

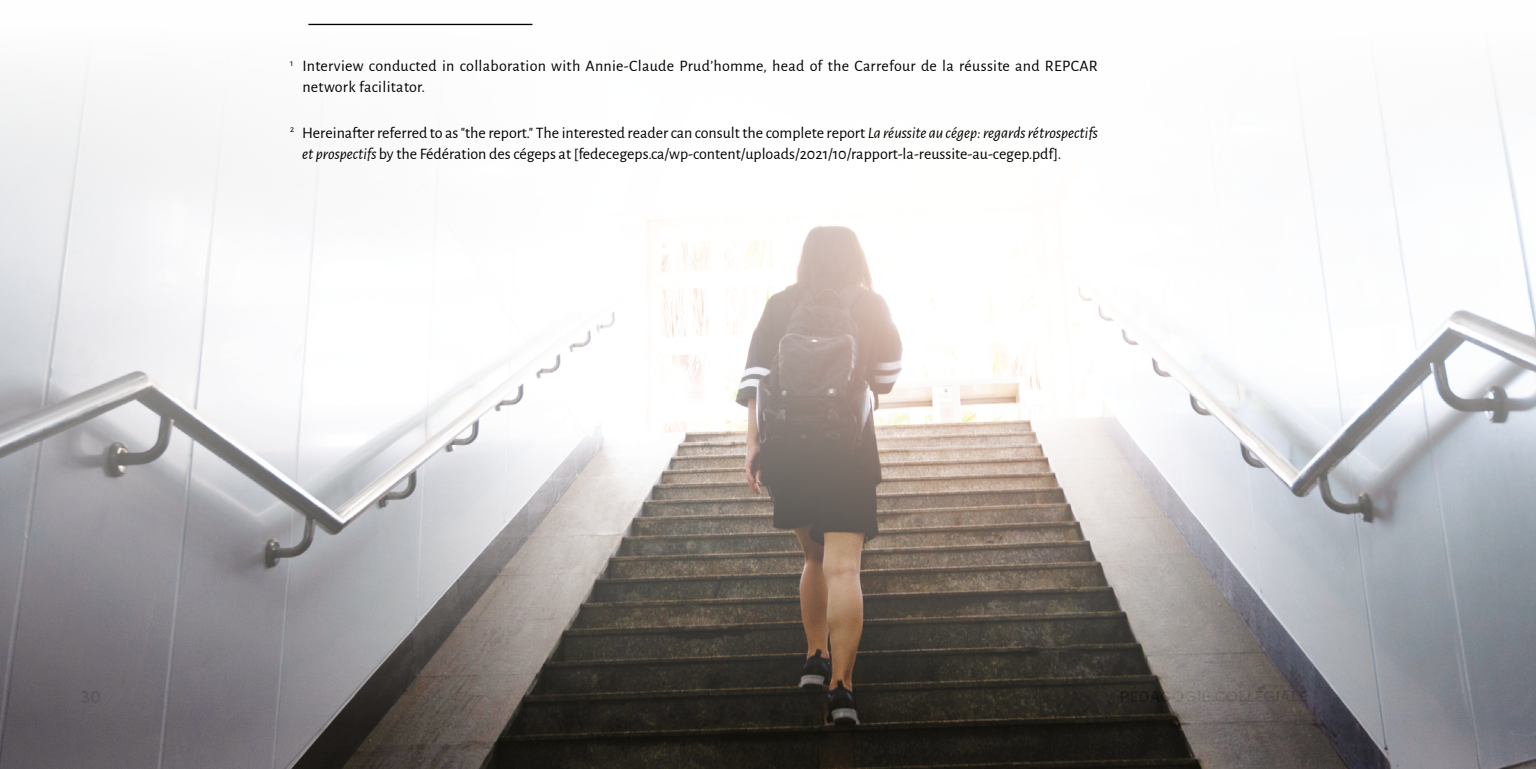
Student Success Reviewed and Updated

Interview with Carole Lavoie, higher education consultant
Interview by Nancy Chaput, member of the editorial board¹

Following the recent publication of the report *La réussite au cégep: regards rétrospectifs et prospectifs*² [*Student Success in College: Looking Back and Looking Forward*, Ed.] by the Fédération des cégeps, *Pédagogie collégiale* had the opportunity to speak with Ms. Carole Lavoie, coordinator of the Fédération des cégeps's work on student success and author of the report, to learn more about the related issues and the courses of action formulated by the Fédération des cégeps to promote student success in college institutions.

¹ Interview conducted in collaboration with Annie-Claude Prud'homme, head of the Carrefour de la réussite and REPCAR network facilitator.

² Hereinafter referred to as "the report." The interested reader can consult the complete report *La réussite au cégep: regards rétrospectifs et prospectifs* by the Fédération des cégeps at [fedecgeps.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/rapport-la-reussite-au-cegep.pdf].



In the report, you propose a new way of defining student success in college. Why didn't you use the habitual terminology of "educational success" or "academic success"?

