and for changing programs, which will enable the resource teacher to provide effective support for the student's career orientation process

✓ **Presenting certain theories**

Resource teachers must be aware of certain theories:

- on the psychosocial development of adolescents and students at risk
- on the career orientation and development of young people
- on effective study and adaptation strategies

✓ **Helping them to communicate better**

The training must allow resource teachers to exercise their communication, reflection, support, listening, networking and crisis-management skills. It must teach them to develop mentoring relationships and to guide their students toward problem-solving processes.

✓ **Teaching them about the available technological tools**

Resource teachers must be trained to use technological tools for follow-up and contact effectively. The follow-up tools may include systems managed by the school for monitoring academic paths, study management software and sites that are useful for the students. The contact tools (individual or group e-mail, Twitter, Facebook, electronic forums) must be familiar to students and must allow teachers to reach the students.

✓ **Taking the personal development of resource teachers into consideration**

The initial training must also cover the personal development of resource teachers: their interests and motivation, stress management and dealing with work overload, and self-knowledge. These themes can be addressed through methods of introspection.

2.4 Providing resource teachers with clear guidelines

The initial training is aimed at providing support and guidance to resource teachers in their work. The instructors should also inform resource teachers about the scope and boundaries of their interventions.

✓ **Encouraging reflection**

Instructors should also make resource teachers aware that their work is not to prepare students to learn subject matter, provide psychological support, resolve existential crises or develop friendships with them. The resource teacher's role is to advise and support students in their school life, to refer them to professionals when the situation requires it and to let them know that they have potential and that they can count on him or her at all times.

It is therefore recommended that resource teachers reflect on the following questions before they intervene:

- How does providing support differ from a classroom teacher's tasks?
- How does the work of a resource teacher differ from that of a psychologist, special education teacher, social worker or guidance counsellor?
- How does the relationship of support differ from a relationship of friendship?

✓ **Specifying the scope and boundaries of interventions**

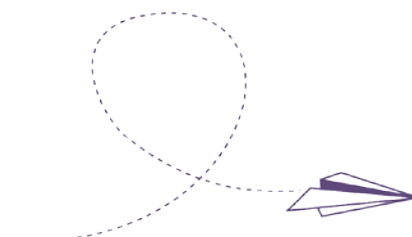
Providing guidelines for the resource teacher's involvement in following up on the students' school records, behaviour, involvement in extracurricular activities and guidance process.

Instructors show the resource teachers that their interventions may take various forms:

- preparing reports and learning profiles, and discussing them with the students
- teaching study strategies
- helping other teachers find the best way to establish contact with certain students
- steering students with a high number of risk factors to professional services
- giving students support in their career exploration process
- giving students information about the extracurricular activities program and inviting them to participate in these activities
- emphasizing the students' successes

Given these many possibilities, it is recommended that, in initial training, resource teachers be told exactly what is expected of them and the approach to be used, based on the goals of the program. There should be no unrealistic expectations in terms of time or resources.

Establishing parameters with regard to using information or data which may be available to resource teachers is also recommended during pre-match training. In general, resource teachers have information on their students' progress, such as elementary school report cards, marks and reports from the first courses in secondary school, and disciplinary offences. It is therefore important for the instructor to establish strict parameters with regard to the use resource teachers will make of this information, identify confidential items of information and who can access it, and specify how this information will be used and for what purpose.



3 Support and guidance practices in mentoring

A mentoring relationship is a one-on-one relationship in which a volunteer provides support to a student with the aim of responding to the student's developmental needs. The mentor can be a teacher, an older student or a volunteer from the school or the community.

3.1 Who coaches the mentors?

Coaching is provided or organized by the instructor or person designated by the school to support the mentors. It refers to initial or ongoing training (during mentoring) and to supervision.

