

# TANDEM on adult learners' success


CONDITIONS PROMOTING  
SUCCESS

VOCATIONAL TRAINING




BASIC GENERAL EDUCATION





This summary reports on two research programs<sup>1</sup> that were carried out as part of the Research Program on Student Retention and Academic Success, conducted in partnership with the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) and the Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC).

### TANDEM ON ADULT LEARNERS' SUCCESS



Lorraine Savoie-Zajc, André Dolbec, 2007, *La réussite scolaire d'étudiants adultes inscrits dans des programmes de formation professionnelle: enjeux, défis*, Université du Québec en Outaouais.

Paul Bélanger, Pauline Carignan, Roxana Staiculescu, 2007, *La diversité des trajectoires et la réussite éducative des adultes en formation de base*, Université du Québec à Montréal.

### TO THE READER

Throughout the document you will find preliminary questions concerning the various aspects of the research which can be used to initiate discussion. The research findings can then enhance and enrich reflection on the topics addressed. The goal is to become familiar with the research and stimulate interest in consulting it frequently. Adult learners and adult education staff are cited in interviews.<sup>2</sup>

1. Both reports are available in their entirety at this address: <http://www.fqrcs.gouv.qc.ca/fr/recherche-expertise/projets/rapports-recherche.php> under the heading "persévérance et réussite scolaires."
2. As requested by the people who conducted the research, this document often uses the term *adult learners*, or *learners* to make the necessary distinction between *adult* and *student* because student generally refers to youths who are subject to compulsory school attendance, even though the level of instruction for both learners and students is secondary education.

**This document is available at:**  
**<http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca>**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	2
<b>PART ONE</b>	6
1 UPSTREAM OF THE ADULT LEARNER'S CHOICE OF TRAINING PROGRAM	6
1.1 Profile of adult learners	6
1.2 Assessment of school experience when enrolling in a training centre	7
1.3 Expression of need, issues and enrollment process	8
1.4 Institutional context of basic general education	12
<b>PART TWO</b>	13
2 PROGRESS DURING THE EDUCATIONAL PATH	13
2.1 Training processes and instructional approaches	13
2.2 Conditions fostering success	15
2.3 Constraints on success	17
<b>PART THREE</b>	21
3 OUTCOME OF THE EDUCATIONAL PATH	21
3.1 Assessment by adult learners enrolled in vocational training and needs expressed	21
3.2 Improvements desired by adult learners enrolled in basic general education	22
3.3 Assessment by adult education centre officials and staff concerning basic general education	23
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	26



# FOREWORD

**A**lthough the two research programs explore different paths, vocational training and basic general education, many affinities and the common theme of success for adult learners bring together vocational training and basic general education on the same route. This forms the basis for the concept *tandem on adult learners' success*.

These research projects refer to the same rationale, the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* along with its 2002-2007 action plan. The Policy affirms that successful general education forms the foundation for continuing education and training. The action plan provides for measures for “removing obstacles to access and retention,” which act as constraints on resuming studies and the success of adult learners. Citizens are encouraged to acquire and update their skills because, according to the government policy, an educated, qualified population is key to economic, cultural and social development.

We will examine the concerns shared by the two research teams along with their specific interests in the common theme of the success of adult learners who attend adult education centres or vocational training centres.

This document is divided into three main parts that present the research findings and that correspond to the real progress of a person in the specific course of his or her schooling. Part One helps readers to grasp the thread of the key aspects, first upstream of the training chosen by the adult learner, retracing time in order to examine the adult learner's profile, previous experience in school, and how a need for training presents itself and motivates a return to studies. Part Two examines the core of training, its process and instructional approaches throughout the course of schooling, and addresses the conditions for success, challenges to be met, motivation and obstacles to be overcome. Part Three invites readers to review the training at the outcome or midway through, in the form of a summary of reflections on the expectations adult learners had about their training or opinions on certain improvements desired in response to the needs expressed. The point of view of adult education centre officials and staff is also provided. In conclusion, the findings of both research programs make it possible to highlight the actions fostering academic success in vocational training and to suggest reference points for educational success in a context of basic general education for adults.



### **CONCERNS COMMON TO BOTH RESEARCH PROGRAMS**

The conditions likely to contribute to success are a major concern in both research programs. Various measures of support for success are dealt with. One of the research programs chose the context of an initial qualifying training program, which involves greater collaboration between training centres and businesses. The other research program chose basic general education, which represents a decisive commitment for adult learners in their life histories and which opens doors for them to other training paths.

The progress of adults throughout the course of their training is one of the key components of both research programs. The programs make it possible to clarify the elements that define and facilitate the process. In addition, the very process of training, through different instructional approaches and the influence of the trainers, was examined from the perspective of the support provided to encourage adult learners to stay in school. The personal project and motivation have comparable importance in both research programs.

Moreover, the research programs are both concerned with conditions for success, not only during the process of training, but upstream as well. Another key component requiring consideration is when the adult decides to engage in the project, either to understand the intent of the adult enrolled in vocational training or to better grasp the variables that will modulate the conditions for success upstream of basic general education—prior educational experience and expectations of living and work environments. In this regard, the processes of expressing the need and participation were examined, through possible changes depending on context, or through the various ways they are expressed in the specific life histories of adult learners.

## DISTINCTIVE ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH

The goals, objectives, concepts and the specific context as well as the research methodology are explained below.

**Vocational training**  
**ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

The research team of Lorraine Savoie-Zajc and André Dolbec examined the factors for success for adults enrolled in vocational training using quantitative and qualitative research.

The concept of academic success refers to obtaining qualification, or a diploma, in this case, the Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS).

The research team was interested in the issues that prompted adults to enroll in vocational training and in the challenges posed by academic success. It identifies the motivations and conditions conducive to the success of adults seeking qualifying training, either when resuming studies or pursuing their secondary studies.

The adult learner's plan, interrelations with workers, the pace of learning, the main obstacles to be overcome and their impacts are aspects of the challenges addressed in terms of academic success in vocational training.

