

PROVIDING CAREER GUIDANCE WHILE TEACHING



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What role can a teacher play in the process of providing CEGEP students with guidance? And if the students in question are already in their sixth term in a career program, isn't it too late? The idea of developing "guidance-oriented" activities is appealing, but how can we concern ourselves with career counselling while helping students develop the competencies associated with a given course? Is the time invested in this process "profitable"? As a teacher¹ involved in the Youth and Adult Correctional Intervention program, I asked myself these questions when I was devising interventions in line with a guidance-oriented teaching approach as part of a training workshop offered by PERFORMA².

Despite my apprehensions, I plunged into the experience and am now presenting its results in this article. After first briefly describing the guidance-oriented approach and its impact on student success, I describe an activity carried out with third-year students in Youth and Adult Correctional Intervention and present its main impacts. Finally, this article seeks to put forward some suggestions for teachers who wish to introduce guidance-oriented activities into their courses and points to pitfalls that can be avoided.

GUIDANCE-ORIENTED TEACHING: SOME PRINCIPLES

A guidance-oriented approach to teaching goes much further than the simple fact of informing a student of available career choices or helping students determine which field of study might suit them. Rather, it involves proposing that students undertake certain activities that will help in gaining better self-knowledge, making choices, and making decisions. Thus the guidance-oriented approach is defined as a coordinated process carried out by a school-based team and the team's partners, in which objectives are set and individual and collective services, tools, and learning activities are set up with the purpose of supporting students in the development of their identities and on their vocational journeys. (MELS, 2002, p. 18).

Pelletier specifies that the expression «guidance-oriented» describes a setting, a practice, or a measure that offers young people, inevitably in process of evolution, contexts that ac-

quaint them with their identity and provide indications of the future as regards their academic and professional success (2004, p. 4). A CEGEP student makes numerous choices that emerge from dreams about a career and must be capable of gradually adopting measures to commit to her or his decisions and sustain them. Colleges that decide to integrate a guidance-oriented approach into their educational projects define their own objectives. For example, in order to foster students' vocational progress, Collège de Maisonneuve defines these four targets.

To make sound academic and career choices, students must:

- have good knowledge of themselves;
- have a good knowledge of programs of study and the working world;
- know how to make decisions that concern their personal and professional lives; and
- actively invest themselves in their academic and career plans.

Teachers can include in their teaching approach guidance-oriented practice and guidance-oriented activities associated with one or more of these targets as a way of contributing to students' guidance. This is so regardless of the teacher's discipline or the program she or he works in.

GUIDANCE-ORIENTED TEACHING AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

There is an undeniable link between guidance, motivation, and academic success (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2002). Thus it is understood that guidance-oriented teaching promotes students' success because it enables students to know themselves better and know their program of study and the teachers involved in it better. In this perspective, teachers can use the learning activities in their courses to support students' quest for identity and thus help students determine the nature of their personalities, their fields of interest, their competencies, and their values.

¹ At the time of writing of this article, I was a teacher.

² Workshop on college teaching: "Indécision, orientation et réussite scolaire: ma pédagogie est-elle orientante?" ("Indecision, career guidance, and academic success: Is my teaching guidance oriented?")—a training session offered at Collège de Maisonneuve in winter 2008 by Isabelle Falardeau.



While certain courses are particularly well suited to the acquisition of knowledge about training programs, careers, and the working world, it is still possible to incorporate the guidance-oriented approach into all kinds of courses by means of activities that encourage the development of decision-making competencies in students. Such activities do so by offering students opportunities to try out decision-making situations or by helping them become aware of their own decision-making styles. Similarly, teachers can participate in developing students' self-advocacy as regards their academic and career plans. This, however, is based on the assumption that students are setting realistic goals, laying out the stages of implementation of a plan, and actively investing in it. Thus teachers can help maintain students' feelings of decision-making competency. Guidance-oriented teaching also helps students check for consistency between their identities and their future working world. Finally, this teaching approach can give students an opportunity to develop awareness of a temporal perspective, that is, to build a realistic image of their futures and mobilize their energies to achieve those objectives. In short, by assigning guidance-oriented activities, a teacher can promote student success.

