

RESEARCHERS AT COLLEGIAL LEVEL: BUILDERS OF KNOWLEDGE



ODETTE LUSSIER
Educational advisor
Cégep Marie-Victorin

At the last AQPC symposium, Marielle Pratte, chief-editor of this publication, in cooperation with the Association pour la recherche au collégial (ARC), invited researchers in the collegial network and others interested in research to meet and discuss *The role of the researcher at collegial level*.

Twenty or so people accepted the invitation and took part in the discussions moderated jointly by Marie-France Bélanger, ARC president and assistant to the academic dean at Collège de Sherbrooke and Bruno Geslain, coordinator for the Research and Training Centre at Dawson College, ex-president and current advisor of ARC.

Participants from 15 different colleges and several disciplinary fields—one person came all the way from Tunisia—made it clear to us that problems experienced locally are also found elsewhere. The main reason provided by participants for attending the workshop was their interest in research. This interest translates into curiosity for the neophyte and passion for the more seasoned researcher. An added incentive was the desire to be part of a network of researchers, to share experiences and to contribute to the search for solutions to problems inherent in research. The discussion was kicked off with the presentation of a Researcher Profile, followed by several examples illustrating the difficulties facing researchers and the motivation that drives them to persevere in their work. The next paragraphs are a synthesis of comments made by participants in the workshop.

THE PROFILE OF A TYPICAL RESEARCHER

There are no important or unimportant researchers. This profile is valid for those who devote themselves to basic and applied research in the field of education or technology as well as for the professor who does a little bit of research daily in order to improve his courses, a kind of non-subsidized reflective-thinking practitioner. The attributes of a researcher were identified by Bruno Geslain during his more than 20 years of experience in the field and through his many meetings with a variety of researchers from different disciplines, both young and old, neophytes and experts.

The first trait of a researcher is curiosity: A desire for knowledge that perseveres. A perseverance that is quasi-relentlessness and, given that the work of a collegial researcher is anything but easy, an essential quality. It is a daily struggle to establish conditions truly suitable for research, with perseverance a constant battle just to survive and requiring a great expenditure of energy to reach targeted goals.

The second trait is doubt: Every researcher questions not only himself but the ideas he puts forth. He is a complex and thorough creature, concerned with the veracity and validity of information he handles and produces. A creative risk-taker with a taste for danger who is not afraid to think outside the box: He knows he will establish links and that unforeseen errors could become the source of significant results and interesting discoveries. He does not fear criticism or making his ideas known to the general public: He makes good use of his intellect.

Demanding towards himself and others, the researcher is a hard worker. Contrary to what some believe he does not lead the life of Riley because he has been released from certain academic tasks... nor is he a subsidy hunter, even if some researchers are quite skilled in this art. He is usually completely absorbed by the object of his research and does not count the time he invests. His work leads him to discover that the more he learns, the more he realizes how little he knows and how much he still needs to learn and understand. He realizes that research is a never-ending process that inspires him, a life's work, something about which he is quite passionate!

Being generous of soul, the researcher is not stingy with his time and is often inspired in the defense of a worthy cause.

The researcher is a creature who is receptive to the ideas of others and to his own growth. According to Bruno Geslain, "Researchers are not born, they are made", and it is curiosity and professional training that shapes them. Very turned on to the world, the researcher is a builder of knowledge and a dreamer who dreams of change.

Being generous of soul, the researcher is not stingy with his time and is often inspired in the defense of a worthy cause. His motivation and his interests run deep. Those who have done research for a long time are aware of the role they play in the construction of knowledge. They are firmly rooted in disciplinary and collegial networks as well as in society as a whole.



► PAINFUL ISOLATION OR BENEFICIAL SOLITUDE?

Even though many participants recognized themselves in this profile, they nonetheless expressed concerns with the conditions in which research takes place at collegial level. For some, this means long periods of isolation that can be difficult to live. During these times, the researcher sees no solution and would greatly benefit from support and leverage to rise above the obstacles. When no resources are available, this painful isolation is a major drain on the researcher's energy.