Three programs of study leading to the Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS) represent the specific context: *Secretarial Studies*, *Automobile Mechanics* and *Pâtes et papiers* (offered in French only).

These programs are offered based on different instructional approaches to be examined:

- individualized—modular (*Secretarial Studies*)
- traditional—training in a vocational training centre and practicum in a business at the end of the program (*Automobile Mechanics*)
- work-study program (*Pâtes et papiers*)

The research team of Paul Bélanger, Pauline Carignan and Roxana Staiculescu examined educational success among adults in basic general education using exploratory research, based on qualitative data.

**Basic general education**  
**EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS**

Here, the concept of the educational success of adults corresponds to achieving their personal training goals, in addition to meeting the institution's expectations. This concept will be further explored in Part Two of the document.

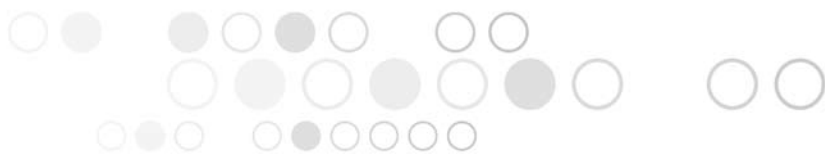
This research defines the diverse meanings of educational success so as to formulate a better definition of the concept. To understand the conditions that foster success, two concepts must be understood; first, the existing dynamics between individual projects and the official objectives of institutional programs; second, the way in which basic general education for adults is experienced in the life of individuals.

The research team has demonstrated that the intense experience of taking part in a long-term basic general education program necessarily involves a significant life transition. In this regard, the variables of success upstream take on their full importance.

In addition, the educational, sociocultural and psychological conditions can result in a variety of experiences that may explain a range of educational success.

The individual experiences examined in the various paths taken by adult learners target basic general education in Secondary Cycle One (DES01). This phase is recognized as the most decisive for the retention of adults. The interview findings define the trajectories and outline adult profiles based on three groups of objectives:

- complete success (progress and attainment of objectives)
- partial success (progress without attainment of objectives)
- lack of success (no progress)



## METHODOLOGY

### Vocational training ACADEMIC SUCCESS

- The research team targeted adult learners enrolled in three DVS programs in four school boards in the Outaouais region at seven vocational training centres.
- The research was conducted over a period of three years, from January 2004 to December 2006.
- The three programs are characterized by different instructional approaches and the preponderance of men (two programs) or women (one program). Overall, the representation of men and women is about equal.
- A questionnaire was administered in fall 2004, and 190 adults answered; these respondents belonged to different age groups, depending on the programs.
- Interviews were conducted from March 2005 to March 2006 and in total, 37 adults having responded to the questionnaire took part in semi-directed interviews. Some adults were finishing their training while some were mid way through. Participation of the population studied, mainly urban, was as follows:

Programs	Average age	Adults
<i>Secretarial Studies</i>	27.9 years	104
<i>Automobile Mechanics</i>	20.1 years	42
<i>Pâtes et papiers</i>	24.4 years	44

### Basic general education EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

- The team of researchers targeted three adult education centres in different environments: urban, semi-rural and rural. These centres offer the same educational services in general education for adults, i.e. literacy training, presecondary, Secondary Cycles One and Two.
- Research was conducted with 36 adults (18 men and 18 women).
- The data are derived from written sources—the success plans of adult education centres and learning evaluation sheets—as well as semi-directed interviews conducted with adult learners, teachers, nonteaching professionals and administrators at adult education centres. Thirty-four adults were reached by a call back telephone campaign.
- The sampling plan chosen made it possible to examine a wide variety of cases, representing the experience of adult learners from diverse social backgrounds.
- The level of training chosen was Secondary Cycle One (DES01). This choice came after literacy training and presecondary education. Successful completion of Cycle One may lead to vocational training or other programs in general education.
- Participation:

Environ-ments	Adults (Men, Women) 36 people				Adult education staff (administrator, nonteaching professionals and teaching staff) 14 people		
	– 25 years		25 years +		Admin.	NTP	Teac.
Rural	3 M	3 W	3 M	3 W	1	1	2
Semi-rural	2 M	3 W	4 M	3 W	1	2	2
Urban	2 M	3 W	4 M	3 W	1	2	2

# PART ONE

## 1 UPSTREAM OF THE ADULT LEARNER'S CHOICE OF TRAINING PROGRAM

### 1.1 PROFILE OF ADULT LEARNERS

**Based on the educational paths of adult learners choosing vocational training**

The profile of adult learners in vocational training is based on the learners who took part in the interviews given following the administration of a questionnaire. Most had completed their training, although some were midway through. It should be noted that these adults attended a vocational training centre for programs leading to a DVS in *Secretarial Studies*, *Automobile Mechanics* and *Pâtes et papiers*. The educational paths are examined here.

In what vocational training program are there:

- the most youths immediately continuing with their secondary education?
- the most adults having taken a break after their secondary studies?

Overall, the 37 adult learners aged 36 and over came from vocational training centres mainly in urban centres. The youngest profile was observed in the *Automobile Mechanics* program; the 12 respondents were under 26 years of age. Nearly half of the young people aged 20 or under in this program did not interrupt their studies. They had no children, in contrast to the 22 respondents in the *Secretarial Studies* program who, in most cases, had at least one child. They were aged 21 years and over, like the three adults in the *Pâtes et papiers* program and nearly half of them were over 31 years of age. Their paths were marked by an extended interruption of over five years in most cases, before they returned to studies in a vocational training centre. The academic background of 21 of them included secondary education, vocational training or postsecondary studies, in equal proportions.

**Based on degree of success in basic general education**

The results obtained for 34 adult learners in basic general education during a telephone interview make it possible to define three types of paths based on the degree to which the targeted training objectives had been attained—both institutional and personal objectives. These paths are complete success, partial success and lack of success.

Does the parents' level of schooling influence the success of their children?

Do learning problems prevent any kind of success in general education?