GUIDANCE-ORIENTED TEACHING: A REVEALING TRIAL

Trials of guidance-oriented activities are revealing for both students and the teacher. Even when a teacher intervenes in this way at the end of students' programs, the teacher plays the role of guide. During a credited training course on guidance-oriented teaching, and with the goal of testing its foundations, I devised an activity called *Vers l'intervenant idéal*³ ("Towards the Ideal Worker"). This was an adaptation of an activity found in the volume *Gros plan sur mon avenir* (Falardeau, 2004). In my own practice, the adapted activity I devised is designed for third-year students in Youth and Adult Correctional Intervention, specifically as part of the final fieldwork course in their program, in which the fieldwork consists of intervention. This fieldwork course allows students to discover the reality of correctional work and become familiar with the workplace, with the clientele, and with teamwork. Confronting real labour market requirements, students are in a position to test their intervention and skills. The intervention fieldwork course provides students with an opportunity to revisit the choices they've made regarding their professional futures. During their program of study, students have had the chance to become familiar with the field of intervention, in particular by means of special lectures, field observation, and experiences with community involvement. Nevertheless, it is during this final fieldwork course that students can really become aware of the profession's requirements. This is the time when they can

tell whether they feel comfortable in this work setting and whether they have the appropriate competencies and attitudes for holding a job in this field. The fieldwork in and of itself serves as a form of guidance. This is a stage in their schooling when decision-making competency is strongly called upon. Some students will decide to continue on to university studies in order to round out their education; others will take their careers in a whole different direction; and still others will take the path of professional induction; but all will clarify their own future plans and make an active commitment to these plans. The idea of incorporating a guidance-oriented activity such as *Vers l'intervenant idéal* into the course struck me as interesting because it offers students one more opportunity to display their knowledge of the working world, to make decisions about their professional lives, and to actively commit themselves to their career plans. Given that the transition from the school setting to the work setting presupposes many forms of self-questioning, the timing seems to me ideal for an activity of this kind.

By means of this activity, students reflect on their identity and the working world and, even though they are close to the end of their program of study, they can continue asking questions and making discoveries about their career choices.

THE ORIGINS OF MY OWN GUIDANCE PRACTICE

Even before I took training in guidance-oriented teaching, I used to assign students two discussion and reflection activities associated with this approach. The first took the form of an invitation to students to express themselves succinctly on what they considered to be the ideal worker in their field: this person's competencies, attitudes, and strengths. In the second activity, students projected themselves into the future and described where they saw themselves five years down the road. My objective was to have them reflect on their future roles as correctional workers. I was later to learn that learning activities of this kind fit perfectly into a guidance-oriented approach. Not only that, but they were to prove to serve as excellent preparation for the guidance activity that is the subject of this article. Thus *Vers l'intervenant idéal* is based partly on my previous practice. It aims to offer students an opportunity to clarify their future plans, identify potential obstacles to the fulfillment of those plans, and learn what

³ The author of the activity "Towards My Ideal", put forward by Ms. Falardeau in her workshop and then adapted by me for my own context, is H. Dail, as referenced in L. Cochran, *Career Counseling: A Narrative Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997, p. 48.



will promote those plans' fulfillment. Projecting themselves into the future in order to describe their conception of the ideal worker could help students take a stance as to what they want to "be" and to determine what personal and professional resources they will need in order to fulfill their plans.

ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The activity is held in the seventh week of term, during a feedback session conducted in groups of five or six students. It unfolds in two parts. First, the activity's objectives are presented and students are asked to carry out the following task individually while respecting the instructions:

Here is your task:

- First, draw inside Box 1 an image that represents what you are (as a correctional worker in training).
- Second, draw inside Box 4 an image that represents what you'd like to be or that represents *the ideal worker*.
- Third, draw inside Box 2 an image that represents the obstacles that could hinder the fulfillment of your ideal.
- Fourth, draw inside Box 3 an image that represents what could help you fulfill your ideal.

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During this first part of the activity, students are called upon to explore their identities as correctional workers: what are my competencies, my fields of interest, my values? Recognition of the obstacles as well as of the factors that could promote fulfillment of the ideal also reveals identity, because students must become aware of what requires improvement and of their known strengths. Obstacles and resources are not exclusively external; these elements are also a part of the student's identity. The activity also relates to knowledge of the working world. By reflecting on the ideal correctional worker, students reveal what they know about the reality of the work, the career, and its requirements. This part of the activity allows for reflection on one's competencies and those attitudes that need to be developed in order to work in the various settings students are called upon to intervene in (penitentiary, group home, youth centre, community setting). The activity also provides students with the opportunity to project themselves into the future: doing so identifies the correctional worker the student wishes to become in terms of the competencies and attitudes to be developed. By means of this presentation, students specify the field they want to work in and take a stance on the values attached to the type of intervention they can expect to defend.

