For the Love of Learning

Volume II: Learning - Our Vision for Schools

Chapter 10: Supports for Learning: Special Needs and Special Opportunities

Throughout this report, we make the case for a learning system that is rigorous and focused, that communicates a sense of purpose and challenge to students and, at the same time, acknowledges that many non-academic needs of young people must be met at school, because that is where young people are.

We also argue that the system must support students as individuals: it must be flexible and allow for different rates of learning as well as learners' different strengths and needs. Care and concern for students must be one of the essential elements of that system. Care and concern for individuals are manifested when one person is responsible for monitoring the student's progress; when smaller teaching and learning units are created; when career education and counselling are treated seriously.

A system built on academic rigour, flexibility, and continuous student-teacher contact will meet the needs of most students and successfully start their transition to adulthood - as learners, workers, citizens, and parents. Others - students with disabilities, with somewhat severe emotional problems, or those from homes in which neither French nor English is spoken - will need more. So will students whose pace of learning in some or all areas is outside the usual range, either because it is exceptionally slow or exceptionally rapid.

We have already suggested that people other than teachers may be able to help all kinds of students - not just those who require special support - leaving teachers free to focus on curriculum. We include as examples in this category outside experts in safe school programs, and conflict- management training.

In addition to benefiting from these school-wide programs, there are students who require counselling individually or in small groups, whether only for a short time or more intensively and for the longer term. In either case, there must be an adult, from outside the classroom, who will help when help is needed, whether that adult is seen regularly or only occasionally.

The point is that schools have students of all types. In this chapter, we consider the issues related to needs beyond those that can and should be met by well-prepared, thoughtful teachers. We also look at additional supports for learning, language facility, and for children with special physical and emotional needs.

We will discuss below four kinds of special situations: those to do with language/culture background; those that derive from a disability, either physical or cognitive; the needs of students who learn at a substantially different pace from most; and those that are related to emotional problems.

Supports for some students

Support for students with different language backgrounds and different learning needs based on language

Many submissions we received spoke of the importance for students of learning languages, and of becoming fluent in one of Canada's official languages. Learning a language and learning through language - the issue of literacy and literacies in English/Francais - is basic to the entire discussion of curriculum: nothing is more essential to success in learning than having a high level of competence in the language of instruction. Students who enter school speaking neither of the official languages will likely need special help. We will discuss the need for programs to support these students: English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Skills Development (ESD) in English-language schools, and their French equivalents, Actualisation linguistique en francais (ALF) and Perfectionnement du francais (PDF). ALF and PDF are just beginning to be implemented in French-language school units to support both Section 23 (Charter rights) and francophone immigrant students. A related issue, the use of the student's first language as a language of instruction, is discussed as an alternative way to support students who have little or no knowledge of the language of instruction in English-language schools.

The need to ensure that all students have access to the second official language, French or English, also underpins the common core curriculum. Competency is enormously important both practically (it broadens careers and job opportunities) and symbolically, because it adds to our sense of Canadian uniqueness. We have already recommended that multilingualism be supported throughout the common core curriculum and that in the specialization years, students maintain international languages, acquire additional languages, and increase their linguistic fluency.

Acquisition of an official language by non-native speakers of English or French

Both the French- and English-language school systems focus on the development of literacies in the curriculum. However, there are key differences between them: in addition to the different social/societal context that influences first- and second-language programs offered in French-language schools, the needs of students requiring second-language support are different in the two systems.

In French-language schools, some ALF/PDF students are immigrants, but more are likely to be children of Franco-Ontarian descent. These are youngsters whose parents, under Section 23 of the Charter, hold rights to have their children educated in French, but who may not have French as the language of the home.

In English-language schools, by contrast, the overwhelming majority of ESL/ESD students are immigrants, with a small number being native-born Canadians whose families generally do not speak English at home. (The latter group will benefit very considerably from enrolment in the ECE program described in Chapter 7.)

While it is often said that Canada is a land of immigrants, it is also true that Ontario welcomes more immigrants than any other province, and that Metro Toronto attracts more of those immigrants than any other city in Canada. (See Chapter 2 for a more detailed demographic description.)

School systems must educate those students and help most of them to learn at least one official language; as well, these youth must continue to be, or in some cases re-establish themselves as, learners, at the

same time as they respond to all the other challenges of leaving one society and culture for another.

All this is happening at a time when the increasing number of immigrants who speak French, or who choose French as their official language, are making Ontario - Metro Toronto and Ottawa, in particular - their destination. The new influx requires a new response on the part of Ontario's French-language schools.

The task, then, is to improve and enrich spoken French while furthering the acquisition of the usual basic skills. This calls for special pedagogical strategies. In this context, in addition to the core curriculum, which sets out the desired outcomes of learning the language of instruction, we support the vision for Franco-Ontarian education presented in the documents prepared by the Ministry of Education and Training. One of the three documents published consists of ALF/PDF curriculum guidelines. The ALF curriculum will enable students having limited or no fluency in French to acquire basic competence in French and to follow the academic program with success. Certain students, owing to their academic background, need the PDF program, because they either have had no schooling or must adapt to their new cultural setting.

ALF/PDF clientele consists mainly of Charter rights holders who have undergone a process of assimilation, and immigrant students. These students are evolving, for the most part, in a social environment where the act of setting foot in a school often means entering a new linguistic and cultural universe. The messages conveyed at school may appear to conflict with those they receive in the home and create in the students a certain ambivalence about their language, their culture, even their personal and social identity.

Many people told the Commission that the present structure of support for acquiring one of the official languages does not do the job. Many francophone parents said they support ALF/PDF programs because those help the French-language school face the difficult challenge of recapturing the linguistic heritage of some students, while enabling those who are already competent in French to accelerate their learning. In this context, the Early Childhood Education Program we are recommending would give children a significant head start in French language as well as learning skills to Franco-Ontarian children.

Available research indicates that while immigrant students may achieve oral fluency in two years, it may take from five to seven years to reach the full social and academic competence necessary for success in secondary school and post-secondary education.(1)

Do students get full support for that period? Do they require such support, or does it inevitably take time and practice to achieve written fluency? Or, as some immigrants argue, is the period of five to seven years unrealistically long?

There is no research to indicate how long it may take francophone students to learn both social and academic language when something other than French is the language of the majority. However, there is clear-cut research on the need for institutional support for French if it is to survive in a dominantly English world. And it explains why franco-phone presenters at the hearings emphasized the need for institutional support for French-language education from "the cradle to the grave."

Many anglophone parents are concerned that there have been serious cuts to the ESL/ESD programs offered by many English-language boards, and that some current ESL/ESD programs are not effective.

The Commission is concerned about the decision of some boards to make substantial ESL/ESD cuts,

while other programs - some mandatory (e.g., classes for gifted children) or some optional (e.g., French immersion) - are spared the cuts. Without adequate support, the majority of immigrant children, particularly those in their late childhood or early adolescence, may be condemned to lower educational attainment and career success.

This is not to suggest that there is or should be only one model of ESL/ESD. At present, the delivery of ESL/ESD is based largely on withdrawing the student for some part, or even all, of the school day; the student is given instruction in English while her/his classmates are learning other subjects.

Generally, the ESL/ESD teacher does not speak the language(s) of the immigrant student(s), and the class itself is usually multilingual; students may not understand each other.

Occasionally, schools will try a different structure: the ESL/ESD teacher works with the regular teacher in the regular class to give support to the immigrant student. Research does not clearly favour one delivery model over the other, although it does suggest that withdrawal from the regular class is valuable to many students as a reception program, orienting and "cushioning" them at a time when many feel bewildered and vulnerable. However, that advantage may be counterbalanced by the likelihood that students are missing much of the regular curriculum. As far as promoting first-language acquisition, however, it offers no clear advantage (or disadvantage).

A new and, we believe, very exciting model is being developed in Toronto. We visited Alexander Muir/Gladstone Avenue Public School, where all members of the staff have developed knowledge of second-language acquisition through an ESL course. Rather than seeing the students' lack of English-language skills as a deficit, teachers emphasize adding English to the languages that students bring with them to school.

Immigrant students(2) are provided with some curriculum content (such as science or history) in their first language within the regular classroom, using the assistance of "language tutors." Some of the tutors are paid (e.g., the school's heritage-language instructors and ESL teachers) and some are volunteers. The practice is supported by research that indicates that heritage-language instructors can effectively support students in curricular areas.(3) Therefore, through the transitional use of their language, students learn their science and history along with their peers, maintaining and developing their literacy in their first language and acquiring English, which will gradually replace their heritage language for all of their instruction.