It was in the group of adult learners (12) who achieved complete success that parents had the lowest level of schooling. In contrast, the group of adult learners (14) who partially succeeded had the highest number of parents with a university education. Determination and tenacity in pursuing studies were observed in the group of adult learners who showed complete success, mainly in rural environments. Their academic delay was mainly attributed to learning disabilities. Discontinuity characterizes adult learners who only achieve partial success, and recurrent interruptions in the past are associated with lack of success. Adult learners who achieved complete success were





usually young men (under 25 years of age) and mainly single without dependent children. This last factor did not influence success because it was also present in the group (8) of those who did not succeed. However, the highest level of wage earners was observed in this last group. Working and studying at the same time is a difficult challenge to take on.

## 1.2 ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL EXPERIENCE WHEN ENROLLING IN A TRAINING CENTRE

### Opinion of adult learners enrolled in vocational training

#### Do people who enroll in vocational training programs share a negative opinion of their secondary education?

The data collected reveal that one third of people queried in the *Secretarial Studies* and *Automobile Mechanics* programs had a positive perception of their time in secondary school. The three people in the *Pâtes et papiers* program did not have negative memories.

Opinions were divided, since in the *Secretarial Studies* program, there were as many people with a negative perception as there were with a positive opinion. They attributed their opinions to personal reasons that go beyond the school setting—behaviour problems, pregnancy, lack of interest, family problems and lack of self-esteem, in addition to learning disabilities. A little over half of the adult learners in the *Automobile Mechanics* program had unpleasant memories of their time in secondary school. Some regretted not having chosen this program earlier, after Secondary III, instead of completing secondary school. Lack of interest in going to school and in some subjects was given as the main reason.

### Opinion of adult learners enrolled in basic general education

#### Is there a direct relationship between the types of success paths and past paths?

It was observed that most adult learners who achieved complete success had never dropped out of their secondary studies or, obviously, out of their training at the adult education centre. However, one third of these adult learners experienced interruptions in the course of their studies caused by family problems. These individuals have a favourable opinion of education and they are interested in their studies. Immigrants are usually in this group.

I like sports—  
I have to be active.  
— Denis

Most of the adult learners who achieved partial success experienced an interruption in the course of their secondary education. However, the rate of interruption decreased sharply when they arrive at an adult education centre. A difficult family context is a recognized problem, but special conditions made it possible to overcome the obstacles and to head in the right direction, thus avoiding the otherwise predictable path not leading to success.

In the case of adult learners who did not attain the training objectives at the adult education centre, lack of interest and an aversion to school were the reasons they most often mentioned in connection with their memories of their schooling prior to enrollment in an adult education centre.

### 1.3 EXPRESSION OF NEED, ISSUES AND ENROLLMENT PROCESS

#### For adult learners enrolled in vocational training

##### Expression of need

Expression of need refers here to the triggers that stimulated interest in the chosen training

Among the elements that strongly influenced the choices of training in the case of the three above-mentioned vocational training programs, which are the two most important elements identified in the research?

- A) a family member
- B) a guidance counsellor
- C) people in their surroundings, friends
- D) a person practising this occupation
- E) a newspaper advertisement about this occupation

The research findings reveal that the most important influences for adult learners in the three vocational training programs originate first of all in the adult learner's surroundings, among friends, and next, in knowing a person who practises the occupation. These two elements are most pronounced in adult learners enrolled in the *Pâtes et papiers* program.

Next comes the influence of family members, which significantly shapes reflection, and this holds true for the three programs and even more so for the *Pâtes et papiers* program. Guidance counsellors had a share of influence for about 40% of adult learners enrolled in the *Secretarial Studies* program. Advertising about an occupation in newspapers was more important than television or radio ads, and was more influential for adult learners enrolled in the *Pâtes et papiers* program. Among the other sources of influence mentioned in the course of the research, information sessions at school also had an impact on slightly over one quarter of the adult learners enrolled in the *Automobile Mechanics* and *Secretarial Studies* programs. Visiting a vocational training centre also had an impact on about one quarter of the adult learners in the *Secretarial Studies* and *Automobile Mechanics* programs. The other aspects of influence in lesser proportions are: teachers (varying from 7 to 15% depending on the programs), agents of Québec's employment assistance and Canada's employment insurance programs, as well as current employers (varying from 2 to 15%).



**Issues**

The research summarizes the reasons that motivate adults to return to studies or to continue with their studies. Two types of reasons are to be distinguished: personal reasons and occupational reasons.

As for occupational reasons, most concern:

- the development of the adult learner’s personal qualities and aptitudes
- the chance to earn a higher salary
- the possibility of finding a better job
- obtaining a diploma
- the possibility of obtaining quality training quickly
- obtaining a better job
- the desire to improve one’s working conditions
- the challenge of improving one’s performance at work

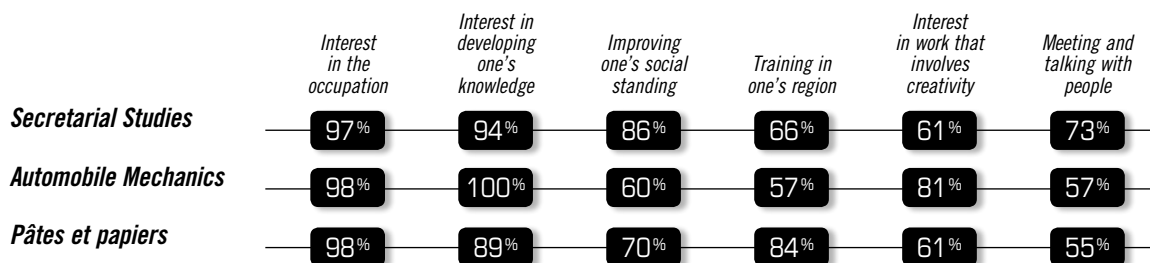
The main issues that emerge from personal and occupational reasons:

- Improving working conditions, ensuring stability and better salary
- Improving the quality of personal and occupational life (better income, stability) and family life (schedules adapted to family life)
- Obtaining a diploma attesting to the acquisition of skills either to obtain a job or to reorient one’s career following loss of a job
- Working in a field related to a passion
- Founding one’s own business

What is the primary personal reason that influences adult learners in the three vocational programs?

