

Intercollegiate Ped Days

Working Together, Stronger Together

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Teaching and learning are collaborative and collective endeavours, especially in times of greatest need. The state of emergency remote teaching imposed by the pandemic has underlined the value of community-based pedagogical support and the need for ongoing collective exchange in the college network at all levels of intervention, such as teachers, pedagogical counsellors, professionals, and managers. For a group of pedagogical counsellors from across the English CEGEP network, this need has found an echo in founding the Intercollegiate Ped Days (IPD), to expand beyond the already existing local pedagogical

days and to afford educators across the network opportunities to cultivate pedagogical and professional development. In this article, we review how we founded IPD,¹ describing the conception process, participation, and growth potential in an attempt to document this collective effort and encourage further collaborations in the broader CEGEP network.

¹ As members of the IPD Planning Committee, we will provide practical accounts and reflective insights on the conception process of IPD. We acknowledge our subjectivity in sharing our observations and understand that we portray an insider's perspective.

Fertile ground for collaboration

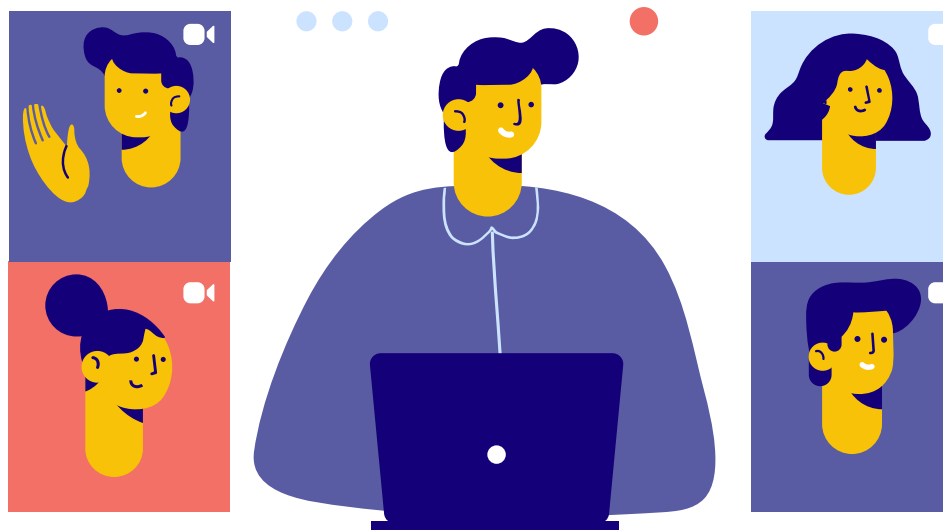
According to Jane Maienschein (1993), "collaborations typically occur for one or more of three overlapping reasons": needing help or support, establishing more credibility, and creating a community (p. 167). In retrospect, we can trace back our IPD collaboration to all three tangents. First, faculty is mainly comprised of subject matter experts as opposed to formally trained teachers and with that grows the need for ongoing pedagogical support, especially as today's learning environments become increasingly complex and unstable, especially in a global pandemic situation! Considering the novelty of the delivery format and the vast amounts of remote teaching support to be covered in 2020, it seemed unrealistic for most CEGEPs to offer "in-house" pedagogical development learning activities that would have the potential to meet all faculty needs. To provide a rich set of pedagogical learning opportunities, it seemed like the perfect occasion to step outside our local institution's walls and reach out to the wider network for help and support.

Second, there was a lot of frustration and skepticism surrounding the remote delivery of our respective local pedagogical days. Teachers were stretched to their limits, balancing family life along with their teaching duties, as well as other commitments. As professionals who are passionate about their disciplines and their students' success, they had to work harder to adapt their teaching practices in response to their ever-changing teaching and learning contexts. Therefore, for teachers to commit to ongoing

pedagogical development, it must be perceived as relevant and credible; i.e., will it be worth their time? Will it help them improve their daily teaching practice? It must also be timely, doable, and accessible. Working together to encourage teacher collaboration across the Anglophone network gave this new delivery format more credibility.