Whatever the model, it is clear to us that French-language and English-language schools with significant immigrant populations (and, in the case of French-language schools, Charter rights holders with little or no fluency in French) have a challenging task requiring resources. In our opinion, it means that ESL/ALF programs, in whatever form, must become mandatory: the staffing formula used to decide the number of ESL/ALF teachers each school and school board should have must be protected, and teachers should be used in a way that helps students who need language-based support.

While we do not make a detailed recommendation on what the staffing formula should include, we note again that available research shows that while oral fluency can be achieved in just two years, and while some immigrants acquire written fluency fairly rapidly, it may take much longer for many students to acquire the level of second-language skills needed in post-secondary education. On the other hand, some immigrants acquire written fluency in significantly less time.

But the object of ESL/ESD and ALF/PDF is not to produce native-level ability. It is to bring students to the point at which, like others in the class, they are able to learn listening to the teacher, asking and answering questions, reading from the board or the assigned book, and so on. The difference in the length of time it takes to reach this level may have to do with a number of factors, including school experience in the country of origin, and the specific original language and its relation to English or French.

This suggests to us that the formula should perhaps provide for more intensive support in the first six months to one year after arrival in Canada and, after that, the student would slowly be integrated into regular classrooms for all or most of the day, with the possibility of continuing ESL support being delivered in the regular classroom.

Recommendation 32

*Therefore, the Commission recommends that the Ministry make it mandatory for English-language schools to provide ESL/ESD, and French-language school units to provide ALF/ PDF, to ensure that immigrant students with limited or no fluency in English or French, and Charter rights holders with limited or no fluency in French, receive the support they require, using locally chosen models of delivery. In its block-funding grants, the Ministry should include the budgetary supplements required to allow the schools to offer these programs wherever the community identifies a need for them.

The program at Alexander Muir/Gladstone raises the issue of the transitional use of other languages as languages of instruction. A goal of all programs designed to give immigrant students facility in English as the language of instruction must be to add English to the student's language repertory. In so doing, the school is helping the learner to continue the conceptual development already begun in the first language, and to build linguistic and conceptual skills in English.

In a society such as Ontario's, where an official language minority has a separate school system to support and promote that language, the parallel situation does not hold. Charter rights students who have English as a language of use do not need it emphasized in their early years in a French-language school, because English so dominates everyday life. If there is going to be serious erosion of the minority language (as is the case in Ontario for French), research indicates that students should receive a minimum of 80 percent of their instruction in that language, so that they develop threshold levels of competence.(4)

On the other hand, the Somali child who has just arrived in the French-language school may need some initial support in the principal language of the home, if it is not French. What is clear is that all students' languages must be valued so that they will feel accepted and be ready to learn.

It is crucial to value the first (non-English/non-French) language rather than giving the impression that it and, by extension, the student's native culture are unimportant or disposable. Support for "heritage" (international) languages helps all students develop a stronger identity and appreciate the validity of all cultures and languages.

Greater flexibility in the languages that may be used for instruction would support the intent of the anti-racist and ethno-cultural equity policy announced in 1993 by the Minister. One of the policy's core elements is to "affirm and value the students' first language."(5) The policy announcement goes on:

> *Competence in the first language provides students with the foundation for developing proficiency in additional languages, and maintenance of the first language supports the acquisition of other languages.*

In other words, students who are given support in their first language are more likely to learn English/French well if their first language is strong, rather than if it is weakened or abandoned. This is why in Australia, the State of Victoria provides for second-language students to "consolidate their knowledge and understanding of the mother tongue ... and use this language in a range of situations, including in the school community."(6)

Other research provides evidence that when students are given support in their first language, they are more likely to learn both the first and the second official languages, compared with English-only students and to non-official- language students who had not achieved or maintained literacy in their heritage language.(7)

The Toronto Board of Education reviewed research in this area and it, too, found that students given support in their first language are likely to do better learning English, that literacy in English or French (or both) is likely to be enhanced through the support of other languages.(8)

Some researchers caution that bilingual programs may be only marginally successful in increasing achievement unless teachers, not just teaching assistants, are genuinely bilingual. As well, gains are likely to be quite limited if teachers do not use effective pedagogical strategies, if programs are reorganized too frequently, if teacher turnover is very high, or if students are moved out of the bilingual/transition program too early.(9)

Providing more flexibility in using other languages to support the teaching of content, such as science, history, and geography, offers schools greater choice in how to support students who arrive at school not able to speak English/French. While the present Education Act provides flexibility in terms of using other languages transitionally, there is a potential for greater success in learning English/French if schools are encouraged to provide bilingual/multilingual reception centres and bilingual programs. (When we speak of "bilingual," we mean programs and centres in which languages other than English/French are used.) We believe this flexibility is important and should be utilized more often.

We acknowledge that if they are to provide more flexibility, teachers, school boards, and parents must be involved at the local level in designing programs. This is particularly true in the French-language schools, where students already face the challenge of learning French in an English environment.

Researchers told us that French-language schools require a very strong in-school French ambience if students are to learn French successfully. A crucial difference between the English- and French-language schools is that a student in the former is immersed in an English-language environment outside school, while the student in a French-language school is much less likely to be immersed in French outside school. Therefore, we recognize that French-language schools and the communities they serve will have to develop some models of language instruction that are specific to their needs while still valuing the heritage language the student brings to the school. What is crucial is that French-language schools maintain a supportive environment for the transitional languages while, at the same time, enabling students to learn in French.

We are impressed by the research into the ability of students to learn both official languages when their mother tongue is recognized and supported. And we believe that Alexander Muir/Gladstone offers a strong model, one that merits further study.

Given the linguistic diversity in Ontario, and the province's tight financial resources, it may seem difficult to imagine extending and strengthening the Alexander Muir/Gladstone model. But strong commitment at the school and community levels tends to mitigate financial constraints. Embracing this model and giving it life will require strong community support by volunteers willing to assist in the classroom, and in locating or developing materials. It is the kind of program that can be supported in significant measure by people in the community who speak the languages of the students. It can also be used by secondary students as a community service option, in keeping with our recommendations in that area.

We encourage schools to use other languages of instruction for transitional purposes, and urge that the Ministry continue to provide for and encourage greater flexibility in the use of other languages of instruction, in order to meet the transitional needs of immigrant and other students, and that it actively encourage and support more school boards, where appropriate, to do the same.

Additional languages of instruction (bilingual and immersion programs) for English-language schools

Another way to help students develop high-level skills in a language is to use it for other purposes. In Ontario, we have the model of French immersion and extended French, in which students in English-language schools are taught all, most, or some of their subjects in French instead of being educated in English all day. This is permitted because, like English, French is an official language of instruction. Under existing provincial legislation, parallel programs in other languages - German, for example, or Russian - are not permitted.

A number of English-language submissions suggested that other languages be permitted for use in instruction. For example, the Chinese Lingual-Cultural Centre of Canada said, in a written brief, "The time has come to amend the Education Act to replace the stipulation that only English or French can be used as languages of instruction." Similarly, a coalition of three Spanish community organizations recommended to the Commission:

> *That the Education Act be amended to allow the use of the Spanish language as a vehicle of instruction. The use of Spanish as a language of instruction would ... enhance the opportunities of Spanish-speaking students to develop fluency in an important international language.*

The Heritage Language Advisory Work Group also recommended that "the Education Act be amended to permit the use of instructional languages other than English and French."(10) As the Work Group said, "Permitting school boards flexibility in program implementation represents an investment in Ontario's linguistic resources." Such programs already exist in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

We do not recommend a change in Ontario's legislation with respect to languages of instruction at this time. We strongly support the use of other languages as a transitional strategy, which is already permitted, and we have already suggested that more flexibility be applied in this regard, to encourage and enhance more transitional language programs. We also support a learning system that places more value on languages as subjects, and we hope that many more students will learn third (and fourth) languages, and take courses in them at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Our discussion and recommendations in Chapters 8 and 9 support that development.

But we are very concerned that all students in Ontario be truly literate in one of the official languages. In our view, the school system is obliged to help students function at a high level in English or French, and to gain a reasonable knowledge of the other official language. We appreciate the value of the existing, optional International- (formerly Heritage-) Language program, elementary, but we are not prepared to go well beyond that by suggesting that students be educated in an immersion or bilingual program in any one of a vast number of non-official languages.

The acquisition and use of sign languages by deaf students

The Commission heard from a number of parents and others concerned about the language of instruction for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and the role of ASL or LSQ in their education.