Others who liken research to a process of creation, feel that solitude is a must: Time is needed to think, to read, to write. On the other hand, participants also emphasized the importance of finding someone who agrees to take time to listen, read passages, provide feedback, and share thoughts on the object of the research. Isolation lurks in the shadows for those who do not work in teams and it is often at the drafting stage that isolation is felt most strongly. It is sometimes possible to find a collaborator among departmental colleagues or within the college, but educational advisors can also represent invaluable assets for researchers.

After 15 years of teaching, one participant discovered the invaluable assistance that could be provided by the educational advisor assigned to his program. The advisor offered key support throughout the project, notably the advantage of being able to use a specialized vocabulary. However, other participants mentioned that the educational advisors at their college did not always have the time nor the opportunity to offer them assistance. As for the greatly valued support offered by the directors in master's degrees and doctorates, it is often insufficient.

Whoever the collaborator is, they must be receptive to research in general and have a particular interest for the object of the research.

In spite of this need for contact with others, it seems that the personality of some researchers tends to isolate them, to make them choose solitude in order to better "commune with the object of their research". Some see this as an advantage: Teaching, by nature, means meeting many people and solitude can offer a beneficial alternative.

The possibility of working in teams is sometimes an option, usually within the framework of projects subsidized by PAREA¹ or research linked to a master's degree or doctorate. One participant indicated that during negotiations on research conditions, it was possible to delegate a certain portion of work to another person, with this person acting as guarantor.

There is a need to distinguish between the terms "solitude" and "isolation". The first is of primary importance for concentration during reflection, conceptualization and when writing up the work; the second, however, is to be avoided, since it is likely to impede the researcher's progress in difficult times. An environment conducive to exchanges is therefore necessary.

One worthwhile solution would be to set up a place for researchers at the same college to meet, another would be to set up a network of researchers. This is the goal of the ARC²: to offer researchers opportunities for meetings as well as training activities, thereby easing the burden of isolation weighing down researchers.

There is a need to distinguish between the terms "solitude" and "isolation". The first is of primary importance for concentration during reflection, for conceptualization and when writing up the work; the second, however, is to be avoided, since it is likely to impede the researcher's progress in difficult times. An environment conducive to exchanges is therefore necessary.

► TIME FOR RESEARCH?

Several participants also mentioned lack of time. To pursue a master's degree or a doctorate while working full-time and with young children at home for example, is not an easy undertaking. Also, it is necessary to be sure that the object of the research has long-term appeal... and relevance. Certain participants made the most of their release from professorial tasks in favour of research, but several indicated that even this was not enough. The possibility of a one-year sabbatical every four years was also discussed as was the luxury of a leave of absence to pursue research on a full-time basis. There are also subsidies available from research organizations that allow for time to be taken to conduct research but again, time must be found to set the process into motion and make the formal request.....and hopefully receive the subsidy.

¹ Programme d'aide à la recherche sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage du ministère de l'Éducation.

² Association pour la recherche au collégial.



SOURCES OF MOTIVATION

Given the difficulties inherent to research at collegial level, how is it that there are always teachers who devote a portion of their time to it? The principal source of motivation is the desire to change things, to see knowledge evolve, to create and discover. It can be a humanitarian motivation: Acting in defense of a cause linked to profound values. For some, it is a desire to help students in their learning; for others, what spurs them on is the contribution they make to the development and growth of an industrial field and the advancement of technology. Others speak of the joy of exercising the creativity that research demands. The satisfaction of ordering and classifying disparate components is also evoked. According to one participant, research forces us to live with chaos initially and then to search for structure. Through it all there is undoubtedly the desire for self-improvement and the desire to surpass oneself.