The instructor is viewed as a facilitator and mentor, not as a teacher. The instructor provides support and guidance, listens actively, learns the group dynamics and manages them. Before, during and after each mentor training session, he or she follows various principles and guidelines:

1. reflects on how the practising teachers or adult volunteers learn; in other words, ensures that they understand the relevance of the learning content and its usefulness for mentoring students, and explicitly links it to what they routinely experience
2. has a command of the training content and ensures that it is consistent with the expectations of the school where the mentors work
3. chooses a comfortable setting that encourages discussion and interaction among the participants
4. arrives early, before the training session starts
5. prepares in advance all the material required for the training to proceed smoothly
6. strikes a balance between discussions among the participants and the presentation of different components of the training content
7. acts as a mentor by engaging in active listening, giving positive and constructive feedback, solving problems and being aware of participants' sensitivity to the suggestions provided
8. asks for participant feedback during and at the end of the training
9. assesses what needs to be reviewed or modified for future training sessions
10. systematically and personally follows up on questions or requests that could not be answered during the training session

3.2 The various types of mentorship training

Initial training

Participating in training sessions before starting to mentor has positive effects on the quality and length of the mentoring relationship and on mentors' own perception of their effectiveness. This training is also known as *pre-match training*. The training sessions offered by schools or community groups are generally short, less than two hours long, owing to a lack of financial and human resources.

Mentors who attend short training sessions feel less confident in carrying out the task, spend less time with their students and are less likely to continue their relationship into a second year than mentors who attend longer training sessions.

According to research findings, it is advisable to provide over two hours of initial training for mentors so that certain elements and specific themes can be addressed.

The Mentor Foundation is an American organization that supports the development of community-based and school-based mentoring programs. It has identified several elements that should be included in the initial training in mentoring programs:

- ▶ the rules and standards of the programs
- ▶ the expectations and motivations of mentors as well as their fit with the goal of the mentoring program
- ▶ the roles and responsibilities of mentors
- ▶ the development phases of a mentoring relationship
- ▶ the importance of empathy, genuineness and collaboration
- ▶ the theoretical distinctions between a developmental approach and a prescriptive approach
- ▶ the ethical issues that might arise in the course of mentoring
- ▶ the risks of the relationship ending prematurely and strategies to effectively close a mentoring relationship
- ▶ the support resources available for mentors

The Foundation also recommends that the following themes be addressed, depending on their relevance, during initial training:

- ▶ the needs and development processes of young adolescents
- ▶ the cultural and economic issues
- ▶ the challenges and risk factors in certain life events like parents separating, immigrating and school transitions

Ongoing training

Ongoing training is provided after the mentoring relationship has begun. In reality, this happens very rarely, is not evaluated much and is often confused with initial training. Certain researchers recommend that ongoing training be provided during a mentoring relationship.

The impact of ongoing training on the other players

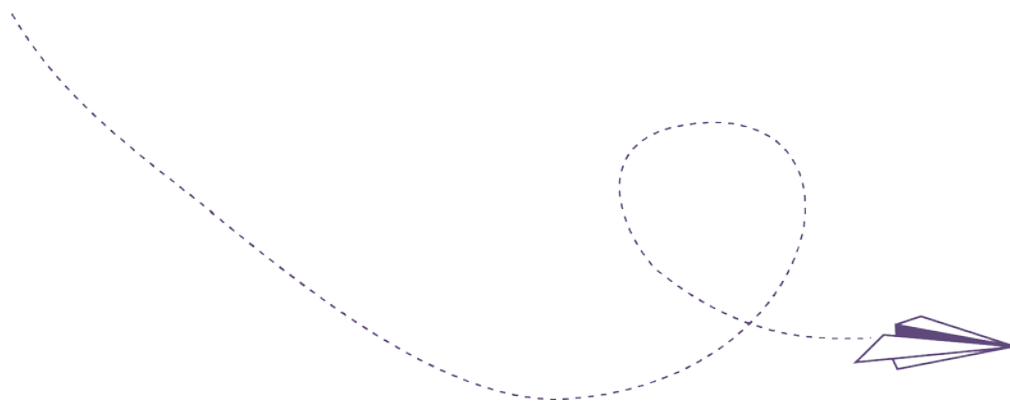
For mentors, ongoing training is motivating, it is necessary for dealing with the difficulties that arise in a relationship, it ensures mentors are supported by the school and it is a unique opportunity to talk with other mentors who share similar experiences.