In speaking of student success without attaching a more specific qualifier, we are taking an approach that encompasses both success that leads to a diploma sanction and success that considers the development of the student's potential in a supportive environment.

This positioning has led the Fédération des cégeps to propose a concept of student success that translates as follows:

To lead students to obtain a college qualification (DCS or ACS) in an educational environment that is:

- stimulating and provides them with a variety of challenges,
- inclusive and takes into account their diverse needs,
- caring and provides them with an environment conducive to study (2021, p. 103).

You emphasize the importance of taking a critical look and evaluating the effect of interventions on students and their learning. To what extent is it possible to go beyond the usual indicators (success rate, retention rate, graduation rate) and take into account the depth of learning in such an evaluation process?

To evaluate the impact of a measure, the objective must first be clearly defined and the initial state of the situation must be adequately documented. Selecting the data to be collected is an important step. This data can be quantitative—a success rate, for example—but it can also be qualitative and describe observable behaviours related to the targeted learning. This learning can pertain to learning objects, cognitive skills, general skills or skills related to intellectual work, for example.

Sometimes a review or evaluation of a support measure is limited to a description of the means used to meet a need, or to an assessment of the support measure based on the perceptions of the students who benefitted from it or of those who implemented it. It is less common for the assessment to include a measure of the effect of the support on student learning or behaviour.

To illustrate this, let's take the example of teachers or professionals mandated to develop a project aimed at improving students' ability to take notes in CEGEP courses. At the end of the project, they will have to take stock and determine whether the project has the potential to be renewed for the next session or whether modifications need to be made. The first step in producing this report could be to describe the number of workshops offered, the number of students who participated, and the results of an appreciation survey completed by the students and by the people who offered the workshops.

However, the assessment should also contain data on the effect of this project on the intended goal of improving students' ability to take notes in their courses. To do this, it would be useful to list the observable behaviours specific to this skill and to verify, using an appropriate methodology, whether or not there was improvement in this skill among the students after their participation in the project.

Critically assessing and adjusting a measure is a delicate exercise for several reasons. First, a rigorous evaluation of the effect of the measures put in place is demanding in terms of time and resources. It requires methodological expertise that CEGEPs would be well advised to develop further. In addition, if the results obtained are not those desired, there is a risk of demobilizing the stakeholders who implemented the support measure. In order to facilitate the evaluation of actions and to promote acceptance of the results obtained, it is important that those who implemented the measure be involved in the process, along with the academic administration, and that they participate in the evaluation exercise from the outset.



You mention that some practices have a greater impact on student learning than others. To what extent is it possible to reconcile privileging and supporting the deployment of these practices with the professional autonomy of teachers?

The research suggests that certain practices have a greater effect on both academic achievement and depth of learning. What is emphasized in the report are the characteristics of teaching methods, the characteristics of evaluations, the characteristics of the teacher-student relationship, and the structure of instruction. It is not intended to promote specific pedagogical strategies or to put forward particular pedagogical methods that have been observed at the college level, such as the flipped classroom, the inclusive approach, problem-based or project-based learning, etc.

Teachers are best placed to critically examine their practices and choose, based on their knowledge of strategies, those that have the characteristics identified while ensuring that they are consistent with the nature of the learning at hand. To varying degrees, college practitioners use high-impact practices. Expanding their deployment is one of the avenues for action formulated by the Fédération des cégeps.

One of the elements addressed in the report concerns the improvement of French language skills, particularly through the use of correction software. However, for some, allowing the use of correction and writing assistance software, particularly for the French Exit Exam, is tantamount to lowering the requirements for graduation. What do you think?

Learning French does not end at the college level; it continues throughout our lives. It is not only a question of allowing the use of correction software in courses or during the French Exit Exam, it is more broadly a question of teaching effective correction strategies, one of which is the use of correction software. The goal is to have students communicate effectively in French, both in speaking and in writing, and this requires that they be able to exploit all the tools at their disposal, including correction software. It has been shown that when students use such tools effectively, they improve their French language skills considerably. It is therefore not a question of lowering the level of requirements. We recommend that these tools be the object of teaching and learning, so that students develop the reflex

to refer to them adequately and in a sustained manner and, in doing so, increase their mastery of the language.

Certainly, the topic is controversial and it does not have unanimous support. As a matter of fact, this was the subject of an article in the magazine *L'Actualité*.³ We believe that it is a promising avenue to consider, which places the student in a learning assessment context similar to situations in the workplace where the use of this type of tool is possible and even encouraged.

In the report, you note that there are worrying discrepancies between student success in, on one hand, the first French literature course and the first philosophy course in the Francophone sector and, on the other hand, the corresponding courses in the Anglophone sector. What do you propose to do to remedy the situation?