Research is expressed in various modes that bring about various types of enjoyment: Aesthetic pleasure which can lead to the achievement of a certain degree of perfection in work; the concrete pleasure of research in the field with the evidencing of structures within the practices. This is a more humanitarian work in which aesthetic pleasure is less present, but that can more immediately useful. Research can also be seen as a political commitment, by allowing us to act as responsible citizens. It provides opportunities to be useful and help society evolve. Finally in one's capacity as a professor, it can express one's love for school and allow us to rediscover the pleasure of studying.

The principal source of motivation is the desire to change things, to see knowledge evolve, to create and discover.

THE WORK OF RESEARCHER, IS IT FOR ME?

It should be well understood that research is not reserved only for those who are specialists in methodology. Anyone who believes they possess the qualities of a researcher can acquire tools, and make the most of ARC mentoring services and training activities. So, if you recognize yourselves in the researcher profile outlined here and have in mind an interesting research project, perhaps the work of researcher is for you. ♦

Odette LUSSIER has worked in the collegial network for several years now. She has been a teacher for more than 20 years in literature and other disciplines. She also held the position of coordinator for the Arts and Literature program (Arts et Lettres) at Cégep de Bois-de-Boulogne. After acquiring a rich and varied experience in the field of education, her current role as educational advisor at Cégep Marie-Victorin allows her to actively work with the teaching personnel and take the initiative in many pedagogical files. Odette Lussier is also a member of the Editorial Board of the magazine *Pédagogie collégiale*, a post she has held for three years now. This activity places her at the heart of teaching developments within the collegial network and nourishes her interest in the field of Arts and Literature.

odette.lussier@collegemv.qc.ca

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS ATTENDING THE WORKSHOP ON THE WORK OF A RESEARCHER

HADHAMI ABASSI	Teacher and researcher, INBNI, Tunisie
NADINE ARBOUR	Teacher, <i>Techniques administratives</i> , Cégep de Jonquière
ROMAIN BEAULIEU	<i>Philosophy</i> Teacher, Cégep de Baie-Comeau
MARIE-FRANCE BÉLANGER	President of PARC, Collège de Sherbrooke
SYLVIE BESSETTE	Educational advisor, Collège de Sherbrooke
MARTINE CHOMIENNE	Educational advisor, Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles
ÉLYSE DUPRAS	<i>French</i> Teacher, Collège de Maisonneuve
FRANCE FOURNIER	Teacher, <i>Techniques administratives</i> , Cégep de Lévis-Lauzon
MARIE-HÉLÈNE FOURNIER	Teacher, <i>Computer sciences</i> , Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles
JOHANNE GAGNON	Teacher, <i>Techniques de travail social</i> , Cégep de Rimouski
BRUNO GESLAIN	Coordinator of the Centre de recherche et de perfectionnement, Dawson Collège
JULIE GINGRAS	Teaching assistant, Cégep de Sainte-Foy
MARLEIGH GREANEY	Advisor, Measurement and evaluation, Vanier Collège
LINA JABBOUR	Teacher, <i>Computer sciences</i> , Collège Gérald-Godin
JEAN-GUY LACROIX	<i>Philosophy</i> Teacher, Cégep du Vieux Montréal
JOHANNE LANGLOIS	Teacher, <i>Techniques de design d'intérieur</i> , Cégep Marie-Victorin
LYNN LAPOSTOLLE	<i>French</i> Teacher, Cégep du Vieux Montréal
CAROLE LAVALLÉE	Teacher, <i>Techniques d'éducation à l'enfance</i> , Cégep du Vieux Montréal
NICOLE MAINGUY	Teacher, <i>Techniques de travail social</i> , Cégep de Sainte-Foy
FLORIAN PÉLOQUIN	<i>Philosophy</i> Teacher, Cégep de Joliette
LYNE PHILIPPE	Teacher, <i>Techniques de travail social</i> , Cégep de Rimouski
MARIELLE PRATTE	Educational advisor, Collège François -Xavier-Garneau
CAROLINE SERVANT	Educational advisor, Cégep de Sainte-Foy