Third, the pandemic cast a sense of isolation on our educational environments. Teachers moved from interacting with their students in live classrooms to seeing them in small squares, sometimes even just as a name printed on a black background. We all migrated from our offices to our homes, where contact with our colleagues became scarce or non-existent. The burden of isolation and remote work highlighted the need for a sense of community. By reaching out to other CEGEPs in the Anglophone

network for idea exchange and procedural know-how on how to better support teachers during these uncertain times, pedagogical counsellors started forming a small intercollegiate community, which later evolved into the IPD Planning Committee. This sense of community that organically developed among a group of pedagogical counsellors was a driving force in realizing that teachers also need community and fellowship, i.e., opportunities to share and exchange with others. We recognized that the badly needed support and camaraderie existing within each local discipline department could be enriched and enhanced by including teachers from "sister" CEGEP departments. It was clear to us, the collective pedagogical counsellors, that teachers would need broader opportunities for connecting, fellowship, and community building. To this end, we initiated IPD 2021.



"Oasis or mirage? It's not a question I ask myself often when opening an email. However, last year's [2021] programme for Intercollegiate Ped Days was a sight for sore eyes, and I could hardly believe mine when I opened the email announcing the [2022] event. After a moment of disbelief, I had plenty of questions... Who was behind this amazing opportunity for sharing in the midst of the pandemic? How could these fertile grounds for exchange have sprung up without direction from on high (or at least from academic deans)? Follow-up emails confirmed it: this was no mirage. This oasis was a grass-roots phenomenon (as I suppose oases normally are!) and it had been tended to by a dedicated group from our college network." – Gordon Brown, Chair, Academic Dean's Table, English Colleges Steering Committee (Brown, 2022).

Despite the inspiration for IPD originating from the onset of COVID-19, the idea of a broader community-based pedagogical exchange is a necessity that will continue beyond any emergency teaching measure. The collaborative nature of sharing pedagogical practices is integral to success in higher education. There is no denial that collaborative efforts have been manifesting themselves

informally. However, the need to streamline and facilitate access to these channels of collaborative pedagogical development has become more evident. The opportunity to share and learn from each other has been scarce in the Anglophone CEGEP network. This scarcity results from our wide geographical distribution and lack of readily accessible spaces to meet whenever needed. Recognizing

this old-yet-found-again necessity of sharing and learning from each other is the drive for creating a virtual space for communities of practice to emerge and thrive. Although highlighted during the COVID pandemic, the need for mediating collaborations has been and will continue to be ever-present.

Process outline

With this detailing of the ways in which the IPD unfolded, we are actively engaging in reflectivity and reflexivity. This exercise will help us identify strategies for improvement and determine our growth potential. Our approach to sharing our experiences by establishing Intercollegiate Ped Days is grounded in constructivism. It is mainly rooted in the constructivist interpretation of collaboration, where "collaboration between organizations does not proceed according to a prescribed set of rules, nor does it follow a timetable. It is, instead, a process that unfolds with a life of its own and proceeds through stages that may be unique to the endeavour" (Slater, 2021, p. 45).

As such, the following account captures the organic and responsive nature of the inception of IPD as well as the open and unstructured nature of its development. To start, we would like to state that it just made sense at the time! Considering the accessibility potential inherent in virtual delivery, we decided to share our pre-existing local pedagogical day programs with the wider network and invite attendance from other Anglophone CEGEPs. This especially presented a unique opportunity for smaller colleges to partake in the more elaborate programs organized by the bigger CEGEPs. Azra Khan from Dawson

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College, who has been a member of the IPD Planning Committee since 2020, explains that the sharing of Dawson's robust pedagogical day programs with the intercollegiate community aligned with Dawson's commitment to catering to the interests of teachers and pedagogical professionals. Christopher Bourne from Champlain College Lennoxville, an IPD 2022 Planning Committee member, adds that opportunities are limited for a small regional college to connect with peers beyond the institution. Hence, the Champlain Lennoxville faculty was receptive to participating in a virtual intercollegiate pedagogical event.

IPD also presented an opportunity for remote colleges to participate in pedagogical activities that usually took place in the greater Montreal area. Physical attendance often created barriers for potential attendees, such as incurring significant expenses associated with travel and lodging as well as making special personal and professional arrangements due to their physical absence. Quinn Johnson from Champlain Saint Lawrence, an IPD Committee member since 2020, expressed that being located relatively far from most of the English-language CEGEPs, it has not always been practical for Saint Lawrence teachers to meet in person or attend events with other teachers in the Anglophone network. Wonneken Wanske, an IPD 2022 Committee member from Cégep Heritage College, also highlights how the conception of IPD offered the teachers and staff of the only public, Anglophone CEGEP in Western Quebec a forum to connect with other teachers in Quebec (in English!). According to her, it provided teachers with professional development relevant to what they are doing in their

classrooms and ties into the broader discourses in higher education today.