There has been extensive work in this area over the last few years: in 1989 and 1990, three reports were issued, one dealing with deaf students in anglophone schools, one on students in francophone schools, and the third on deaf students taking post-secondary education.(11) A series of recommendations was made, including enhancing the use of sign language.

In our view, while a great deal has been accomplished in research and policy review, implementation remains the issue. In 1993, the Legislature approved the use of either ASL or LSQ as languages of instruction, a move we support.

We believe, however, that there is a need to give full effect to this decision. While it is now possible for deaf persons to obtain an Ontario Teacher's Certificate, this can occur only through training in ASL in an English-language faculty of education. There is an urgent need to develop a program in a French-language faculty to support the training of LSQ teachers, and the development of teaching materials for the francophone sector.

We also support recommendations that deal with providing all students with the option of studying sign language for credit or as a "heritage language" in school.

We believe that the direction already taken in support of ASL and LSQ is appropriate. Parents should have the option of having their deaf children educated using ASL or LSQ as a language of instruction; those who do not wish to do so should be able to continue to choose existing options.

We also recognize the considerable debate that has taken place on this issue, when the 1989-90 reports were released, and again in 1992-93, when the implementation reports were published.(12) Because we detect a growing consensus around the recommendations of those reports, which focus on providing realistic options, we urge the government to move forward in their direction.

Support for students with disabilities, and for slow and fast learners

Recent figures indicate that students with disabilities account for more than 6 percent of all Ontario's school-age children.

Disabled Students in Ontario: Numbers and Percentages ( )		
	Number of Pupils	**% of School Pop.**
Low Vision/Blind	910	.05

Orthopaedic	1,410	.07
Learning Disabled	72,790	3.70
Speech & Language	8,664	.50
Autism	2,081	.10
Hard of Hearing/Deaf	2,559	.13
Behaviour	9,311	.47
Multiple	4,362	.22
Educable Retarded	15,963	.80
Trainable Retarded	6,037	.30
Total Population Identified: 124,087 **Total School-Age Population: 1,982,994** *From Statistical Services Section, Policy Analysis and Research Branch, Ministry of Education for 1990-91. Figures include enrolments at the provincial schools.		

During the public hearings, we were often moved by the testimony of parents of children with disabilities. Their devotion to their children, and to others like them, is not only admirable but frequently extraordinary. When schools and the education system have supported the needs of their children, their gratitude and willingness to work hard and co-operatively with educators is limitless.

They were at pains to tell us both how well the system can work, and how vulnerable they and their children are when it does not. They pointed out, for example, that although Ontario's legislation on behalf of disabled students is a model for other provinces, its implementation sometimes falls far short of stated policy. In some areas, they told us, there is a lack of accountability that permits very uneven implementation by school boards - for example, in due process and special-needs funding.

We strongly support the position that policies are of limited value unless they are seriously monitored and accounted for at the local and central levels. While we can and do take pride in the degree to which Ontario is on record as caring about, and dedicating resources to, the education of students with special needs, we certainly support the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario in its request

> *that there be adequate accountability measures introduced and implemented to ensure that the educational system of Ontario, while delivering an excellent level of education to all, remains focused on children and their needs.*

Physical disabilities

The public education system recognizes that it has a responsibility to provide education for all school-aged persons (until age 21), regardless of level of ability or of disabling conditions. In recent years, legislation and practice have moved away from separating or segregating students with disabilities or different abilities to integrating or "mainstreaming" them in regular schools and classrooms.

The major issue raised in hearings and briefs around the education of the differently abled was integration. It is generally supported, but particular concerns are raised by various members of the public. Parents who favour integration told us that some integrated programs lack some of the extra supports that were promised or are necessary; and others, who favour centralized or residential programs for some types of students, feel that the number of such programs, or the distance between delivery sites, is

inadequate, given the need.

In some cases, parents and advocates for students with disabilities are concerned that integration may not be the best solution. For example, within the deaf community, some parents and teachers believe that the best educational facilities and opportunities are found in the residential schools, while the majority of families choose to have their children educated in the regular schools.

The government has acknowledged that both kinds of education are appropriate, and has continued to support them; it plans to provide a residential facility in the northern part of the province. The Ministry of Education and Training has responded positively to the committees that advised it about education of the deaf anglophone students; it must respond as well to the needs of the young deaf francophones, including the request for a residential facility in the north, for teacher preparation, and the availability of texts and materials.

The Commission supports the policy of making both segregated and integrated facilities available where demand for both exists, and where there is reason to believe that both provide good learning environments. We recognize, however, that the cost of education in residential facilities is much greater, and suggest that before the increased expense can be justified, the particular advantages of a residential program must be clear to educators as well as to parents.

In most cases, parents of children with disabilities opt for integrated settings because they are eager to make sure that their children will enjoy a normal childhood, and attendance at the local neighbourhood school is part of that normal childhood. But integration and mainstreaming have costs: specialized knowledge and technology are lost and are not, and cannot, realistically be available in every teacher, in every neighbourhood school, in every classroom.

Moreover, mainstreaming means that children with particular learning differences or disabilities will not have the company of peers with whom communication may be easiest and most natural to them. This is probably truest for deaf children: in an integrated classroom, there are not likely to be other students with whom they can sign; and even where there are either human or technical supports for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, there are likely to be fewer of them. Similarly, blind children educated in integrated settings may have access to fewer books and materials in Braille than are available in classrooms or schools designed for the education of the blind.

While some of these deficiencies in resources can be remedied through the use of itinerant specialists, distance education, information technology, and shared resources, it is unrealistic to expect that every neighbourhood school will be as well equipped and well staffed to meet special needs as are schools and classrooms dedicated to that task.

The public education system has an obligation to educate all educable children and youth, and it must be responsive to the parents and public who support it. But members of the public must also be aware of the varying advantages and possibilities, as well as the costs, of segregated or concentrated, compared with fully integrated, classes and schools. It is not realistic to expect that all the advantages of one kind of setting can be found in the other.

No one countenances the segregation of children in wheelchairs in special classes because some school buildings do not have wheelchair access. But making adjustments to entries, exits, and washrooms will still not enable youngsters with all types and degrees of disability to be accommodated in neighbourhood

schools.

Learning disabilities, learning disadvantages, and slow learners

We have already commented on how touched we were throughout our public hearings by the many heart-wrenching submissions we received from young people with disabilities, from their parents or teachers. Government has a responsibility and has made a commitment to provide adequate educational facilities for learners with disabilities, in special facilities or in integrated mainstream schools.

From what presenters told us, it is clear that this commitment is not yet being fully realized. It must be. Teachers in integrated classrooms cannot be expected to teach anyone, with or without disabilities, unless they have the necessary and proper support for doing so. Its absence undermines the original rationale for integration for all students.

While physical disabilities may come to mind first when special needs are being discussed, by far the greatest number of students classified as having special needs are "learning disabled." They account for 59 percent of all students diagnosed as disabled.

Although learning difficulties are traditionally labelled and defined in ways that parallel medical problems (diagnosis, prescription, and treatment), the fact is that the medical model does not work very well in this context.

For some time, educators have observed that the labels assigned to children with learning difficulties change over time and location, which suggests they lack clear definition. There are two phenomena in this regard that suggest caution:

- When schools are given large budgets earmarked for the learning disabled, the number of children who are identified this way expands to absorb the available budget;
- In experiments where all children of a particular age or grade have been given the "diagnostic" tests for learning disabilities, results indicate that a huge proportion would be so labelled, although most of the students involved exhibit no learning difficulties.(14)

Research has begun to show that prevention and intensive early intervention - when children are learning about reading and are learning to read - may prevent a large proportion of so-called learning disabilities, many of which are not really distinguishable from the general early academic deficits that are more characteristic of boys than of girls, and of more children from disadvantaged than advantaged neighbourhoods.

The overlap between "learning disability" and the learning disadvantage associated with poverty is very great, and the distinction between special education and what is sometimes called compensatory education is so unclear as to frequently make the differing "diagnoses" of dubious value.(15) For that matter, there is no indication that these different labels identify difficulties that require different, rather than the same, treatment.(16)

It is increasingly clear that children who have difficulty learning to read, for whatever reason, are likely to fall behind and remain behind throughout their schooling, to repeat a grade, and to drop out before completing secondary school. The evidence that many - not all - of these failures can be avoided with better early literacy education is a sound reason for hope.

