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A Successful Entry into the College Network

A program that redefines professional integration

Interview with Karina Lapointe,
pedagogical counsellor at the
Cégep de l'Outaouais

Interview by Catherine Doucet,
pedagogical counsellor at the
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"This is my first session as a teacher, I was hired three days ago and will have to teach two classes starting next week." "I don't understand why my students aren't interested when I only use my PowerPoint to teach." "My students are always questioning my grading of evaluations and I have a hard time explaining why." "When I allow students to work in teams, I always have to deal with conflicts, the volume of exchanges in class, everyone's involvement and the unpleasant attitudes of some." These are just a few examples of situations regularly reported by teachers new to college teaching.

Even more so than other teaching staff, new teachers experience significant challenges: high expectations from colleagues and administrators not only in terms of mastering the content to be taught but also in terms of using stimulating and differentiated teaching and assessment strategies (Bourgeois and Vasseur, 2012). They may face pedagogical, didactic, socio-emotional, and administrative challenges that all too often lead them to leave the teaching profession. What's more, new teachers do not systematically benefit from support from seasoned colleagues, who lack the availability or competence to provide mentoring. Support procedures, if available, are not always consistent across different teaching sectors (Desautels, 2013).

Given the challenges of professional integration (PI) in college teaching, this interview is an enriching encounter between two pedagogical counsellors (PCs) from the Cégep de l'Outaouais' Service de recherche et de développement pédagogique (SRDP). Catherine Doucet, a new PC and interviewer, and Karina Lapointe, a more experienced PC and interviewee, present a comprehensive and functional PI program that could prove a source of inspiration for the entire network.

As soon as I knew I'd be taking part in the PI for new CEGEP teachers, I read the *Politique d'insertion professionnelle du nouveau personnel enseignant* [New Teacher Integration Policy, Ed.] and the *Programme d'insertion professionnelle* [Professional Integration Program, Ed.]. I realized that this integration takes place at several levels within the institution. Tell me, Karina, how does the PI of new teachers take this specificity into account?

PI is a challenging time for new college teachers. They are experts in their discipline, but generally have no pedagogical training, unlike elementary and high school teachers who have undergone initial teacher training (Galaise, 2009; Venne, 2020). In many cases, they rely on their personal learning experiences, which are mainly based on the paradigm of teaching as teacher-centered rather than student-centered (St-Germain, 2008; Venne, 2020).

To welcome new teaching staff at the institutional and departmental levels, and with their immediate superiors, a policy was adopted by the CEGEP's human resources service in 2013. Then, in 2015, the *Programme d'insertion professionnelle du nouveau personnel enseignant* was added by the Direction des études and the Service de recherche et de développement pédagogique (SRDP), composed of the college's PCs. Finally, the CEGEP's departments were invited to design a PI program adapted to their reality to facilitate the integration of new staff and quickly break their isolation.

Can you explain how the PI program is deployed within the SRDP?

From their first teaching session, all new teachers, whether full-time or part-time, are released from their Friday morning schedule to attend five mandatory three-hour workshops. These can be taken in any order over a two-year period and are usually offered during the first two months of each session. The CEGEP’s human resources service contacts me each time new teachers are hired so that I can add them to a tracking spreadsheet and invite them to the workshops offered.

New college teachers who can provide a transcript certifying that at least one course in classroom management has been successfully completed can be exempted from the work-

shop that covers classroom management. The aim of these workshops is to make new teachers aware of the CEGEP’s policies and help them adopt them, as well as to introduce them to pedagogical strategies based on the learning paradigm. Then they may deepen their pedagogical training through specialized programs such as those offered by Performa. The workshops are accompanied by a course on the Moodle platform, which provides access to all the reference documents.

Table 1 Summary of PI workshop content at the Cégep de l’Outaouais

Workshop titles – In any order	Topics covered
<i>A good start</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to teaching a first session at Cégep de l’Outaouais • College teaching context • Institutional guides for writing general course outlines and course outlines, lesson plan templates • Importance of the first class and the pedagogical relationship with students
<i>Classroom management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities of teaching staff and the student community • Teaching and learning strategies (the pros and cons of certain classroom management strategies) • Dimensions of classroom management
<i>Learning assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional Policy on the Evaluation of Student Achievement (IPESA) • Importance and types of feedback • Evaluation grids
<i>Professional competencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cégep de l’Outaouais professional competency profile • Personal reflections in a practice notebook
<i>Characteristics of the student population</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obligations of the Cégep de l’Outaouais • Main concepts of student inclusion • Recognizing the characteristics of college students

How do these workshops help new teachers feel more competent in the college teaching environment?

All workshops are designed to introduce new teachers to different pedagogical methods and to inspire them in their choice of personal pedagogical strategies. In addition, these training activities reduce isolation and are an opportunity to share experiences with other teachers who have recently been hired at the CEGEP.

When new teachers complete all five workshops, they receive a letter of congratulations from the SRDP. The academic dean and the department coordinator are then informed of the teacher's important commitment to their professional development. What's more, to encourage further professional development, Performa gives teachers who complete their workshops credit toward the Micro-programme en insertion professionnelle en enseignement au collégial [Microprogram in Professional Integration in College Teaching, Ed.] (MIPEC) when they complete the required reflective assignment.

Did this credit for the MIPEC have an impact on Performa enrollment?

Yes it did. In fact, last Winter, our MIPEC local cohort included a dozen teachers for the face-to-face introductory course of the program. We had not had such a large group in a local cohort in several years. This made the integration of the teachers much easier. The instructor was on site, which allowed for an enriching and concrete exchange for the development of their professional practice.

Can you name any positive impacts experienced by new teachers since the introduction of the mandatory workshops?