This is a sensitive issue, and it is not a matter of questioning general education. An analysis of the success rates among students in French-language CEGEPs and those in English-language CEGEPs shows that this gap exists. Particularly for groups of students who have obtained low grade point averages in high school, we observe that literature and philosophy courses in the Francophone sector have lower success rates than the corresponding courses in the Anglophone sector. A similar observation is made when analyzing the success rates of the language-specific exit exams. Students in the Anglophone sector do better than those in the Francophone sector on the language proficiency criterion. This has an undeniable systemic effect on the success and graduation rates of students in the Francophone sector.

³ See NADEAU, J.-B. "Qui a peur d'Antidote au cégep?" *L'Actualité*, January 13, 2022 [lactualite.com/societe/qui-a-peur-dantidote-au-cegep/?e=cd8c464a6b]

The course of action formulated by the Fédération des cégeps suggests that the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (MES) create a working group, composed of teachers and students, among others, in order to better understand the situation, identify the elements to be taken into consideration and determine avenues for improvement.

You mention that the mobilization and collaboration of the various stakeholders in a CEGEP are necessary to promote student success. Can you explain your vision of this collaboration?

This is an issue related to organizational culture and the concept of a learning organization. Within an institution, it is important to have a concerted vision of student success. CEGEPs must set development goals and adopt the posture of a learning organization that is willing to take a critical look at its practices and achievements. This cannot be done in a vacuum, since the interventions carried out with students must be complementary to one another and require a responsibility shared by the various stakeholders and by the various administrations. Thus, the evolution of practices can only be envisaged in a context of collaboration and of shared knowledge development, by relying on all staff members already involved in the implementation of student success plans and all those who could contribute to it. In this regard, program committees are excellent places for collaboration on teaching and learning.

Do you have any suggestions on how we might promote high-impact practices in our college institutions? What levers do we have at our disposal?

There are many levers available, but supporting the professional development of the various stakeholders, particularly teachers, is the first step in promoting the wider deployment of high-impact practices in colleges. It is important for colleges to create the conditions necessary for professional development and to support reflective practice among all those who implement student success measures.

For teachers, it is important that they be able to develop their expertise, particularly through communities of practice. The means of supporting teachers can be varied and conditioned by the specific context of each CEGEP. For example, we can

consider relieving them of part of their duties and offering them support so they can review their course, modifying their schedules to facilitate the grouping of communities of practice, or supporting the implementation of action research on selected high-impact practices.

Professionals, particularly pedagogical counsellors, also have a role to play in supporting institutional analysis and taking a critical look at the CEGEP's strengths and areas for improvement in terms of deploying high-impact practices, both in teaching and in the educational environment. They can play a complementary role with teachers by accompanying them and promoting their professional integration. ■

We would like to thank the Réseau des répondants de la réussite (Repcar), the Réseau des répondants des données de la réussite (Repstats) as well as Annie-Claude Prud'homme, head of the Carrefour de la réussite and Repcar network facilitator, for having inspired some of the questions asked to Ms. Carole Lavoie.

Carole Lavoie is a consultant in higher education. Between 2018 and 2021, as project manager for the Fédération des cégeps, she coordinated the work on student success at the CEGEP level and produced the resulting report. Previously, she occupied the positions of Director General, Director of Studies, and Director of Pedagogical and Institutional Development at the Cégep de Sainte-Foy for 18 years. She was also a teacher at Cégep Édouard-Montpetit for about a decade. In 2018, she was named a member of the Ordre de l'excellence en éducation, in recognition of her significant contribution to the quality of Quebec's educational system.

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Organizations That Support Student Success

The Carrefour de la réussite au collégial

Overseen by the Fédération des cégeps and funded by the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (MES), the Carrefour de la réussite was created in 2000, following work carried out in the late 1990s on student success and graduation in colleges. Since then, this organization has been supporting colleges in the implementation of their student success plans, in particular by creating opportunities for exchange between college stakeholders and by transferring and mobilizing knowledge on success, retention and graduation.

Over the years, three communities of practice have been established:

- The **Réseau des répondants de la réussite (Repcar)** is a group of stakeholders in charge of success initiatives at their institution.
- The **Réseau des répondants du dossier du français (Repfran)** brings together those in charge of the promotion and improvement of French language skills at their institution.
- The **Réseau des répondants des données de la réussite (Repstats)** brings together stakeholders in charge of student success data management at their institution.

Source: [reussitecollegiale.ca]

The Consortium d'animation sur la persévérance et la réussite en enseignement supérieur (CAPRES)

Created in 2002, CAPRES contributes to the development of a culture of accessibility, perseverance and student success in higher education. With financial support from the MES, the organization acts as a *showcase* facilitating the circulation of knowledge rooted in research and practice and its transfer to the higher education community, and as an *interface* that contributes to the pooling of this knowledge and the actors involved.

In 2022, CAPRES celebrates its 20th anniversary and will become **the Observatoire sur la réussite en enseignement supérieur (ORES)**. The MES has given the organization the mandate to set up this new observatory by the fall of 2022 in order to monitor the various issues affecting the education community and the research being done in Quebec and around the world.

Source: [capres.ca]



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