To streamline the process, we agreed to pool the events already planned for each of our respective local colleges during the week of January 7 – 15, 2021, into one extensive schedule. This resulted in a weeklong program that would be accessible to the whole English CEGEP network, teachers and professionals alike. This amalgamation of offerings was later dubbed "Intercollegiate Ped Week" (changed in 2022 to Intercollegiate Ped Days). The program consisted of workshops and activities held online at individual colleges and shared live to the network. Several colleges had already secured keynote presenters, and steps were taken to stream the presentations to make them accessible to all colleges. As a result, we offered 47 sessions and two keynote presentations with more than 600 session registrations from across the English CEGEP network. Azra Khan underscores that the extensive collaboration of all the English language instruction colleges in building Intercollegiate Ped Days ushered a fertile ground for rich exchange among teachers and professionals, which would advance reflection and strategies in exemplary teaching and learning at the college level.

What defines IPD from a conference or a symposium is the fact that it maintains the collegiate and familiar format of a local pedagogical day. It allows teachers to share their pedagogical practice and knowledge without going through the typical conference proposal review and acceptance process, which is often a deterrence to participation. IPD harnesses a sense of community by establishing itself as a welcoming and inclusive platform

for all college members by affording everyone an opportunity to share. This open invitation allows for new and lesser-known voices to emerge. It also creates an accessible exchange process with multiple entry points. The IPD format capitalizes on the dynamics of existing local communities and expands their reach in order to create new prospects for pedagogical collaboration and exchange.

Discipline-specific sessions

During the 2021 iteration of IPD, we saw an opportunity to organize discipline-specific exchange sessions to encourage intercollegiate teacher collaboration. The idea was for teachers to share their knowledge and experiences of course design, assessment, and student engagement for virtual instruction. Research shows that teachers benefit greatly and engage in more frequent exchanges by participating in discipline-specific conversations (Thomkin *et al.*, 2019), especially if conversations evolve around their immediate educational context (in this case, CEGEPs). As such, we created IPD's discipline-specific sessions (DSS) in the hope that they become the foundation for initiating online networked communities of practice, which encourage collaborative reflection, learning, and knowledge building (Laferrrière, Erickson, & Breuleux, 2004).

To jumpstart DSS, we invited teachers from every Anglophone college to participate in sessions corresponding to their discipline. The objective would be to share teacher reflections on an engagement or assessment activity and/or an adjustment to the course design due to online migration. These



communities would offer CEGEP teachers the opportunity to access a range of knowledge outside their respective institutions (Wenger, 1998). Understanding that effective communities of practice are not imposed, we relied on self-motivated teachers who volunteered to spearhead the pedagogical exchange during their discipline-specific sessions. We put together a list of different disciplines offered at our colleges and personally started reaching out to each department to gauge their interest. The teachers who stepped forward became "key teachers," who would present their ways of addressing feedback and evaluation in their respective disciplines to initiate conversation during their respective sessions. Pedagogical counsellors also attended the sessions as facilitators to field questions, encourage participation, and generate notes and aggregate resources to be shared with all participants. The DSS sessions exemplified how, in an online "networked community," teachers engage in theory-practice

dialogue more frequently, make links between local considerations and a wider variety of external factors and resources, and expand their capacities in using ICTs (Laferrière, Erickson, & Breuleux, 2004).

At the closing of the sessions, many participants expressed a desire to meet again in discipline-related groups. Some groups considered the possibility of holding follow-up meetings and furthering their communities of practice yearlong. Therefore, we decided to collaborate with SALTISE to offer another opportunity for teachers to connect through the established groupings of IPD's discipline-specific sessions during SALTISE's annual conference. We also established a permanent online presence in collaboration with AQPC by creating a platform on Linkr to facilitate a continuous asynchronous pedagogical exchange. Through every iteration of DSS (IPD 2021, SALTISE 2021, IPD 2022, and SALTISE 2022) as well as the ongoing online exchanges,

teachers become more familiar with each other and each other's practices, which builds a greater sense of community (Wenger, 2005).

The future of the discipline-specific sessions is closely knit to its grassroots nature. Since DSS are a prelude to creating communities of practice, the burden of growth lies with its members. Their engagement charts the course and determines how the momentum is initiated, sustained, and/or driven. Wonneken Wanske stresses that the grassroots nature of the way IPD came into being is promising for the future. She explains that pedagogical counsellors have established an event just-in-time for teachers to develop community ties within their institutions and the larger network of colleges. These existing and newfound community ties can respond to ongoing professional development needs as they arise. Such responsiveness speaks to the agility of communities of practice.