- A) Improving one’s social standing
- B) Interest in the occupation
- C) Developing one’s knowledge

The data indicate that interest in the occupation is a priority issue for the three programs, followed by developing one’s knowledge. The graph below presents the data and shows at a glance the importance adult learners attribute to these issues based on the programs.



In addition, the low cost of the training was one of the other reasons that particularly influenced adult learners enrolled in the *Pâtes et papiers* program, followed by those enrolled in *Secretarial Studies*. For the latter, encouragement from people in their surroundings to return to studies was a significant reason.

The reputation of the program was also an important reason in making the decision to return to studies in the case of those enrolled in the *Secretarial Studies* and the *Pâtes et papiers* programs.

However, starting a business is considered an issue specific to adult learners in the *Automobile Mechanics* program.

The desire to update one's skills was also chosen by one third of the learners in the *Secretarial Studies* program.

### For adults enrolled in basic general education

#### Expression of need

The data concern the triggers motivating a return to or pursuit of studies. The three types of success paths are taken into account.

The decision to return to or to pursue studies took shape following a series of gradual changes that fostered increased awareness, often leading to maturity.

Based on the success path, the triggers for change include the following:

#### Adult learners who have completely succeeded

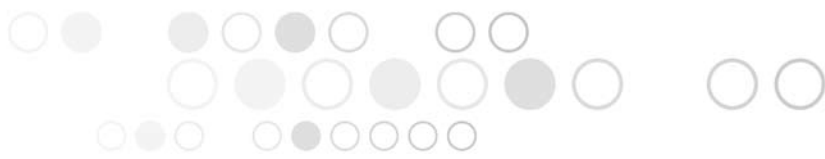
- Having friends already enrolled in the adult education centre or who have completed training
- Information in the media

#### Adult learners who have partially succeeded

- Developing awareness and reflection during a trip
- A recommendation from an education professional or a counsellor
- Information provided to adult learners through a community organization such as the Regroupement économique et social sud-ouest (RESO) de Montréal, which coaches them in their decision making

#### Adult learners who have not succeeded

- Becoming aware of one's poor working conditions
- A job loss making reorientation compulsory
- Psychological support offered by parents for a training plan
- Technical support from a secondary school, a community organization or their own informal network in obtaining all the necessary information or contacts that help them make a decision
- Following a period of reflection leading to the decision to make a change in their life, feeling a need for a new orientation of their personal and work life



The trip to British Columbia settled me down. Then in Europe, I really realized that I had to do something else with my life.

- Charles

The possibility of obtaining recognized training in order to reach an occupational goal is a reason given by many adults who have completely succeeded in reaching their training objectives. A well-defined training plan is essential to success. Obtaining a better job and improving one's economic situation is the reason cited by adults who have achieved partial success. In contrast, the group of adults who did not successfully achieve their basic education objectives were aiming at obtaining a Secondary School Diploma (SSD).

### **Steps taken**

It was observed that adult learners who completely succeeded had taken steps to get information from friends or through the media about admission to an adult education centre. In addition, these adults had defined their plan with the help of staff providing reception and support. In the other two groups—adult learners having partially succeeded and those who did not succeed—the initiatives more often originated with other people, either education and guidance professionals who referred them to a centre at their secondary school, or to a community organization or informal network of contacts. For some adults, participation in the Regroupement économique et social sud-ouest (RESO) de Montréal facilitated access to an adult education centre.

### **Enrollment process**

The enrollment process and the negotiation of arrangements to improve the response to the needs of adult learners upstream vary according to the success paths observed later. The vast majority of adult learners say they encountered no obstacles to their enrollment in an adult education centre. This is due to the fact that the personal goals of individuals correspond to the objectives of the institution; accordingly, no discussion was held with the institution concerning arrangements to meet their needs.

However, one third of the adult learners who achieved partial success experienced difficulties at the stage of qualifying for enrollment or for financial aid. On the whole, discussions with the local employment centre (CLE) worked well, although the occupational objectives had to be adapted to the organization's standards. Adults who achieved partial success in their training were more likely to discuss arrangements. The arrangements concerned schedules and extending deadlines. The adult learners in this group more often mentioned the lack of a fit between their goals and those of the institution.

## 1.4 INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF BASIC GENERAL EDUCATION

### Expression of need and support for the enrollment of adults

In order to better understand the strategies implemented to reach the population and the support provided to adults who wish to enroll to return to or pursue their studies, interviews were conducted with education consultants, teachers and administrative staff in three adult education centres.

Here, the expression of the need involves the formulation of training needs for all adults, regardless of their origin, status or occupation, so that they are heard and supported and their needs can be met.

It was observed that actions taken upstream reveal the following:

- Existing responses to needs are provided more often than the adapted training.
- Information and awareness raising about basic education are provided more often than specific actions are taken to mobilize adults who do not participate in training.
- In rural areas, adult education staff want to be attentive to adult learners' needs.
- In urban areas, where the demand exceeds the supply, this concern is not feasible because of financial constraints.
- It must be recognized that services for adults are not solely restricted to adult education centres. In fact, Emploi-Québec, through local employment centres, and the Regroupement économique et social du sud-ouest (RESO) de Montréal also take in adults and support them in their process of seeking training.

Our concerns include being attentive to the needs of the community and being more visible in public and community organizations in order to adapt services offered to the needs identified.

– Adult education centre director

Adult education centre staff emphasize the correlation between supporting adult learners in clarifying their plan and their success. The research data reveal a number of shortcomings in terms of reception and support.<sup>3</sup>

The adult education centre staff consulted noted that the work of the centre's team is essential in providing better support for adult learners undertaking their training plans.