In the second part, the student answers questions that require reflection. Taking place outside the classroom and carried out in a more personal mode, this part of the activity consists of asking students to reflect in greater depth on the stages that will be necessary to overcome obstacles and fulfill their plans. For this reason, students benefit from a few days in which to step back and deepen their thinking. The objective of this second part is to help each student set realistic goals and specify the stages of implementation they will have to set up in order to approach their "ideal".

A guidance-oriented activity serves as a guide for students struggling with indecision. Students who are clear about their choices are students who are more motivated, who persevere in the face of difficulty, and who succeed better.

The *Vers l'intervenant idéal* activity incites students to actively commit themselves to a career plan. By means of this activity, students reflect on their identity and the working world and, even though they are close to the end of their program of study, they can continue asking questions and making discoveries about their career choices.



PROVIDING GUIDANCE WHILE TEACHING IS...

... a relevant and useful form of practice

Why should we worry about career guidance in a CEGEP course? According to Guay (2006), only 48% of CEGEP students have well-defined academic and career plans. Among undecided students, one in four displays chronic indecision. The moment of embarking on CEGEP studies coincides with the period in their lives when students must make a great number of choices. According to specialists, they usually have not completed their process of vocational development (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2002). Faced with this critical situation, teachers surely have a role to play. Having gone through this experiment with students, I am now convinced that planning on guidance-oriented activities in my teaching has the potential to be relevant and useful. A guidance-oriented activity serves as a guide for students struggling with indecision. Students who are clear about their choices are students who are more motivated, who persevere in the face of difficulty, and who succeed better. The period of reflection offered by the guidance-oriented activity is relevant and useful because it allows students to take stock of what to expect, whether in the labour force or in the course of university studies. On this score, one female student observed:

At the end of high school, career guidance comes up a lot. Since the beginning of my career program, I'd never stopped to reflect on how I see my future.

The guidance-oriented activity described above serves as an opportunity to clarify career choices and have discussions with other people in order to determine on the path to follow and the means for arriving at one's "ideal". It is an exercise designed to contribute to forging the identity of a correctional worker and specifying a career plan.

... time well spent

We all know that the issue of the best way to invest the class time assigned to teaching and learning activities sits at the heart of teachers' concerns. The idea of devoting course time to guidance-related activities could prompt reservations on the part of teachers who find they already have a lot to do. After conducting the activity with two groups of students, I asked them if they had found it productive. One male student said:

Now I understand better just where I am.... It allowed me to take the time to identify the kind of correctional worker I want to become.

This teaching action, then, allowed the student to clarify his professional identity, which could certainly have an impact on his academic persistence and his commitment to his career plans. A guidance-oriented activity offers students a moment in which to firm up one choice or explore another. As a female student said:

This activity came at the right time.... I needed to clarify what interests me for the future.... Will I continue on to university? Or will I look for a job?

That comment and those that precede it confirm that the time invested in the guidance-oriented activity is well spent, because the activity meets a student need. *Vers l'intervenant idéal*, like other similar activities, is a means of supporting future graduates in their career-choice process and of developing their feelings of decision-making competency.

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Situated at a stage when competencies are in process of integration, and occurring at the onset of that decisive point represented by the end of a program of study, the activity aims to elicit students' reflections and bring students to clarify their occupational choices, mobilize their energies relative to their plans, and become more familiar with the working world. In short, guidance-oriented activities like *Vers l'intervenant idéal* can contribute to graduating competent students, competent not just technically, but also professionally, because they will be ready to face the reality of work.

... easier than may be thought

Some teachers assume that taking class time to be concerned with guidance requires too much preparation; they state that they simply do not have enough time to address this concern, which is peripheral to the skills teachers must develop in students. And yet guidance can be very effectively wedded to teaching. Teachers exert an influence on students' career choices in several ways. Teachers serve as models through many of the actions they perform: when they present their own professional careers and name what guided them in their choice of this discipline; when they use themselves as examples in discussing the workplace; when they speak about their plans and the steps they mean to take to fulfill them. If a teacher's approach offers students opportunities for self-questioning and reflection about themselves and the working world or about their degree of commitment, that



teacher, whether working in a career program or the pre-university sector, contributes to the guidance of the students in her or his classroom. How many teachers discuss with their students the usefulness of their discipline as part of the exercise of countless professions and cite examples of the way the discipline is applied in various workplace roles, never suspecting that this practice has an effect on guidance?