Challenges and opportunities

In the field of education, there is a strong emphasis on the concept of collaboration, yet there are limited institutional policies and procedures that outline the implementation process. As a group of pedagogical counsellors working together for the first time on a new concept, we found ourselves burdened with charting the course of this partnership. This initiative has not been without its challenges, especially since "[c]ollaboration also requires individuals and institutions to step out of the comfort zones where they usually operate quite autonomously" (Baldwin & Chang, 2007, p. 26). Considering the novelty of this intercollegiate collaboration, here is a summary of the challenges we faced:

Administration: Considering that the IPD Planning Committee members work at different colleges, finding an online platform that effortlessly streamlined our administrative preparations was deemed difficult. Azra Khan identifies this aspect of our collaboration as our biggest challenge. She explains that we have to ensure equal access to any co-created documentation in a space that is continually accessible (even if a Planning Committee member changed their position). The college-approved software does not allow for equal access by all institutions. It only permits one college as a designated owner, whereas all accounts belonging to other colleges would log into the system as guests. Utilizing the software as a guest user presents a few accessibility blocks, which are sometimes time-consuming and often frustrating. Technical issues include restricted document visibility in share mode, inability to

read group messages unless using the system in guest mode, and restricted group options control for guest users.

Financial planning: The idea of an intercollegiate pedagogical development event was neither a planned nor sanctioned academic happening. Its novelty meant that it had no preapproved budget or designated financial allocation. There was a considerable amount of ambiguity surrounding the budget approval process as well as the financial contribution of each college.

Timing and scheduling: Each college has its preapproved and predetermined local pedagogical development date, which is blocked and announced in the academic calendar. As a result, it was challenging to plan an intercollegiate ped days event that accommodates seven different dates across seven colleges. Also, sharing the content of every local pedagogical day meant that we had a week-long event, which was intensive for the organizers and exhausting for the participants.

Scope: Defining the scope of an intercollegiate pedagogical event was exhausting and time-consuming. Azra Khan explains how demanding it was to go through each of our institutions' strategic plans to identify where the commonalities in goals and priorities lay. She adds that another level of complexity lies in the back-and-forth consultation between the colleges (local institutional feedback) and the IPD Planning Committee. We had to ensure proper collaboration in realizing our interinstitutional pedagogical day objectives.

Delivery mode: Given the imposed virtual operation of all colleges, any pedagogical development had to also adhere to the same mode of delivery. This meant that we would ask teachers who were already saturated with online activities to spend more time online. Before IPD, many questions arose regarding "Zoom fatigue," the receptiveness of teachers for this new format, and the accessibility of the delivery to all participating members.



We had no answers and knew that we were experimenting, maybe taking a risk with online delivery. During IPD, we also encountered technical difficulties. In some cases, local security system issues sent session invitations and reminders to the spam folders and at other times prevented participants from accessing the meeting links.

All the challenges we encountered while planning for the first intercollegiate event of 2021 became the building blocks for planning the second event in 2022. We considered every difficulty as an opportunity for growth and improvement:

Administration: Considering the accessibility deficiency of the college-approved software, not all members of the IPD Planning Committee have equal access to the platform. However, we realized that the three colleges with a constituent status could simultaneously administer our shared space. This distributed platform management guarantees a

level of sustainability and continuity. However, we must underline that the administrative aspects remain a challenge due to technical limitations.

Financial planning: Based on the IPD 2021 and 2022 expenditure indicators, we drafted an IPD 2023 budget, which we shared with the Academic Dean's Table of the English Colleges Steering Committee for their direction on the appropriate institutional approach. Such an expansive intercollegiate endeavour requires collaboration and alignment on all institutional levels.

Timing and scheduling: In the 2021 post-event evaluation questionnaire, participants indicated their need for a shorter and more targeted event. We responded to their feedback by pooling our respective local pedagogical offerings to be presented in a shorter intercollegiate three-day event. This format is still under examination to determine the best course of action for 2023. Shortening the event from one week to three days resulted in the

name morphing from Intercollegiate Ped Week to Intercollegiate Ped Days.