#### **The research identifies the main obstacles related to the institution with regard to the expression of need.**

Obstacles to the expression of need

- Inadequate information and awareness raising about the training offerings
- Lack of time, resources and latitude
- The limited number of solutions offered to adult learners with respect to their training needs
- Inflexible programs
- The underrepresentation of adults aged 24 and over, those who require more support in deciding to return to general education

3. In the course of the research, the adult education centres were developing their action plan to implement reception, referral, counselling and support services (SARCA). Today, adult learners have access to the SARCA services renewed last September in all adult education centres of the province, even if the adult education centres had already implemented such services before this date. Financial resources were allocated to school boards for the adult education centres for this purpose. Support services were considerably strengthened. The results should be noticeable shortly.



# PART TWO

## 2 PROGRESS DURING THE EDUCATIONAL PATH

### 2.1 TRAINING PROCESSES AND INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

**In the case of the three vocational training programs**

***Secretarial Studies***

Training involves courses and a practicum at the end of the program. Adult learners progress through the program by means of an individualized path. The content is divided into modules. Each module covers a specific period of time. The program seems well balanced between theory and practice. Respondents consider the program's structure and the individualized path as positive elements.

However, opinions were divided regarding the type of instructional approach used. For some respondents, individualized instruction was a condition for success allowing them to proceed at their own pace, but others found this approach difficult. The following reasons were given: time management when the modules are more difficult; the time required to wait for explanations from teachers in class; the minimum wait time before being allowed to take a break; the time elapsed before the next module begins; respondents wanted more time allotted to the module must have limitations concerning absences. Some courses on accounting.

Many respondents considered the computer component of the program was appropriate, although some criticized it (outdated software, not enough computers available). Respondents also mentioned the flexibility of working, studying at home and progressing through the program using a computer.

***Automobile Mechanics***

As in the case of the program above, training comprises courses and a practicum at the end. Enrollment in this program often occurs during the learner's regular schooling. The instructional approach is traditional. The teaching of concepts is done in groups through lecture courses, and the content is divided into modules. The program provides for alternating theory with practice. Nearly half of the respondents stated that theory and practice are well balanced.

The quality of the automobile fleet presenting new technology in the industry was much appreciated. During practice, some learners would have liked to see more and a greater variety of tools, whereas others wanted more time for practice and more practicums.

PART TWO  
2 PROGRESS DURING THE

***Pâtes et papiers***

This program involves a specific instructional model, i.e. the work-study approach adapted to this sector. This approach ensures that theory is complemented by practice. The specialized equipment used in the plants is not available in a vocational training centre. The three adults who participated in the interviews said that the training met their expectations.

However, one adult thought that the program modules were too dense and that there was not enough time to review the material. The learners mentioned that the different teaching styles of teachers could be a problem.

**In the case of basic general education**

... All the respondents in the survey use an individualized training model. A minority of them in semi-rural and urban areas were taking upgrading courses in group classes, mainly in French. Let's take a look at what the respondents identify as the benefits in their training that either helped them enrich their knowledge or better solve everyday problems, and what gave them a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Gaining knowledge is important to be able to better communicate.

- Nadine

For the fun of knowing.

- Caroline

The benefits related to French and mathematics are most often mentioned, especially for adult learners who completely or partially attained their objectives. For immigrants, knowing French as the language of usage and better understanding the history of Québec are significant benefits. All of the adult learners consulted, regardless of their success path, said getting a diploma and recognized training is a value they seek. Learning English as a spoken language was a significant benefit for adult learners who did not attain their goals. For most of the adult learners, going to an adult education centre increased personal growth, led them to have greater confidence in themselves and in their abilities, and brought them greater personal satisfaction.

Adult learners who experienced complete success are characterized by flexibility, because when they encounter obstacles, they take the initiative of asking for help and they get support from adult education centre staff. They are satisfied with the program and its context, as they fit with their plans, which were well defined from the outset. Adult learners who achieved partial success believe that individualized learning does not foster group spirit, and they feel nostalgic for group classes. Although two thirds of the adults who did not succeed had learning disabilities, only a minority of them recognize that this is the cause of their lack of success. Few of these adult learners mentioned receiving help from the adult education centre staff, but paradoxically they preferred individualized learning to the few group classes that they attended.

If they gave a one-hour group course per week, per subject, it would help people get to know each other; there would be more contact between the students.

- George

According to adult education centre staff, the individualized approach allows for flexibility in learning paces and also in time management. However, it should be noted that this approach is linked to the varying ability of individuals to take initiative. In this sense, it involves self-selection. Thus, this approach seems to pose problems for some adult learners who are less autonomous and who do not take the initiative to ask for help from teachers because they lack confidence in themselves or feel inferior to others. Moreover, this approach does not foster a sense of belonging to a group.





## 2.2 CONDITIONS FOSTERING SUCCESS

### Sources of motivation and support for success in vocational training

What is the main source of motivation that influences adult learners in the three vocational training programs?

- A) Improving one's quality of life
- B) Having a stable job
- C) Wanting to complete and succeed at one's training and be eager to practise the occupation

In the three vocational training programs, *Secretarial Studies*, *Automobile Mechanics* and *Pâtes et papiers*, the adult learners were primarily motivated by the desire to complete their training, to succeed at it and to practise their occupation, and this was based on their interest in and passion for the training.

Other aspects of motivation were identified by adult learners in the three programs:

- improvement of one's quality of life by getting a better job
- the hope of starting a new life
- confidence in finding a job through openings in their field

A number of personal qualities were mentioned by learners in the *Secretarial Studies* program as aspects contributing to motivation:

- determination
- positive attitude
- perseverance
- the will to succeed
- the pleasure of learning new things

### Support for success

#### In academic and instructional terms

- Support from teachers played an essential role in the success of adult learners in the three programs concerned. A good relationship with this staff was important as a support for success.
- The supervision provided by competent teaching staff, combined with the feeling that the staff want to see learners succeed provided considerable support.
- Mutual aid and encouragement between adult learners were important factors.

#### In family terms

- The support of family was an element that the three groups of adult learners mentioned. Living in harmony in a family was also an important factor. Learners in the *Secretarial Studies* program referred to their spouses and children, while those in the other two programs often mentioned their parents and other family members.