This issue causes great personal anxiety to many Ontario citizens, and it is important to be as clear as possible: the unhappy fact is that some children have difficulties in learning that will not be solved either by prevention through good early education or by early and intensive intervention.

At the same time, there is reason to think that a large proportion of those now labelled learning disabled - perhaps as many as half - could avoid the stigma (and expense) of carrying that label and, most important, could learn to read at the same pace and with the same success as their peers.

What they may require is the advantage of early education and excellent instruction in language skills in the primary classroom, supplemented where necessary by intensive, individual tutoring by a skilled teacher during the primary grades. A renewed focus on excellent pre-service and continuing teacher education in the pedagogy of literacy for primary teachers, plus the literacy guarantee we described earlier (any child who showed signs of difficulty in reading by the end of Grade 1 or early Grade 2 would receive intensive individual assistance for weeks or months), is the best strategy for preventing many apparent "learning disabilities."

It would seem that many children are suffering not from learning disabilities but from what we might term "instructional deficit disorder," were we to embroider on the elaborate medical terminology typical of special education, which too often assigns cause with no effect.

Recommendation 33

*We recommend that no child who shows difficulty or who lags behind peers in learning to read be labelled "learning disabled" unless and until he or she has received intensive individual assistance in learning to read that has not resulted in improved academic performance.

We are thinking not only of children in the primary grades, but also of those who enter Ontario schools later, with a history of irregular school attendance, or with little facility in English or French.

In recent years, as the term "learning disabled" has become more popular, the number of children to whom the term is applied has increased, while the number described as "slow learners" has decreased - especially in middle- and upper-income neighbourhood schools. We are not the first to observe that this can hardly be a coincidence - that diagnosis may be more tied to fashion and to socio-economic perceptions and assumptions than to reality.

As with all other human behaviour, there are variations in learning rates. While some children labelled as learning disabled may have an early academic disadvantage (which, if addressed appropriately, will not become a lasting problem), others may be slower-than-average learners.

Some people learn some or most things faster or more slowly than do other people. School emphasizes certain kinds of learning, and rewards certain kinds of intelligence. Children who continue to have difficulty learning from print, or who continue to need to move systematically from the concrete to the abstract, or who need more or different examples or experiences to understand or internalize a concept may need not just a greater variety of teaching and learning modes, but more time to master the same curriculum.

Providing more variety pedagogically and more flexibility in learning time is probably simpler - and it is certainly more cost-effective and more easily justified - than going through a lengthy process that ends in a label ("slow learner" or "learning disabled") that may be stigmatizing and that is in itself no guarantee

of receiving effective help.

While we are aware that by the time they reach 21 years of age, some mentally handicapped young adults will not be able to achieve mastery of the common or specialized curricula, we are not recommending, as some parents have suggested, that free public schooling be extended past that age. *We are genuinely concerned - and we trust that the appropriate branches of government share our concern - that support for these young adults and their families is apparently inadequate: such support as day-centre programs; recreational, occupational, and life-skills programs; and other essentials for community living.* We view this as a social issue, and feel strongly that it must be addressed; but the solution is not in the schools.

Throughout this document we speak of the need for flexibility. Students must have help when they need it, not later. This requires flexibility in both the student's schedule and the curriculum. A student failing a grade often does so because difficulties were allowed to accumulate during the year, and were not addressed immediately, even when a lack of progress had been evident early in the school year.

For many students who can learn at an average pace but have fallen behind, the best approach to a gap in learning is to treat it as a temporary problem that is addressed by fast-paced, "accelerated" instruction, based on the student's understanding that it is possible to catch up with classmates, provided that he or she is willing to work hard with targeted support for a limited time.

The most promising interventions for such students involve work in class, after class, before class, and during the summer, all of which expand the amount of instructional and learning time available. The model, to draw on industrial terminology, is a "just-in-time" strategy. While, through constant monitoring, skilful teachers can identify students who are having difficulty with a new idea or skill, and may be able to modify their teaching to accommodate the student, some students will need the additional temporary "catch-up" work we have described.

Some researchers suggest that no form of extra or compensatory education is as likely to be as successful as in-class instruction provided by classroom teachers who are well trained to teach in heterogeneous classrooms, supported where necessary by para-professionals, lay assistants, and consulting teachers. It is true, nonetheless, that some students will still need on-going, long-term assistance in order to continue to make reasonable progress, although they may never "catch up" to some of their classmates. Among the interventions that are most helpful is cross-age tutoring. A student who lags behind peers tutors a younger child and, in the process of "talking through" a solution to a problem, comes to understand how to ask herself questions as a way of learning new material and of monitoring her own comprehension.

Another useful arrangement is the multi-age classroom. When the range of development is broader, cross-age tutoring can occur within the classroom, and the teacher can do part-time homogeneous grouping for such fundamental skills as reading. As well, if the teacher has the same group of students for two or three years, it is easier to know when children are making regular progress, even if they are not at the same level as some of their peers.

What is usually not helpful either for students who have temporarily fallen behind or for slower learners is to take them away from class, so that instruction in one subject is missed while another subject is being reinforced. Exceptions exist, especially when the withdrawal program is brief, intensive, and focuses on accelerated instruction; but they are truly rare, in terms of both content and effect, and are not typical of withdrawal programs.

Generally speaking, separating children who have difficulty with the curriculum into special or

withdrawal classes has not been effective in improving their level of achievement.(17) Of itself, the segregation tends to be stigmatizing and unproductive, in part because good peer role models are lacking. Most typically, the programs offered in the special classrooms have tended to be ineffective, in part because of a focus on "basic skills" at the cost of higher-level cognitive processing. This runs counter to the fact that these students, like most others, appear to learn more when basic skills are taught within the context of solving real problems, and acquiring real knowledge, rather than in isolation.(18)

Another significant problem of special education classes is that they tend not to increase overall available instructional time for students, many of whom need more time to learn material. Parents often support or initiate the decision to have their children designated as learning disabled because they believe that the special attention and small classes will be highly beneficial. While this may be true in individual instances, or in the case of exceptionally well-designed programs, it is certainly not generally supported by research in this area.(19)

In fact, a review of the most effective ways of helping many students who are now described as disadvantaged, as slow learners, and as learning disabled, yields a list that would be equally appropriate for students with no learning disadvantages at all.

> *There is a rapidly growing literature that identifies programmatic structures, curriculum and instructional strategies that produce substantial increases in student performance for low achieving, poor, learning disabled or mildly handicapped ... interestingly, the strategies work successfully for all categories of students. [These are:]*
>
> 1. *early childhood education for three- and four-year-olds;*
> 2. *extended day [full-day] kindergarten programs;*
> 3. *extensive use of pedagogical strategies based on the effective teaching research;*
> 4. *continuous progress programs in reading and mathematics;*
> 5. *curriculum programs with the goal of developing students' complex thinking skills;*
> 6. *co-operative learning across all of the ... curriculum topics;*
> 7. *peer or volunteer tutoring;*
> 8. *computer-assisted instruction;*
> 9. *providing as much of the extra educational [program] in the regular classroom as possible, bolstered by providing a consulting teacher to work with the regular classroom teacher.(20)*

A review of research into the effectiveness of special education for students with learning handicaps or deficits shows that a program of separate instruction for these students is not effective.

> *The needs of students with handicapping conditions have led some parents and professionals to accept the notion of separate, if quality, education. We will argue that the current system has proven to be inadequate because it is a system that is not integrated, and that we must learn from our mistakes and attempt to create a new type of unitary system, one which incorporates quality education for all students ... While special education programs ... have been successful in bringing unserved students into public education, and have established their right to education, these programs have failed ... to make the separate system significant in terms of student benefits.(21)*

We know that some children of normal intelligence who have had effective instruction in reading continue to have difficulty in school for reasons that appear to be primarily cognitive rather than emotional. And we do not doubt that some - though by no means all - have been helped by special-education programs in which a teacher works with students one-on-one or in very small groups. While we are unequivocally sympathetic to such efforts, we must report that we could find no research evidence to suggest that what happens is substantially or systematically different from what any well-trained teacher would do with any student having difficulty comprehending text, conveying information, or expressing opinions through speech or writing. The one plausible advantage of the special-education situation is the individualized or small-group setting.

It is very possible that there is a great deal still to be learned about how to help children with learning problems, and that future research will be more fruitful. Meanwhile, the most promising supports for significant numbers of children having learning difficulties appear to be the same as those that help all children: well-prepared teachers, solid early education, and classrooms in which children are supported by their teachers and by each other. In turn, their teachers are supported by good information and resources, including helpful professional colleagues, a knowledgable principal, consulting teachers, and professional networks.

