

Pilot Schools

Study on the Implementation
of the Québec Education Program
in Secondary Cycle One

RESEARCH REPORT 2003-2006

Abridged Version

Training
PROGRESS
School Organisation
Collaboration

Éducation,
Loisir et Sport

Québec 

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Context of the research

Within the context of the education reform under way in Québec, the Direction générale de la formation des jeunes of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) is responsible for monitoring the progress of the implementation of the Québec Education Program (QEP) at the secondary level. This monitoring is carried out in 15 pilot schools that began implementing the QEP in Secondary Cycle One in 2003-2004, two years before its implementation became compulsory in all Québec schools.

This abridged report highlights the main information collected on Secondary Cycle One pilot schools between 2003-2004 and 2005-2006. The study's detailed findings and theoretical context are available in the research report.

Objectives

The purpose of the research conducted in pilot secondary schools is to monitor the progress of the QEP's implementation. More specifically, its objectives are to:

- 1- identify the conditions conducive to the successful implementation of the QEP
- 2- examine the influence of school organization models on students' perceptions
- 3- identify courses of action to promote the successful implementation of the QEP

The implementation conditions examined in this study (school organization, collaboration, training and accompaniment) were chosen because they are often cited in the literature as being essential to a successful education reform.

Methodology

The sample consists of 15 secondary schools (13 public and 2 private schools). It includes 11 French schools, 3 English schools and 1 that has a French and an English sector. These schools are located in various regions of the MELS regional offices and represent different socioeconomic backgrounds.

In the spring of each school year, questionnaires on a variety of aspects regarding the QEP's implementation were administered to school administrators, teachers and students. In addition, for each year of data collection, teachers submitted the description of a learning and evaluation situation that they carried out in class and that was based on the QEP. They included the evaluation tools used as well as the work of three students.

Findings

Implementation of the QEP

- **Priority given to subject-specific competencies.** Teachers indicate that they place more emphasis on subject-specific competencies than cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning when they are in class. Analysis of the learning and evaluation situations confirms that at the outset, teachers find it easier to integrate subject-specific competencies than cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning.
- **Teachers' progress.** The quality of the learning and evaluation situations carried out by the teachers gradually improves. From one year to the next, they better integrate subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies as well as the broad areas of learning. It was also found that the more teachers apply the QEP, the more they indicate that they understand it and feel comfortable applying it.

School organization

- **Family and homeroom systems.** During the last three years, two models of school organization have had a positive impact on teachers and students: family and homeroom systems.
 - Under the *family* model, a team of teachers is assigned to a small number of student groups. Meeting times are set aside in the teachers' schedules.
 - Under the *homeroom* model, a group of students is assigned to a homeroom teacher, who may teach two or more subjects to this group. This teacher provides follow-up for students in his or her group.
- **Advantages for teachers.** In schools that use family or homeroom systems, teachers say that they understand the QEP better, adhere to it more, and are more motivated to apply it than teachers in schools that do not use such systems. Teachers in schools that use family or homeroom systems also say that they have adapted their practices more (planning, evaluation, collaboration with colleagues) since they started applying the QEP.
- **Advantages for students.** Students in schools that use family or homeroom systems indicate that the group is more committed to classroom activities and find that these activities are more diversified, compared to students in schools that are not using one of these models of school organization. Students in schools that use such models are also more interested in school, see the usefulness of their learning, and say that they put more effort into their schoolwork.
- **Newly emerging school organization.** Another model of school organization called looping has emerged in the pilot schools since 2005-2006: a teacher accompanies the same students from one year to the next. For example, a teacher in the first year of Secondary Cycle One would teach English Language Arts to the same groups of students in the second year of the cycle. At the moment, no data are available on the impact of this approach on pilot schools.

Collaboration

- **Coordination teams.** Generally, teachers of the same subject and in the same year work with each other. Sometimes, they also work with teachers who teach the same subject in a different year of their cycle. Meetings and discussions between teachers of different subjects occur infrequently.
- **Meeting times.** In the majority of schools, teachers meet with each other during pedagogical days. Some schools also have periods set aside in the teachers' schedules during which they do not give any classes and can thus meet to work together.
- **Discussion topics.** The main discussion topics among teachers involve planning learning and evaluation situations, monitoring and evaluating students, and sharing their experiences with the QEP's application.
- **Time spent on coordination meetings.** The majority of teachers meet with their colleagues for less than one hour per week; however, many of them would like to have more coordination meetings. In schools where more time is spent on coordination meetings (one or more hours per week), teachers adhere more to the QEP and notice that their team spirit has improved, compared to schools where less time is spent on collaboration.

Training and accompaniment

- **Most useful training topics.** According to teachers, the topics for which training is the most useful in helping them apply the QEP are:
 - 1- Evaluating competencies;
 - 2- Creating learning and evaluation situations; and
 - 3- Subject-specific programs.
- **Usefulness of accompaniment.** According to teachers, meetings with other teachers or with education consultants are very helpful in applying the QEP. Accompaniment allows teachers to reflect upon and discuss with resource people their teaching and evaluation practices as well as their learning and evaluation situations.
- **Training, accompaniment, adherence and motivation.** In schools where more time is spent on training (30 or more hours per year) and accompaniment (12 or more hours per year), teachers adhere more to the QEP and are more motivated to apply it than teachers in schools where these conditions are not as present. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that while most teachers adhere to the QEP and are motivated to apply it, some of them do not adhere to it and some lack motivation. It is conceivable that these teachers had little QEP training or accompaniment, which would explain their less positive perceptions.

Conclusion

The study carried out in Secondary Cycle One pilot schools during the past three years reveals that the more teachers use the QEP, the better they understand it and the more at ease they are in applying it.

The pilot school study also highlights the conditions conducive to the successful implementation of the QEP. These winning conditions have also been identified in literature on education reforms:

- 1- School organization that allows teachers to better monitor students' progress, either the family (a team of teachers is assigned to a small number of student groups) or the homeroom system (teacher who teaches more than one subject to the same student group).
- 2- Planned meeting times so that teachers can discuss the QEP's implementation.
- 3- Ongoing professional development, based from the outset on teachers' needs.
- 4- Accompaniment provided by qualified individuals in order to help teachers integrate the QEP.
- 5- The school administration's leadership, which is essential to facilitating the implementation of all the aforementioned conditions as well as to motivating and supporting the school team throughout the change process associated with the education reform.

Continuation of the pilot schools project

Research on pilot schools will continue until June 2010. The information collected will make it possible to continue monitoring the schools' progress in implementing the QEP. In addition, a new element—monitoring evaluation practices—will be incorporated into the study.