#### In financial terms

- Financial aid from a government or community organization was also an important source of support.

## Motivation for succeeding and support in basic general education

Students are able to do something to gain self-confidence and develop their concentration, maturity and empowerment. It does not necessarily involve passing a cycle.

- Teacher

Every person has potential, but it has to be used. It's like a diamond in the rough—you have to polish it to succeed and find your magic.

- Marco

## What exactly is “educational success”?

Educational success is more comprehensive than academic success. It takes into account progress in a path as well as non academic objectives. In 2002, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation<sup>4</sup> distinguished between the dimensions of academic success and the dimensions of educational success.

Academic success is measurable, in particular through academic results and earning a diploma. Educational success refers to realizing one's potential, to the concept of a plan, as well as to personal and occupational development.

According to adult education centre staff, success requires the development of self-confidence, autonomy and the ability to become involved.

The formulation of a career plan should be the first essential step in educational success. In addition, flexibility in the path, such as taking the General Development Test (GDT) or the Secondary School Equivalency Test (SSET), makes it possible to review the path and allow adult education centre staff to recognize prior learning.

## Support for success

- Support in carrying out the plan and clarification of directions promote success.
- The relationship of trust between adults and the adult education centre staff and the support provided by staff are decisive factors for success.
- Support from adult education centre staff, especially from teachers throughout the instruction, is also associated with success.
- Support from the community, family and friends is an important factor. Ties with someone who has successfully completed a program at the centre provide a positive image.
- The financial aid and support provided by organizations are considerable factors in promoting the success of the adult learners concerned. These include:
  - Carrefour jeunesse-emploi, which allows people to enter a network of peers and develop a dream
  - RESO, a Montréal community organization which creates more positive learning conditions for adult education centres (small groups of adult learners, etc.)
  - the local employment centre, a government organization (Emploi-Québec) that provides financial support and improved learning conditions

4. Québec, Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (2002), *Au collégial : l'orientation au cœur de la réussite*, Avis au Ministre de l'Éducation (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, April 2002). Québec, Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (2002), Avis au Ministre de l'Éducation sur le projet de loi 124, *Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Conseil supérieur de l'éducation et la Loi sur l'instruction publique* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, November 2002).



## 2.3 CONSTRAINTS ON SUCCESS

**Challenges based on the difficulties encountered by adult learners enrolled in vocational training**

**What factor most undermines academic success for adult learners in the three programs covered by the research project?**

- A) Financial difficulties**
- B) Family difficulties**
- C) Learning disabilities**

According to the adult learners enrolled in *Secretarial Studies*, financial difficulties are the factor that interferes most with academic success. To varying degrees, this factor was also recognized as the most harmful by adult learners in the *Automobile Mechanics* and the *Pâtes et papiers* programs. Other negative factors include:

- family problems
- lack of time
- transportation-related problems
- learning disabilities
- lack of support from family and friends

Adult learners in the *Secretarial Studies* program also mentioned problems with balancing work, family and studies as well as absenteeism, often caused by family responsibilities, whereas in the *Automobile Mechanics* program, learners mentioned problems linked to work and study, which often result in fatigue. Adult learners in the *Pâtes et papiers* program found it difficult to adapt to new instructional approaches and intense teaching modules. Adult learners in the *Secretarial Studies* program noted problems related to subjects such as French and computer skills, whereas adult learners enrolled in *Automobile Mechanics* had difficulties with reading.

### **Which program is most associated with the following challenges?**

a) spending time on one's studies	1) <i>Secretarial Studies</i>
b) balancing family and study	2) <i>Automobile Mechanics</i>
c) developing fast and effective work methods	3) <i>Pâtes et papiers</i>

We should say that completing a vocational training program, learning to work with the tools of the trade, getting good academic results throughout the program and learning to put knowledge into practice are the main shared challenges for all the groups of adult learners in the three programs. For the adult learners in the *Secretarial Studies* program, the important challenges that indicate differences with the other two programs are balancing family and studies, developing practical skills—learning several computer applications—and improving French.

For learners in the *Automobile Mechanics* program, the challenges are more important than those for the learners in the *Pâtes et papiers* program: developing fast, effective work techniques, and managing time and energy more efficiently.

Lastly, for learners in the *Pâtes et papiers* program, the most oft-cited challenges, compared to those of learners in *Automobile Mechanics*, are spending time on studies and developing mathematical knowledge. Since adult learners hold jobs, spending time on studies is a considerable challenge. Remember that these students are involved in work-study programs.

### Obstacles for adult learners enrolled in basic general education

The primary source of obstacles is without doubt a shortage of money, and this is deplored by adult learners who achieved total success, those who achieved partial success, and those who did not succeed. Learning disabilities are identified as a significant obstacle by adults who succeeded and by those who did not succeed. Living conditions—personal problems, illness and family obligations—are sources of obstacles for adult learners who achieved partial success.

A lack of support, on the part of a spouse, the family or even teachers is also a considerable obstacle for adult learners who have achieved partial success and for those who did not succeed. For this last group, the conflict between work and studies, the difficulty of doing an oral exam in front of other adult learners and the difficulty of accomplishing the learning required, particularly in French, constitute significant obstacles.

According to the adult education centre staff, there are various obstacles to be overcome. These include:


- problems for adult learners in finding ways of meeting their needs
- anticipation of shame in the family if they don't succeed
- the fear of another failure at school
- work-family-study balance
- the lack of support for overcoming difficulties
- the negative image of an adult education centre identified with youth in difficulty
- the need for support to clarify the career plan

My biggest problem was the exam ... I had to read the text, I had to read it at least three times or I couldn't understand it.

- Max

Financially, we barely survive while going to school ... there are no extras, nothing to get our minds off things or to get rid of some stress.

- Josée



It's because of French that I dropped out of school. Oral presentations in front of the whole class, I just can't do that.

- Charlotte

After examining the conditions promoting success and constraints on success, we should consider a few stories that demonstrate a combination of factors and constraints as they play out in people's life histories. Let's take a look together.