From the very first sessions, contact is established between new teachers and the PCs offering the workshops. Participants appreciate the exchange of ideas, the problem-solving approaches and the case studies integrated into all the workshops, which enable them to develop their pedagogical knowledge and concrete strategies, which may reduce their stress. For example, teachers can take away suggestions for challenging classroom management situations that they can implement as early as their next

class. The discussion of various prescribed tools, such as the *Institutional Policy on the Evaluation of Student Achievement* (IPESA), helps new teachers to better understand the college teaching environment and the policies that govern it, and then to enrich their pedagogical alignment.

I'm well aware of the benefits of the program for new teachers, but there must be some difficulties as well. What have been the challenges of the institutional PI program since its inception?

The Academic Dean releases new teachers, but sometimes this is not possible. In these cases, we have to find ways to offer the workshops at other times. This situation is not ideal because the workshops are designed to ensure that new teaching staff start out with the basics of college teaching adapted to the Cégep de l'Outaouais. We've already had one teacher comment that he would have liked to have received tips on classroom management and to have been able to familiarize himself with the IPESA as soon as he was hired. For one of the programs, we also had to adjust our workshops so that the new teachers could take them during the general two-hour break, a gap in the schedule during which the teaching staff are available. This compromise allowed new teachers to attend the workshops, but with limited time for sharing.

Moreover, because the workshops last three hours, we need to cover a wide range of concepts. New teachers, for example, would like to have the opportunity to create their own evaluation grid with the help of the PCs, and to discuss the case studies presented in more depth, in order to develop their professional judgment as they make the IPESA their own. Currently, teachers have to schedule other times to work individually on their evaluation grids, consult with colleagues or even meet with their PC to fine-tune them, due to time constraints.

Feedback at the end of each workshop was positive, but there was a desire from teachers for the workshops to be more hands-on. They would like to be able to reinvest all of the proposed activities in their classrooms. Currently, we are diversifying the workshops: case studies, role-playing activities, discussion of articles on pedagogy, and so on. But it's true that in the time allotted, some of them can be skipped. In short, we could think of activities that would allow teachers to familiarize themselves with pedagogical concepts as well as to create pedagogical materials. For example, planning the first class (*A Good Start* workshop) or planning a lesson taking into account the characteristics of the student population (*Characteristics of the Student Population* workshop).

As you mentioned earlier, in addition to the policy implemented by the CEGEP's human resources service, and the PI program that includes mandatory workshops, departments are invited to develop a PI program adapted to their reality. Could you explain how this program represents continuity with the institutional arrangements already in place?

About one third, which represent around ten departments at the Cégep de l'Outaouais, have this type of program. It responds directly to the support needs of teachers, according to the characteristics of their respective departments. A PI program for a department with more than twenty teachers will not have the same content as a smaller department with five or fewer teachers. Moreover, some departments regularly welcome new teaching staff, while others rarely do. It is therefore important that each department considers the role of each member in supporting new teachers, the type of support that should be offered, and which stakeholders, such as the department's associate dean or PC, should be involved in the PI process.

Moreover, some departmental PI programs include a mentoring program that provides personalized support between more experienced teachers and new ones. Each department determines the selection criteria for mentors, their responsibilities with respect to the new teachers being mentored, and then the schedule of steps to be offered. Ideally, it includes observation sessions with a PC and with students, as well as meetings with all parties involved (mentee, mentor and PC), so as to establish an action plan spread over several sessions.

Karina, what would you say to departments that are hesitant to set up a PI program?

Great question! Actually, I would tell them that it's essential to have a PI program that fits directly into the reality of the department and meets the needs of all the teachers who are part of it. For example, in nursing, a teacher who is hired to supervise internships needs different support than a teacher who offers a regular course.

Moreover, as a PC, I had the opportunity to observe and, of course, support several new teachers during their first years of teaching within the PI programs of certain departments. I worked with experienced teachers who acted as mentors. Many of the new teachers commented on how much they appreciated the support, constructive feedback and personalized guidance they received as they developed their teaching skills.

The design and reflection involved in creating a PI program requires the involvement of a department. Some teachers may be mandated to develop the program with the help of the PC in charge. Some time is needed for all stakeholders to become familiar with the program before it is officially implemented. Adjustments can then be made as needed by the department.

In conclusion, what elements would you like to develop for the for the College's PI program in the coming years?

Obviously, our PI program will benefit from the addition of complementary tools in various forms and applications. For example, these tools could address: 1) topics inspired by authentic contexts, college policies and needs, and 2) universal themes in pedagogy. An online forum would also allow new teachers to interact and share best practices.

In addition, we will work with the French department to add two optional workshops to our PI program. The first workshop will train teachers to correct the French language in their students' evaluations. They will have access to a booklet of correction codes to guide them, and they will do hands-on exercises while being guided by French teachers. The second workshop will be aimed exclusively at teachers who had difficulties with the French tests when they were hired. The aim will be to provide them with support tailored to their needs in order to help them develop a better command of the language.

In the future, it would also be a good idea to offer an in-depth workshop on how to create evaluation grids, as this is a common need among new teachers. A workshop on active pedagogy could also inspire them in planning and managing their teaching activities. In addition, training on artificial intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT, which are increasingly present in the teaching world, would be extremely relevant.

What's certain is that by keeping abreast of the changing needs of the college network and taking into account the needs of new teachers, we can facilitate and enrich their integration into the teaching profession. This is the challenge that the Cégep de l'Outaouais has taken on with its PI program. —

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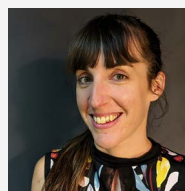
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