In Chapter 12 we emphasize the need to ensure that teachers' pre-service and continuing education equip them with an understanding of children's cognitive, emotional, and social development; an awareness of the wide range of normal behaviour; skill in identifying genuine learning problems and seeking appropriate assistance; and familiarity with, and skill in the use of, a wide range of teaching methods. These are the essential components of preparation for teaching all students well, including students who might formerly have been seen as needing special and separate education.

Able, advantaged, and fast learners

Some children learn material more quickly than most, either in one subject, in several related areas, or in virtually all of them. At present, such students are given extra or more complex work to do in the regular classroom ("enrichment") or are placed in a part-time or full-time class for "gifted" students. In 1990-91, students officially designated as gifted accounted for more than one in five of all "exceptional students," and 1.75 percent of the entire school-age population.

While many parents spoke to us about their satisfaction with the gifted programs in which their children are enrolled, we think that it makes sense to question whether students who are academically advanced or learn more quickly are best thought of as gifted, or whether that description might be better applied to a very narrow band of students who would be at a substantial disadvantage in any class not tailored to their very special individual talents. This might apply to the person who is very gifted in math, for example, or in music, and whose needs, therefore, cannot be met by any teacher in the school.

We believe that parents and students should seriously consider an alternative for the larger group of quick or advanced learners, one that is rarely used in Ontario: acceleration, which can mean accelerating in a particular subject or in all subject areas. (The latter is often called "skipping a grade.") In a more flexible system, it should be possible for some students to progress more quickly than others. Through the use of teacher assessment, as well as of the challenge examination, students who can demonstrate knowledge of a subject area should be able to progress to the next level at once - not many months later.

But, whereas repeating a grade has been a common practice despite a very poor track record (students

who are held back rarely show improved longer-term progress), acceleration, despite its rare use in Ontario, has a very strong and positive record, based on the experience of other jurisdictions. In fact, acceleration has much more pronounced effects on student learning than enrichment.(22) Many parents and educators fear that students who accelerate will be at risk socially: at a disadvantage with their peers because of their relative youth, they will become ill adjusted and unhappy. However, in spite of considerable research on the subject, there is very little evidence that this is the case.(23)

Another concern is that students, however bright, cannot afford to miss content instruction by skipping. As we make clear throughout this report, we are convinced that almost all students could learn more, faster, and better in a system that supports teaching for understanding. We have recommended that there be only three specialization years after Grade 9, and that even after that, learning time can be compressed; or, alternatively, that what is learned in the same amount of time can be expanded. For fast learners especially, the notion of missing learning because of a lack of time is inappropriate. As long as we are clear about what students need to know, the acquisition of knowledge can be monitored so that no real gaps go unaddressed. Time is not the problem, especially for the quick.

While we are not suggesting that enrichment and special gifted programs cease to exist, we question the idea that this is the best strategy for quick learners, and reiterate that acceleration is a highly effective, greatly under-used, and extremely cost-effective alternative for students who are fast learners.

Recommendation 34

*Therefore, we recommend that in addition to gifted programs, acceleration, based on teacher assessment, challenge exams, and/or other appropriate measures, become widely available as an important option for students.

Socio-emotional or behavioral disabilities

Classroom strategies:
Like learning difficulties, behavioral problems, including excessive anger and aggression, and depression and withdrawal, exist in a continuum, ranging from those that are temporary or environmentally driven and can be addressed by improved teacher education and pedagogy, to severe obstacles that require long-term supportive programming, and may never be fully resolved. Some teachers are more skilled than others at preventing disruptive behaviour, and their superior techniques can and should be taught to all teachers. There is some evidence that when these are part of the repertoire of primary teachers, children who would otherwise be labelled "behavioral" and put in special classes avoid such placements and the attached stigma and high likelihood of academic failure.(24)

Another kind of skill that makes a significant difference to the aggravating or lessening of "behavioral problems" of the aggressive variety is that of conflict resolution, or negotiation. When teachers and peers respond non-confrontationally to a student who is angry, it is often possible to defuse that anger, and avoid an explosion. Situations that might otherwise result in suspension can sometimes be averted, and, with models for acceptable social behaviour, students may begin to alter negative self-expectations and gain self-control.

With emotional as with learning problems, the first, best "solution" for some children is simply a well-trained and well-supported teacher. But, even with the advantage of well-prepared teachers - and class or school-wide conflictresolution training - there are some students who will need additional

short-term support, while others will require support throughout their years in school. This includes both the aggressive children and those students who are depressed. Depressed students, most of whom are female, risk not being identified and helped if they are quiet, do their work, and do not call teachers' attention to themselves.

But it is the hostile or very aggressive children whom teachers typically find most difficult in regular classrooms, because those students are the ones who disrupt the class and cause difficulty for other students. Most of these are males. In some cases, disruptive students may have learning problems - either the material is too difficult and they are discouraged and frustrated, or the material is too easy and they are bored. Both possibilities should be explored before they are ruled out as causative factors. Whether the problem requires remediation or acceleration, the best solution may be intensive tutoring or more challenge, rather than a focus on non-academic "behavioral" concerns.

If, on the other hand, the problem is not mainly about learning difficulties, but about social and emotional factors, counselling is necessary. Often, counselling is not available at school or outside (at least without a long waiting period). But because the student is too disruptive to remain in class, he is placed in a special-education class called "behavioral," most often staffed by teachers with some special-education training, but without training or experience in counselling or therapy. It is hardly surprising that this "treatment" is not often very effective, and that the behaviour of students who spend years in such classes does not improve while, very frequently, they deteriorate academically.(25)

While educators are aware of the poor prognosis for students placed in behavioral classes, the classes continue because they do not address an individual's problem solely or even primarily: they serve the larger community by removing him as a disruptive influence from a classroom of 20 to 35 students and one teacher.

In the special classroom, with perhaps six students, a teacher and an assistant, the student's behaviour can more readily be contained. Those with significant emotional disabilities who act out or are particularly hostile present a real difficulty for the school, an institution in which children and young people learn in groups, with a fairly low adult-to-youth ratio.

The special-education classroom substantially increases the ratio of adults to students. There are other conceivable alternatives, some possibly better from the viewpoint of the troublesome students, but unlikely to be implemented if they do not meet the need for a reasonable learning and teaching environment for the students and teacher in the regular classroom.

Another, and possibly a better, alternative in many cases, is to increase the number of adults in the regular classroom in order to keep students integrated while giving them enough close supervision and support to enable them, through a mixture of prevention and quick intervention, to minimize their disruptive or anti-social behaviour. Many schools and classrooms have recently become engaged in such programs, which hold out the hope that students, as they continue to be exposed to high expectations, a normal peer group, and a common curriculum, will learn over time to model positive social and learning behaviour. Avoiding the isolation of the special class means escaping stigma and low expectations of self, while being exposed to, and having the opportunity to learn, the curriculum presented to the peer group.

Health interventions:
For those students who need additional, therapeutic support, schools must depend on health resources

that are not readily available. If treatment could be delivered at the school site instead of in hospitals and clinics, students could spend more of their day in their normal environment, and parents would feel less intimidated by the idea of treatment. And if professional help were available over longer periods to those who most need it, the possibility of students remaining in a normal learning environment and profiting from it, academically as well as socially, might be vastly increased.

If a teacher, whose job is to help students learn a curriculum, is to be able to do so, children and youth handicapped by emotional problems must be helped by health professionals, some of them intensively and for the long term. Whether depressed or angry, they cannot function effectively as students unless they receive very strong support.

These young people are not typical, and they are not numerous; estimates vary, but it is rare for any school to have more than a small number. But these few are not effective learners, and no education, however "special," will be effective for people whose basic health needs are not met.

The connection between the need for treatment for individual students and the provision of a safe and strong learning system for all students must be recognized, and should become the basis for the delivery of mental-health services to children and youth and, where appropriate, their families, as early as possible. Without such support for the few, education for the many suffers.

We reiterate that there are relatively few children and youth who need long-term, intensive professional care. And we remind educators again that not only disruptive and hostile children and youth need help; students who exhibit signs of serious depression are not disruptive at all, but they certainly need significant support from health professionals if they are to realize their potential as learners and as adults.

These children must be a priority for the health system: by dint of their age, they are most responsive to preventive measures and early intervention. And they must not be ignored by the health system on the grounds that they will be looked after by the educational system, when they require the care of health professionals.