For a program administrator, ongoing training would equip him or her to monitor the development of a mentoring relationship and, sometimes, to manage the risks of conflict, of prematurely ending the relationship and of the student or mentor losing interest in the program.

In the United States, the U.S. Department of Education offers 12 ongoing training sessions whose content can be adapted to the goals and needs of the programs.

In this context, mentors learn to:

- ▶ set boundaries for their interventions
- ▶ explore their identity and its impact on the relationship
- ▶ understand the important issues of adolescence
- ▶ intervene effectively when the student is victimized
- ▶ manage crisis situations
- ▶ communicate effectively at different stages of the relationship and in such a way as to engage the student in a problem-solving process
- ▶ plan activities with the student
- ▶ help the student to set short-term and long-term goals
- ▶ support the student in his or her schoolwork
- ▶ collaborate effectively with the student's parents
- ▶ manage the question of gifts and money
- ▶ prepare to end the relationship



Follow-up

Follow-up generally takes place weekly or monthly. It can be conducted by experienced teachers or by complementary educational services staff on a one-to-one basis or in small groups of eight to twelve mentors.

The objectives of the follow-up differ from those of ongoing training. The follow-up usually enables mentors to report on their relationship with the student, to understand specific situations and find solutions, to share their experiences with other mentors and talk about strategies that worked or those that did not turn out as expected.

Follow-up, a context of mutual assistance

A recent study has shown that student mentors who participated in group follow-up meetings were more likely to perceive themselves as effective throughout the mentoring relationship. The group follow-up meetings provide an invaluable context for mutual assistance and understanding, which is essential for a mentor to maintain a feeling of competence.

Successful training practices

The Mentor Foundation recommends that the instructors be in contact with the mentors at least twice during the first month and once a month thereafter, and that information on the length, frequency and nature of the meetings be compiled. It recommends access to certain resources that can facilitate mentoring:

- ▶ constructive criticism from instructors who are monitoring the program
- ▶ research and documentation written for the layperson in connection with the challenges encountered during mentoring
- ▶ Internet resources
- ▶ experienced mentors
- ▶ a list of activities that an instructor-mentor pair can do
- ▶ a list of external resources for reference purposes

The Foundation recommends that the instructors maintain regular contact with a key person in the student's social network, such as a parent, guardian or teacher.

It stresses the importance of regularly recognizing the mentors' work and commitment, and suggests that official ceremonies and social gatherings be organized.

Training for parents

Several mentoring programs also include training or information sessions for the young people and parents targeted by the program, even before mentoring starts. These sessions generally cover the orientations of the program, the roles and responsibilities of the mentor, the roles and responsibilities of the student, and what the program expects of parents. They also give the instructors opportunities to learn about the participants' expectations and motivations, and sometimes to influence mentor-student pairing and to adapt certain facets of the program.

4 Conclusion

The support and guidance practices are some of the essential elements to ensure program quality. In educational support programs, the training resource teachers receive can provide the opportunity to define the scope and boundaries of their interventions and encourage them to reflect on these interventions. The initial training sessions are also an ideal time to enable resource teachers to become familiar with certain theories and technological tools, to grasp the broad principles of good communication and, in general, to better understand the environment in which they will be working.

In mentoring programs it has been observed that initial training, ongoing training and follow-up encourage the mentors to perceive themselves as competent, enrich the quality of the individualized support, and increase the chances that it will benefit the student at risk. The time devoted to training and follow-up, the relevance of the training content and giving mentors the opportunity to interact with other mentors in the program and with experts in mentoring are some examples of support and guidance practices recommended by researchers in the area of mentoring programs.

Reference

Larose, Simon. *Les pratiques éducationnelles exemplaires en matière d'accompagnement individualisé au secondaire: Une analyse commentée des recherches des vingt dernières années*. Québec City: Université Laval, Groupe de recherche sur l'inadaptation psychosociale chez l'enfant (GRIP), 2011.

The full research report is available in French at the following address:

www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/recherche/accompagnement.