### **Sonia's story**

Sonia always liked going to school, and she reflects the cultural tendencies of her family. Her problem: learning disabilities, particularly in mathematics, which can be traced back to elementary school and special classes when she was a teenager.

Determined and confident that she would succeed, she asked for counselling, but did not want her failures to be discussed in the group and preferred the individualized approach. Her process was long and difficult. She had to begin her studies at the elementary level.

Sonia benefited from the material and psychological support of her parents. The adult education centre staff suggested that she revise her goals and take the Secondary V equivalency test. She attained this objective.

She did not achieve her initial goal of Secondary V, but she obtained certification after she took the Secondary School Equivalency Test, which gave her access to the occupation she was interested in, as a florist.

### **A brief look at Didier's story**

Didier comes from a bilingual family. He attended English school from elementary level to Secondary III. He experienced difficulties in Secondary II, and he had to repeat his year. After he completed Secondary III, he went to spend time with his mother in Africa, where he could not continue his schooling.

Didier returned at the age of 16 with an academic delay of two years. He enrolled in an adult education centre, dropped out of his studies and re-enrolled later. His partner supported his project and supported him financially while he got an education. However, his partner had to stop working because she was ill.

Didier had to get a job and move. He lost interest in a number of compulsory subjects. He would have preferred to take group classes because he had to wait to obtain explanations. He also found that certain subjects were not required, since he wanted to take a course in computer literacy. He felt supported by adult education centre staff who suggested that he enroll in a Secondary V equivalency program. He agreed, but did not finish and later decided to complete his Secondary V to get his Secondary School Diploma (SSD).

He became very involved in student affairs, discovered his abilities as an organizer and was able to increase his self-confidence. He passed Secondary V French, several credits of computer literacy and undertook mathematics. He completed his SSD and hopes to enroll in CEGEP for an Attestation of College Studies (ACS) in computer management.

**To conclude, let's take a look at Marie's story.**

In elementary school, Marie was not happy. Her mother, who does not have much schooling, wanted Marie to succeed in her studies. As a teenager, Marie experienced family difficulties: the illness of her mother and her sister. She went to live with her father, who had problems related to excessive gambling. Marie returned home and became ill. She dropped out of her studies.

Marie had to resort to income security in order to live. However, her life took a new turn. She was encouraged to join Carrefour jeunesse-emploi, and became part of a network of peers who liked her, which allowed her to formulate a dream. She did a practicum in a childcare centre and wanted to become an educator. She moved to Montréal where she enrolled in an adult education centre.

Income security referred her to a local employment centre which provided her with financial support for three years to complete secondary school and get training as a childcare educator. The community organization RESO de Montréal also helped her by providing financial, psychological and instructional support. She lived with a friend who had attended the adult education centre and who encouraged her.

She made a great deal of progress. Now pregnant, she has interrupted her studies and plans to continue them if she finds a childcare centre. Returning to school was a personal success story for Marie.





# PART THREE

## 3 OUTCOME OF THE EDUCATIONAL PATH

### 3.1 ASSESSMENT BY ADULT LEARNERS ENROLLED IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND NEEDS EXPRESSED

**In the case of the three vocational training programs**

**Returning to school**

A little more than half of the learners in the *Secretarial Studies* program recognized that the decision to return to school was an important choice in their life. They reaffirmed their choice of program, as did the learners in the *Pâtes et papiers* program. The impacts were personal, financial, social or occupational. They were positive about their training, the instructional approach, the subjects studied and the availability of the teachers.

However, some learners expressed only moderate appreciation for a variety of reasons, in particular, difficulties experienced with computer skills, a preference for a different area of study, difficulty adapting after a long absence, delays in obtaining explanations with the individualized approach, manuals to be updated and corrected. Some learners had not done their practicum, such as those in the *Automobile Mechanics* program, but they had expected to have a practicum with the possibility of employment and that included a variety of tasks.

A little over half of the learners in the *Automobile Mechanics* program also made a positive assessment of their training. Their interest in mechanics forms the basis for their choice. Their positive assessment is related to the following aspects of training: the up-to-date nature and quality of the program, its structure and the materials. Their expectations were met. In the case of the *Pâtes et papiers* program, interest in the occupation was just as pronounced and the program, of short duration, was recognized for the quality of the training and support. The expectations were met and learning was put into practice during practicums.

However, some learners in the *Automobile Mechanics* program expressed only moderate appreciation for various reasons: the gap between the reality and the initial goal, financial difficulties experienced, the low income associated with the occupation, the lack of depth of certain courses and useless content in other courses.

**Needs  
expressed**

The needs for each group of adults can be summarized as follows:

- In *Secretarial Studies* and in *Automobile Mechanics*, adult learners wanted more practice, either by reducing the amount of theory or by increasing the length of the program. Examples for each of the programs include further development of subjects deemed important such as accounting and the study of the engine.
- Learners in the *Secretarial Studies* program wanted more flexibility in time management and more parental leave, whereas learners in the *Automobile Mechanics* program asked for more accessible financial aid and training in the evening to allow them to work.
- Learners in the *Pâtes et papiers* program identified few needs except for a longer program and a laboratory for working with chemical components.

### **3.2 IMPROVEMENTS DESIRED BY ADULT LEARNERS ENROLLED IN BASIC GENERAL EDUCATION**

It should be noted that few participants offered any suggestions.

Adult learners who achieved complete success made no suggestions for improvement. They are the ones who were least likely to indicate obstacles.

In the case of adult learners who achieved partial success, we should emphasize that these people experienced the most obstacles. They are also the most likely to suggest improvements, i.e. greater government financial aid for adults in the adult education centre and increased employment benefits from the local employment centre, in order to facilitate a return to or continuation of studies and to counter dropping out.

These adults and those who did not succeed suggested that the training profile be more personalized and adapted to each person's pace, more oriented to personal and occupational objectives in the choice of concepts being taught.