The identification, placement, and progress of students with special needs

While different learning rates (slower or faster than average) may seem categorically different from "disabilities," whether learning related, emotional-behavioral, or both, they are organizationally similar: most students who receive special programming - whether in the form of remediation or enrichment through in-class special support, or in a totally segregated setting based on special learning or emotional needs - are first identified in a process that involves assessment and diagnosis, parental consent, and then special designation, whose continuing applicability must be reviewed annually.

The Identification, Placement, Review Committee (IPRC) process is very costly in professional time, typically requiring a significant amount of preparation and involvement by teachers, administrators, and such support personnel as psychologists, psychometrists, and sometimes social workers, speech therapists, and others. This time is invested not only in the actual study of a student's record and apparent difficulties but in the legal formalities as well.

There is reason to question whether this costly identification and placement process serves students well, mostly because the precision of diagnosis ("learning disabled" versus "slow learner," for example) is not supported by equal precision in prescription. In other words, we are far better at labelling learning

problems than at resolving them.

It appears that the reasons some students have difficulty mastering the curriculum are not always accurately reflected by the available assessment tools. For example, while most educators and specialists agree that there are genuine learning disabilities (such as letter reversals in reading), these appear to account for far fewer of the school population than may be identified as learning disabled.

Similarly, the "behavioral" designation describes a classroom problem rather than that of an individual. The student's behaviour is problematic for the teacher and for other students, but the identification as "behavioral" does not clarify the student's problem, or suggest any particular intervention. It is a label, not a diagnosis. That why is we question the value of the I (Identification) in the IPRC acronym.

Most evaluative studies suggest that a great deal of special education does not succeed in achieving its goal, which is to enable the student to make significantly greater progress than peers who remain in the regular program such that he can catch up sufficiently to be reintegrated into the class. The medical model of diagnosis and prescription often does not result in the desired "cure." Therefore, the second reason we question the IPRC process is the poor track record of special-education withdrawal programs, which has helped drive the move towards integrating students with learning and behavioral problems into regular classrooms. With a decline in special placement, and the increased emphasis on program rather than placement, the P in IPRC becomes much less salient.

Perhaps the most important part of the IPRC acronym refers to the R (Review), carried out annually after the identification and placement have occurred. Our concern is that this review may not take place frequently enough, may not be taken seriously enough, and may reflect educators' low expectations of the student, leaving that student in a special program for years, with no demonstrated evidence of improvement. There is little point in special placement that does not result in more progress than would be made in a regular class or program: not only is it unjustifiable, it can be cruel.

In fact, in suggesting a "case manager" approach for students in Grades 1 to 6, and a Cumulative Educational Profile supervised by a teacher from Grade 7 on, we are recommending a system in which there is much more frequent review on an informal basis through regular teacher-student-parent consultation, independent of a special referral process.

The C in IPRC - the Committee process being followed - is sometimes adversarial in tone. Parents are asked to attend the meeting at which the case will be made that their child should be designated as requiring special education, as well as any subsequent review meetings.

If parents are uneasy, or disagree with the diagnosis, they may choose to be accompanied by an advocate, perhaps a lawyer. In other cases, parents feel they have been overwhelmed by a roomful of experts, and have been too intimidated to ask questions or to disagree. As well, although many school boards make efforts to assure that parents are invited to the meeting, and understand it, that does not always happen. In some cases, IPRC decisions are legally appealed by parents. We think that less adversarial, more informal and more responsive interchange between parents and educators might result in better communication and ultimately in better support to the learner.

While we appreciate the need to take decisions to alter students' programs very seriously, especially if that involves removing them from the regular classroom for part or all of the day, and the necessity for truly informed parental consent to such decisions, we are not convinced that the costly legal process involved in the IPRC process is always useful. At the same time, we are very concerned that parents be

fully informed about the school's recommendation, and that when they consent to it, they do so on that basis.

Recommendations 35, 36, 37, 38

For this reason, we recommend that:

*when parents and educators agree on the best programming for the student, and there is a written record of a parent's informed agreement, no IPRC process occur;

*when there is no agreement, and an IPRC meeting must take place, a mediator/facilitator be chosen, on an ad hoc basis, to facilitate discussion and compromise, to alleviate the likelihood of a legal appeal; and that the legislation be rewritten to provide for this pre-appeal mediation;

*when a student has been formally identified and placed, the annual review be replaced by semi-annual individual assessment that will show whether and how much the student has progressed over a five-month period, and that decisions about continuation of the program will be made based on objective evidence as well on as the judgment of the educators and parents in regard to the student's progress; and

*school boards look for ways to provide assistance to those who need it, without tying that assistance to a formal identification process.

Funding for such supports could flow to schools on a per capita basis, based on a formula that estimates the percentage of students in a neighbourhood school who are likely to need extra help. (Schools that serve as centres for special education or that have other special designations, such as "inner city" or "special needs," could be funded accordingly.)

Our discussion of the programming needs of children who are exceptional because of physical, cognitive, or emotional handicaps or differences has stressed our support for the integration of such students whenever possible. At the same time, we recognize and have acknowledged that in some cases there are advantages to students in part-time or full-time placement in other settings.

Recommendation 39

*Therefore we recommend that while integration should be the norm, school boards continue to provide a continuum of services for students whose needs would, in the opinion of parents and educators, be best served in other settings.

Supports for learning for all students

Most students can learn what they are expected to learn as long as they have competent and caring teachers with high standards for themselves as professionals and for their students as learners, a well-planned curriculum, adequate learning resources of all kinds, and family and peers who value them.

Indeed, despite frequent media criticism, lack of concrete evidence of student achievement (as the result of scarce school, district, and provincial assessment data), and some recent, general decrease in confidence in public institutions, opinion polls over the years have tended to show a considerable degree of satisfaction with Ontario's schools. (See Chapter 2.)

But one function that came under particularly heavy criticism was that which is supposed to be carried out by guidance teacher/counsellors, both as career educators and as personal/social counsellors.

Guidance programs are under more pressure to change than most others. Parents and students rarely complain that the way history or geography is taught has not changed; there is no general expectation on the part of the public that the content or delivery of these subjects would necessarily shift over time.

But the world of work changes over time, and is radically altering personal experience, leading to expectations that schools will alter career education accordingly. However, it is not easy to provide satisfactory service with staff who were trained 20 or more years ago, are not regularly retrained, may have had minimal training in this area to begin with, and who typically do not have recent personal experience or systematic links with workplaces other than schools, or even with the college and university systems.

In personal and social guidance, too, the demands and expectations have grown enormously. Teachers (including guidance teachers), administrators, parents, and health and social-service professionals told us again and again that schools are trying to help more and more children and families cope with more and more problems related to poverty, family breakup and dysfunction, and lack of support. Guidance counsellors - some of whom are teachers whose guidance training consists of as little as one summer course - are on the front line in helping young people cope with school as part of their often-complicated lives.

As well, these teacher/counsellors are frequently burdened inappropriately with clerical tasks - sometimes by principals who appear not to value or want to protect the legitimate guidance role, and the staff who should be dedicated to it. These duties take much of their time away from students, and make it difficult for guidance teachers to deliver important curricula in life skills and decision-making, which most students need. Diverting guidance teachers from the legitimate teaching role also makes it more difficult for them to be successful in their counselling role because they are prevented from having an initial, non-threatening contact with students who may latter seek them out for individual help.

Therefore, it is not surprising that guidance counsellors are often described by students and their parents as being insufficiently trained or accessible, and as not meeting the needs of students. All these shortcomings are real, but certainly do not apply to all counsellors at all schools. Many professional associations of guidance teachers and career counsellors told us that there are excellent teachers and counsellors who are eager to be supported by the training, mandate, and resources needed to do an important job well. We trust they will find our recommendations encouraging and helpful.

Career education

For decades, surveys of the Ontario public have shown a discrepancy between the strong importance parents and older students place on career education, planning, and counselling, and the relatively insignificant amount of time guidance and other teachers actually devote to it.(26)

Students say they need help in formulating educational plans and making decisions about courses and options but that guidance counsellors lack information, or are unavailable without a prior appointment, or are unknown to them. We were told that guidance counsellors were often uninformed about college programs, and under-informed or misinformed about university programs. We heard that they spend much more time working with university-bound students than with others, that they know little about the work world, and cannot help students who need work-related information and counselling. We heard, as well, that there is a need for much greater understanding and skill in working with students who are often marginalized by colour or culture.