It is important to grasp that guidance-oriented teaching enhances the quality of educational support without taking anything away from disciplinary competence.

Carrying out a guidance-oriented activity can be as simple as organizing course content around an activity that simultaneously aims at one of the targets of the guidance-oriented approach for example, one of the targets chosen at Collège de Maisonneuve, as presented above. It is important to grasp that guidance-oriented teaching enhances the quality of educational support without taking anything away from disciplinary competence.

IS THE CEGEP LEVEL GUIDANCE ORIENTED?

The experiment in guidance-oriented teaching that I carried out with CEGEP students reveals that activities of this kind can be relevant and useful while contributing to academic success. True, the expression “guidance-oriented” is more often associated with elementary and high schools. But having conducted this trial, I find it just as essential to support college students in their process of career choice. CEGEPs organize activities related to their mission to provide career guidance, including open houses, talks, practicums, workplace visits, and many other opportunities for discussion with people who practice targeted trades and professions. As Falardeau says, (2009, p. 19), the concern with guidance has existed since CEGEPs were created. As he points out, however, to turn the CEGEP setting into one that provides career guidance, it is necessary to aim for elements of comprehensiveness, collaboration, training, and awareness-raising about the fact that everyone involved has a role to play in giving students guidance (*ibid.*). Offering students an academic and career information service and enabling them to consult a guidance counsellor is indispensable. But as teachers, we too have a responsibility on this score. We must be partners with professional school guidance counsellors and work in a way complementary to theirs. To this end, it is necessary to better equip and support teachers, train them in guidance-oriented teaching, and place at their disposal teaching materials that they will be easily able to adapt to the reality of their courses.

THE ABCS OF THE GUIDANCE-ORIENTED APPROACH AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

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The guidance-oriented approach (GOA) was first implemented in Quebec’s elementary and high schools about ten years ago. The approach has been developing in diverse ways according to school, depending on each institution’s management and educational plans.

The GOA consists of a set of measures, activities, and projects that offer young people, inevitably in process of evolution, contexts that acquaint them with **their identity** and provide **indications of the future** as regards their academic and professional success (Pelletier, 2004, p. 4). By means of classroom and out-of-class projects, teachers in all disciplines and guidance professionals support students through their process of reflection on their identities, help them discover the possibilities of the academic world and the working world, and lead them to reflect on their academic and career choices.

Vocationally speaking, the transition to CEGEP is as much a determining factor for students who enrol in the career sector as for those who go into pre-university programs. Every teacher plays a role in the strengthening of students’ career choices and does so at different moments and levels of action. Despite the extent of vocational indecision among CEGEP students (one in three changes programs), the guidance-oriented approach is less developed at the CEGEP level than in elementary and high schools. And, as is the case at those two earlier levels of education, the practice of guidance-oriented teaching varies enormously from one CEGEP to the other. Currently, it exists as the product of the initiative of some guidance counsellors and teachers who are especially affected by students’ indecision.

It is above all through courses such as “Analysis of the Profession,” during workplace-based fieldwork, or as follow-up to visits by speakers that teachers have set up guidance-oriented activities in order to help clarify their vocational choices. All teachers, whether working in general or specific education, are capable of altering their teaching approach in order to make it more guidance-oriented. The more teachers integrate GOA into their teaching practice, the more CEGEP students will feel supported as they work to clarify their career choices. ◀



IT IS POSSIBLE TO TEACH AND PROVIDE GUIDANCE

Following this trial, I now view guidance for CEGEP students as consisting not simply of referring them to professionals who can provide career information. I've observed that, even when students are enrolled in a career program, it is still possible for them to have concerns about their futures. A guidance-oriented activity is revelatory for students, it's useful, it's time well spent, and it's easy to carry out. Teachers play an important role in guiding their students, even students reaching the end of their programs. Designing a guidance-oriented activity is not an insurmountable challenge. Rather than reinvent the wheel, why not use an existing idea for inspiration and adapt it to the program one teaches in; or why not identify what one is already doing in the form of guidance-oriented practice and enrich it? There is no reason to try to do everything in one single activity or one single course. Working with one's program team to attach specific guidance-oriented targets to certain courses can also serve as a solution for sharing the responsibility for a guidance-oriented approach among teachers, and for owning the responsibility collectively. ●

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