### 3.3 ASSESSMENT BY ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE OFFICIALS AND STAFF CONCERNING BASIC GENERAL EDUCATION

#### **Learning conditions**

The relevance of the individualized approach as the main instructional approach in the three adult education centres covered by this research program was called into question. According to all officials and other staff, the organization of content and learning must offer a variety of instructional situations, focused on collaborative and individual learning.

The possibilities of different tests—GDT, SSET—allow flexibility by offering different paths toward obtaining a recognized attestation. For example, the SSET promotes access to the job market, makes it possible to fulfill the conditions for admission to vocational training and leads to admission to the construction trades. Passing the SSET leads to an Attestation of Equivalence of Secondary Studies (AESS), which does not provide credits for obtaining an SSD and does not meet the prerequisites for a Diploma of College Studies (DCS), but allows admission to an Attestation of College Studies (ACS) program.

Flexibility is possible in establishing schedules. The variation of the teacher-adult learner ratio produces different learning conditions and a more or less favourable context for interaction between teachers and adult learners as well as for consideration of each person's path. In contrast, remember that adult learners assisted by the RESO community organization as well as by local employment centres obtain better support thanks to financial aid that the adult education centre receives from these organizations in order to set up small groups.

#### **Instructional follow-up: practices concerning learning disabilities and dropping out**

##### **Adult learners in difficulty**

The lack of resources required to adequately help people with learning difficulties is deplorable. The means currently used are remedial workshops and classroom atmosphere fostering encouragement, the development of autonomy, confidence, motivation and support. It was indicated that no particular instructional approach is used for learners with difficulties.

### **Dropping out**

A series of measures is in place in adult education centres to combat dropping out:

- individualized follow-up and tutoring
- review of training profiles
- organization of extracurricular activities to recognize success, e.g.

Adult learners' week

Research reveals that the call back and follow-up system in the event of dropping out does not exist in the three adult education centres studied. The concept of dropping out is controversial because it conceals different realities. In many cases, dropping out is linked to external factors such as an obligation to return to work, difficult material conditions, maternity and parental responsibilities, illness and accidents.

Dropping out to enter the job market can give shape to an experience or a life project such as family, travel, or rest. Perhaps the adult learner has obtained the goal he or she set.

In fact, dropping out is an interruption. Dropping out of adult education, like dropping out of school, should be seen from a perspective of lifelong education.

### **Perseverance and the gratification of success**

The 34 cases studied in the research make it possible to define three types of experience in general education that, depending on the retention or dropping out experienced, are characterized by continuity, discontinuity and interruption in the educational path.

- Twelve adult learners presented a successfully continuous educational path, which corresponds to the first type of experience. These adult learners, all under 25 years of age, extended their basic general education, sometimes with interruptions along the way, and succeeded in obtaining certification to go on to vocational training. They succeeded by completing the planned path or by taking an alternative route of obtaining attestations awarded after passing the GDT or SSET tests.
- The second type of experience of 14 adult learners is characterized by educational discontinuity. These adult learners achieved partial success. They are in the process of reaching their training goals, but they take longer to complete their process.
- Those who did not succeed in attaining their training goals interrupted training before the decisive step of certification. This is the third type of experience. The path of 8 adult learners was broken up by repeated interruptions in secondary school and training in adult education centres. A lack of interest in studies and even aversion for school were the reasons for dropping out of initial training. They reported their difficulties with learning, conflicts between work and study, and a shortage of income.



For an adult, taking part in training that turns out to be a super life experience (Cathy) has an effect on the continuation of education.

- Training adviser

The benefits of the experience most often mentioned concern three aspects of the individual: restored self-confidence, increased self-esteem and new awareness of one's potential.

The person also mobilizes other resources, such as the desire for learning, discovering a passion for a subject, and curiosity, which reinforces the will to carry on. Moving from fear to a passion creates greater assurance and thus greater autonomy.

# CONCLUSION

A “tandem” was in effect, briefly. As officials and staff of adult education centres and vocational education centres, you are asked to use these actions and reference points to enrich reflection and action in order to provide improved support for all adult learners. When will the next tandem event occur and who will you do it with?

## **Vocational training**

..... To provide better support for academic success, adult learners recommend a number of actions.

## **ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

..... In *Secretarial Studies*, they recommend that:

- textbooks be reviewed and approved
- the training centre consider the prior learning of adult learners
- English courses be offered
- it be possible to transfer software applications from the school to the home
- the content of some accounting courses be further developed
- the number of hours in French instruction be increased
- group workshops be added for accounting
- the number of adult learners per class be reduced
- there be more teachers for large groups

Adult learners enrolled in the *Automobile Mechanics* program also expressed the same wish, suggesting that additional teachers take part in practical sessions. They recommend additional material, improving the document system and updating books. As for the organization of training, they suggest reviewing the components of an engine before studying the engine as a whole. Lastly, the number of practicums should be increased in order to validate choices and promote integration into the job market. Adult learners enrolled in the *Pâtes et papiers* program did not suggest any recommendations for action.



**Basic general  
education**  
**EDUCATIONAL  
SUCCESS**

..... Benchmarks for educational success were identified at the outcome of this research program.

- The decision to return to studies or to pursue studies is linked to a triggering event or a transition in the life of the adult learners concerned. The research emphasizes the relevance of psychological, technical and material support provided upstream in order to encourage the demand and support it, and to facilitate decision making. External organizations such as local employment centres or other community groups often play a decisive role in motivating adult learners to return to or to pursue their studies.
- The research shows that in rural areas, adult learners over the age of 25 have a fourfold higher success rate in attaining their goals than those of the same age in other environments. The quality of follow-up and the possibility of reviewing training goals could explain this success rate. Knowing how to review one's training goals seems to be an important factor in success and retention.
- If complete success is associated with a rural environment and partial success with the same goals seems to occur in semi-rural environments, a lack of success is not associated with a specific environment. Lack of success occurs in all environments (rural, semi-rural and urban) and it affects women and men, regardless of age.
- The educational path and its outcome are not linear or uniform. Many factors affect paths in different ways. The educational life stories are influenced by changes in the environment in which they occur.