Scope: The committee's ways of working together continue to be genuinely collaborative in our shared workspaces and our mutual respect for each college's local plans and priorities. Azra Khan describes it as both a challenge and a very fruitful/inspirational exchange about teaching, learning, and continuous improvement in post-secondary education. This intercollegiate collaboration highlighted an existing commonality that helps align our efforts.

Delivery mode: Albeit compromising on the in-person advantages, online delivery has proven successful thus far. Also, the technical barriers did not deter participants from attending in virtual mode. However, to increase technological literacy, we plan on providing our participants with user manuals that would facilitate their navigation of the online platform. With the limitations connected to virtual events, this will be a challenge that will require constant revisiting and respective responsiveness.



Although never identified as a challenge, the concept of collaborating with organizations that serve the CEGEP community presented itself as an opportunity. We recognize that IPD opened the door to establishing partnerships that could be mutually beneficial to the colleges and external entities alike. On the one side, IPD offers key organizations that support college-level teaching an opportunity to further connect with the college community and diffuse their offerings to the wider Anglophone CEGEP network in a familiar pedagogical development setting. On the other

side, teachers do not have the time to search for and research their pedagogical development opportunities. IPD bridges this gap by bringing together all opportunities into one event. Teachers benefit from the chance to become current on the services and programs that support college-based teachings and pedagogy. As a result of these collaborations, IPD has become a fertile ground for exchanges and discussions in preparation for the bigger CEGEP conferences happening in the spring (e.g., SALTISE and AQPC). It is a symbiotic relationship where all parties collaborate to support teachers in their efforts to ensure student success.

Growth

Building on the success of the first intercollegiate pedagogical event of 2021 and improving on our initial shortcomings, the IPD Planning Committee reconvened to organize another event for 2022. At the outset, we committed to enhancing the event's accessibility and convenience in an attempt to address some of the challenges noted above. As members of the IPD Planning Committee, we also sought to align our organizing efforts with our respective strategic plan goals and student success action plans by focusing on the themes of inclusive pedagogies, systemic inequities, barriers to learning caused by inequity, and strategies to overcome such barriers.

"One of the lessons from the pandemic has been the extent to which inequalities in our educational system are exacerbated in times of greatest need. In recent semesters, we have all been obliged to reflect more deeply on barriers to inclusion, on support for diverse learners and the wellbeing of all, and on power differentials that decolonization and Indigenization can help address." – Gordon Brown, Chair, Academic Dean's Table, English Colleges Steering Committee (Brown, 2022).

As such, the Intercollegiate Ped Days 2022 took place on January 12 – 14, 2022, with the theme of *Systemic Transformation: Developing Our Inclusive Practices*. Sessions explored the theme and how it relates to teaching and learning as well as our inclusive pedagogical and institutional practices.²

IPD 2022 attracted more than 720 participants and presenters exchanging knowledge and experiences in 48 sessions over the course of three days. Shortly after, we invited participant feedback to provide further insight into their experiences with the content, delivery, and logistics of the event. The feedback guided our evaluation process and highlighted areas of improvement, especially in relation to familiarizing participants with new online platforms. We also recognized the importance of catering to the varied local college community interests while engaging in broader conversations.

While charting the course for next year, Azra Khan noted that IPD would best serve the colleges by maintaining an annual intercollegiate ped days event with a continuation of shared priorities that align with local institutional objectives. Christopher Bourne identifies IPD as an opportunity to pool our efforts for more resource-intensive speakers and projects. At the same time, Wonneken Wanske sees

the potential for a yearly event, where IPD contributes to the exchange between institutions and practitioners by providing a space to strengthen ties between the Anglophone college community in Quebec. Currently, the IPD 2022 report is sitting on the Academic Dean's Table of the English Colleges Steering Committee, in anticipation of outlining the planning steps for IPD 2023.

Looking at IPD's growth potential, we acknowledge that the core of this budding success lies in the commitment of our intercollegiate communities on all levels—faculty, professionals, staff, and administration alike. A strong inter-institutional foundation for policies and procedures that support intercollegiate collaboration will not only afford spaces for corresponding grassroots initiatives to thrive, but will also empower new initiatives to sprout. We are hopeful, but not certain, about the ways in which Intercollegiate Ped Days will grow. We do not want to determine a specific course for our growth trajectory since we want to constantly remain responsive to the pedagogical needs of our college communities. The organic nature of our development is a power we want to keep harnessing. ■

² Readers interested in learning more about the sub-themes can consult the IPD 2022 program [educative.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ipd-2022-program-final.pdf].

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