On the other hand, we also saw impressive evidence of what could be and is being done in innovative programs involving career centres and various kinds of school and community partnerships. "In those schools regarded as most effective by students, counsellors spent a great deal of time with students on career counselling."(27)

Throughout these pages, we have envisioned a system that is cognizant of the importance students and parents place on career education and planning, and acknowledges the necessity to begin very early to build student awareness of the myriad of possible occupations, of the value of education to their future, and of the importance of knowing and developing one's abilities and interests. Such a system would give a central place to career education, and include trained and dedicated career-education personnel in every school.

We have put a strong emphasis on career awareness, appropriately embedded in a community-based learning environment, beginning in the primary grades. (See Chapter 8.) We believe that for this to happen, teachers must have assistance in gaining access to co-ordinating and connecting opportunities for community-based, career-awareness activities with the curriculum, taking students outside the school, and bringing community workers and employers into it. This work depends on someone with time dedicated to it, and with some experience and interest in school-community liaison and community-based education.

Recommendation 40

*We recommend that all elementary school teachers have regular access to a "community career co-ordinator" responsible for co-ordinating the school's community-based career-awareness curriculum, and working with teachers and community members to build and support the program.

The co-ordinator might be a person who works at a local career centre, a parent, teacher, or community member with appropriate background and/or experience. The number of hours per week needed will vary according to the size of the school and the age of the students.

We have also created a cumulative educational plan (CEP), beginning in Grade 6 or 7, and monitored and regularly reviewed by teacher-advisors in consultation with students and parents, as well as providing co-operative education and career counselling during the specialization years, and during the transition from school to work. (See Chapters 8 and 9.)

In order to support the CEP and the career-education-related curriculum beginning in Grade 7, we believe that students and their teacher-advisors must have access to a career-education specialist who knows about education, training, and work opportunities, about secondary and post-secondary educational programs, and who is able to provide students with assessment and counselling as well as job and career information. We want schools, beginning no later than Grade 7, to have career-education personnel who are professionally trained to organize, co-ordinate, and deliver educational and career information, planning, and counselling, with differing emphases according to the age and needs of the student.

The career-education specialist's job would include direct contact with students individually and in groups, with parents, and as a consultant helping teachers and teacher-advisors to become aware of the range of education, training, and work options available to students after high school.

In addition to advising, counselling, and consulting, the job would include periodic monitoring of

students' CEPs. The career-education specialist would continue to assist students, not only those who stay in secondary school, but those who leave before they are 18 years old, advising them, referring them to other sources of help, and helping those who wish to re-enter school to do so. Currently, career education is primarily the job of guidance counsellors who may have little specific training in the area, and who typically do not or cannot give it the time and attention it needs. We are convinced that in future, this service must be delivered by people trained for it, and dedicated to it.

Teacher training is not the essential component; training as a career educator/counsellor is. To the extent that the function will continue to be carried out by existing staff for some time, they must be retrained; people entering the field must also be trained, whether or not they are teachers; the result may be a mixture of teachers and non-teachers doing this work.

Recommendation 41

*We recommend that beginning in Grade 6 or 7 and continuing through Grade 12, all schools have appropriately trained and certified career-education specialists to carry out career counselling functions.

The career-education specialist would continue to advise and refer students who leave school before they are 18 years old, and would help them re-enter school if they wished to do so.

We suggest that the role and function of the career-education specialist be clarified by:

- defining the skills and training required to provide these services, including skills in communicating with a diverse population;
- creating and implementing a plan for educating and re-educating people who are now, or should now be, delivering these services to students; and
- ensuring that career-education services are delivered by those who, after a date to be specified, have the agreed-on training.

The redefinition of the career-education role and function should be done in co-operation with other ministries, such as Industry and Trade, Citizenship, and the Ontario Women's Directorate, as well as with the Ontario School Counsellors' Association, the Association of Career Centres in Educational Settings, and with representatives of colleges and universities, and the training should be accessible from several routes, not only teacher education.

> *Any person can call him/her self a career counsellor with absolutely no qualifications. There is a need for a comprehensive training initiative that is developed with extensive field consultation to ensure that the training is relevant and accessible to practising career counsellors.(28)*
>
> *The Government of Ontario should work with relevant stakeholder groups to establish career/vocational counselling as a recognized field of professional research and practice in Ontario, comparable to its status in other jurisdictions.(29)*

Career information constantly changes and grows. No career educator, however well prepared, can function well without having an excellent and current information base. Responsibility for developing and updating such a base must be centralized and be equally accessible to all schools and all learners.

We suggest that the Ministry support the development, or updating and implementing, of a provincial,

career-information system accessible to staff and students. Responsibility for developing and updating such a database must be centralized, and the information must be equally accessible to all schools and all learners, to teachers, career-education specialists, students (including those with disabilities), and adult learners. We suggest that as one way of establishing a provincial system, the Ministry investigate the role of information technology, in connecting sources and networks of career information and counselling, and explore the feasibility of increasing resource availability through electronic means.

Another type of invaluable information for schools is the careful description of exemplary programs and the conditions necessary for their implementation and maintenance. The Ministry of Education and Training has recently undertaken initiatives, such as the Education-Work Connection (EWC), that expand and improve the information base and the educational opportunities available to learners and to career-education personnel in schools. This kind of project, which builds capacity at the local level by building information and expertise centrally, is extremely helpful.

In order to meet students' needs for career and educational planning and counselling, there must be a clear statement about what students have to know about post-secondary opportunities, best expressed as learner outcomes for career awareness and education. Some of these statements are embedded in *The Common Curriculum*; others, especially for Grades 10 to 12, do not exist.

Recommendation 42

*We recommend that the Ministry, in co-operation with professional career-education groups, the Ontario School Counsellors' Association, and the Association of Career Centres in Educational Settings, and with representation from colleges, universities, and business and labour, develop a continuum of appropriate learner outcomes in career awareness and career education for Grades 1 to 12.

These outcomes should place a continuing emphasis on linking the school's curriculum to the community and its work settings, and should be understood to include community service.

Because career education has traditionally been delivered by teachers with training in guidance, and because we are recommending that the career-educator function in schools be expanded (to begin no later than Grade 7) and differentiated from the teaching function, it is necessary that the Ministry of Education and Training, in collaboration with professional career counselling and school guidance groups, and with business, labour, and colleges, examine and clarify the role of guidance counsellors in career education, and develop models of effective and exemplary staffing, training, strategies, and practices.

Finally, while we are confident that greater clarity about learner outcomes in career education, and a strong push for more intensive and appropriate training for those who provide it, are the keys to better career education and counselling for students, we are aware that well-planned programs and well-trained staff are genuinely effective only when they are supported by an environment - in this case a school and a school board - that recognizes the importance of career education, and facilitates the job of career educators.

It is our hope that all schools and school administrators will find in these pages the voices of the parents and students who spoke to us, and take seriously the responsibility for supporting dedicated staff who can carry out their duties in career education and guidance.

Social and personal guidance teaching and counselling

We also heard concerns about the personal and social (as opposed to the educational and career-planning) function of guidance. Guidance teacher/counsellors are often seen as remote and too unfamiliar for students to approach; in fact, research supports the finding that students are more likely to go to subject teachers for help that would be more appropriately provided by trained counsellors, in part because the guidance teacher is simply not well known and accessible to them.

At some point in their school careers, many, if not most, students will be concerned about an issue that may or may not be educational in nature, but that could interfere with their ability to concentrate on their work. They would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns in confidence with an adult other than a parent, another relative, or a friend of the family.

Because most children and young people know only one other class of adults - teachers - they may turn to one of them for personal help or advice. Some students, when asked, acknowledge that they would like to be able to speak to a counselling adult at their school, but have not done so for a variety of reasons.

Teachers, especially when they are acting in an advisory capacity, should be prepared to listen to students in a friendly, non-judgmental and confidential way, to offer support and advice as appropriate. As well, they must be able to recognize when a student needs more help than they can appropriately offer, and to help that person gain access to a counsellor or health professional. In elementary schools, there is often no guidance counsellor, and referral is usually through a school team to a health professional.

In addition to personal counselling, guidance may involve individual students or groups of students organized around interests and issues such as decision-making, leadership, or social support; or problems, including substance abuse or family violence. In addition, guidance counsellors, who are certificated teachers, have a role inside the classroom and the school, as teachers of life skills and related curricula. Besides delivering a specific curriculum, such as life skills, guidance teachers may organize, supervise, and support such school-wide programs as peer tutors, peacemakers, or the student council.

Counselling

There are apparently several problems that prevent many guidance teacher/counsellors from carrying out their responsibilities successfully. First, a variety of roles, but especially those of teacher and counsellor, have traditionally been subsumed under one title. It is possible that separation and specialization between them would serve schools and students better, and that more differentiated staffing would result in higher-quality and more user-friendly guidance teaching and counselling.

Related to this is the clear fact that for a variety of reasons, guidance staff are not always properly prepared for their work and not always appropriately assigned. For example, part-time counsellors are often teachers of other subjects, with very little training in counselling.

Moreover, because counsellors do not have full-time classroom assignments and are therefore "available," administrators often make demands on their time for work more efficiently done by others: prime examples are clerical duties involving registration, record-keeping, and the like. Finally, too many counsellors see their offices as the appropriate place for working, and they stay there, waiting for students to find them, and serving only the minority that does so, rather than allocating their time in a planned way to groups of students who could benefit from their service. Counselling in many schools tends to be individual and reactive; neither is efficient, and both severely limit counsellors' efficacy for the student population as a whole.

The essence of the personal counselling function in schools is to connect with students and help them cope in school so that they can be academically successful in spite of difficulties or distractions of various degrees of seriousness, many of which are commonplaces of daily life, especially for adolescents.

The appropriate strategy for meeting much of this need is prevention: offering group counselling and group learning/life skills programs in such areas as decision-making, study skills, stress management, and so on. As well, intervention programs for groups of students with definable short-term needs - such as students at risk of failing, or of being suspended because of poor attendance or inappropriate behaviour - can be assisted by a combination of group and peer counselling, with guidance counsellors providing the orientation, training, and monitoring of the peer tutors.

It is not essential that counsellors be certificated teachers, or that teachers be trained as counsellors. What is essential is that people with appropriate training and expertise for preventive and short-term counselling are available and are well known to all students, so that it is not difficult or stressful for students to gain access to them when they wish to make individual contact.

There are ways counsellors can make themselves known and accessible to most students. These include offering a combination of such programs as student council advisor; facilitator of training in study skills, in peer tutoring, and in conflict mediation; and advisor-facilitator of group programs for women students, recent immigrants, teen parents, and others.

If counsellors do not take an active role in the life of the school, their time and services are absorbed by a small minority of students, and they are perceived as not useful.

> *It is clear that the majority of students do not see the guidance office as a place to go for help with their personal problems. If guidance counsellors feel this latter service is an important responsibility, they have a great deal to do to make themselves appear not only accessible, but as people who can meet this need.(30)*

When, on the other hand, they make themselves well known and accessible, through classroom contacts and programs delivered to the entire school, they make a positive difference.

When students need long-term or intensive help, a teacher, counsellor, or team of teachers and administrators who review teacher referrals must refer these students to a health professional, such as a physician, a psychologist, a social worker, or another therapist. Whether these health professionals are directly employed by the school or school board, or by hospitals, clinics, or community agencies, or are self-employed, their availability as a back-up system is essential.

Schools are not staffed with a high enough ratio of counsellors to students to allow them to give more than brief counselling on an individual basis, and extended mental-health intervention is not what they are or should be doing. When students have problems and concerns that are not readily dealt with, they must have access to qualified health professionals at school or nearby, people who can give them appropriate time and attention, whether individually or in small groups. This is one of several examples of the need for links between the health system and local schools in a way that makes help available to young people where and when they need it.

Teaching

Guidance curricula of the kind we described earlier as group learning and life skills, can be delivered by guidance teachers who spend a set number of hours in classrooms. In cases where there is no guidance counsellor (typically before Grade 9), the existing "guidance" curriculum (decision-making and interpersonal skills) has been delivered by a classroom teacher or by an administrator who may have some guidance training.

It is common for elementary schools to lack guidance teachers/counsellors. This report emphasizes, from beginning to end, that in addition to providing a well-planned, challenging learning program, schools must look to people outside to offer children other kinds of learning experiences - many of which are in what we think of as the life skills areas.

Rather than expecting a busy school principal or a classroom teacher, already responsible for teaching a myriad of academic subjects, to present a curriculum on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, or to help students learn how to operate a students' council, schools must be able to draw on community personnel outside their walls for the skill and expertise that are certainly present in a variety of publicly supported agencies with mandates that certainly include the children and families served by the school.

In the curriculum from Grade 10 on, we have suggested that life skills instruction, in areas like parenting education, for example, have an important place. Currently, guidance teachers may be delivering such programs, as may family studies teachers. Whether teachers or non-teachers are involved, students need access to this information, as well as to opportunities to discuss their concerns and questions about health- and lifestyle-related choices.

We suggest that there are a variety of possible deliverers of a group learning/life skills curriculum, and of training in such skills as peer tutoring and other kinds of leadership and service to students of any age or grade level. This includes subject teachers, who may integrate a study skills or a small-group learning focus into their program; as well, it may include administrators, guidance teachers, or non-teachers, such as public health workers, community workers, and others.

Thus, teachers with guidance training are one of several possible resources for delivering this curriculum. The appropriate training for delivering group learning, life skills, and interpersonal and intrapersonal development could be the core of a revised program for guidance teachers, in which the teaching role is emphasized.

Recommendations 43, 44, 45

We recommend that in order to meet the needs of students for guidance and personal counselling:

*first, the Ministry of Education and Training take the lead in working with the Ministry of Health to develop a definition of essential mental-health promotion programs and services that should be available in the school setting; the professional training necessary to provide them; the services that should be offered to students outside the schools and by whom; and the way responsibility for providing these services is shared across ministries.

*second, the Ministry of Education and Training clarify the nature and function of personal and social guidance counselling in schools by:

> a) redefining the appropriate training required for a guidance or personal counsellor, and creating and implementing a plan for educating and re-educating those people who are now, or should now be, delivering these services to students; this redefinition should be done in co-operation with the Ontario School Counsellors' Association and representatives of colleges and universities;

such training should also be accessible through avenues other than teacher education;

b) ensuring that delivery of these services be implemented by personnel who, after a date to be specified, have received the agreed-on training.

*third, the Ministry of Education and Training develop a new guideline for social/personal guidance to replace Guidance, Intermediate and Senior Divisions, 1984 including a description of the kind of differentiated staffing needed to deliver guidance and counselling services in schools, both elementary and secondary.

In the case of students with serious mental-health needs, we strongly support the principle that the institution that has primary responsibility for the child or youth should take the lead in defining the supports needed, and other institutions should co-operate to meet the defined need. (For further discussion of this principle, see Chapter 14.)

While we believe that it is important for policy makers to consider career education, personal and social education, and counselling as functionally distinct - and to ensure that preparation for, and execution of, each of, these roles in schools is well supported - we are aware of several schools in which career education, life skills, and group and individual guidance and counselling are integrated. These programs are of high quality, are accessible, and are well respected by students, teachers, and parents.

We are encouraged by such exemplary initiatives because they can serve as excellent models for the development of new guidelines for training and program delivery.

Endnotes (Chapter 10)

1. Jim Cummins, "The Role of Language Maintenance and Literacy Development in Promoting Academic Achievement in a Multicultural Society," p. 7-8. Paper written for the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, 1994.
2. In the text, we have referred consistently to "immigrant students." While it is true that there may be a very small number of students born in Canada but living in a home in which English is not spoken and who might benefit from ESL support, we want to emphasize the very small number who should be in segregated or withdrawal ESL classes. This is not, however, the case in French-language schools, where the need for ALF is as relevant for Canadian-born students as for students born outside Canada.
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4. Cummins, "Bilingualism and Second Language Learning," an appendix to "The Role of Language Maintenance." The appendix may also be found in the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 13 (1993): 51-70.
5. Ontario, Ministry of Education and Training, "Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity," in *School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (Toronto, 1993), p. 14-15
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8. Maisy Cheng and A. Soudack, *Anti-Racist Education: A Literature Review*, report 206 (Toronto Board of Education Research Services, 1994), p. 47-49.
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15. J.R. Jenkins, "Similarities in the Achievement Levels of Learning Disabled and Remedial Students," *Counterpoint* 7, no. 3 (1987): 16.
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17. Odden, "Thinking about Program Quality."
18. P. Peterson, "Alternatives to Student Retention: New Images of the Learner, the Teacher, and Classroom-Learning," in *Flunking Grades: Research and Policies on Retention*, ed. L.A. Shepard and M.L. Smith (Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1989), p. 174- 201.
19. Odden, "Thinking about Program Quality," p. 125-42.
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