

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF “EDUCATIONAL ADVISOR IN RESEARCH”*

The role of “educational advisor in research” has evolved over time due to the various profiles and interests of those working in the network, as well as to the socio-economic context of the last 40 years and to the general growth of CEGEPs. This role is difficult to demarcate because it is influenced by many internal and external forces that vary from one establishment to another.

Only a few years ago, in her research report on the role of the educational advisor, Lise St-Pierre (2005) divided the evolution of this role into three periods. More precisely with regard to support for research, while maintaining these divisions, today we must add a fourth period. In fact, we are presently experiencing an effervescence not in research itself, but rather in the implementation of means which aim to develop a culture of research in colleges. Here then is a four-phase overview of the role of the educational advisor in research.

THE BEGINNINGS

As early as 1964, *The Parent Report* foresaw the importance of “preparing new programs of study inspired by experiments and research taking place elsewhere” (*Commission royale d’enquête sur l’enseignement dans la province de Québec*, 1965, p. 370), thereby requiring that programs and teaching be renewed in light of relevant innovations and research. The Commission encouraged universities to develop programs that would allow teachers to pursue their training and conduct research, given that “they will soon be outdated and left behind if they do not keep abreast of the progress of knowledge in their discipline and in the sciences of education” (*Ibid.*, p.306). *The Parent Report* also proposed the creation of a new function, that of the educational advisor.

In the early years of CEGEPs, the term “educational advisor in research” was seldom mentioned in the network, and when it was used, it did not necessarily refer to people whose exclusive role was to support research. These specialists were expected to take care of teacher training, to animate the college environment, and to generate and support the carrying out of innovative projects. The very definition of “research” in this particular pioneering context comes closer to those of “creation” and “innovation” in pedagogical terms — because this is where the most work is still required. However, we should not think that there was no “classical” or disciplinary research being conducted in CEGEPs in the 1970s. As mentioned by Guy Denis, a researcher and one of the first educational advisors at Cégep de Sherbrooke,

the very existence of colleges represents a willingness on the part of society to set itself apart from the traditional educational system in existence up until then. Moreover, simultaneous major advances in the Humanities and Social Sciences have enjoyed a significant development, opening new research avenues, particularly through the growth of qualitative research and action research which clearly became preferred methodologies. In colleges, therefore, new ways of understanding, analyzing and learning are being discovered, in some cases from actual practice.

Gradually, educational advisors who were associated with research, whatever their titles were at the time, became responsible for coordinating research and trying out new pedagogical methods, including those calling for new teaching technologies. We are referring here to audiovisual techniques, since the computer had not yet permeated the education field. Suddenly, research and pedagogical experiments, which aimed to develop a global approach for intervening with students, were undertaken by teaching teams and educational advisors, notably at Cégep Lionel-Groulx and Cégep de Sherbrooke. In 1972, the latter’s initiative led to the creation of the PERFORMA program¹. From 1972 to 1980, the PERFORMA network spread quickly through the college network, generating numerous research projects and, in return, reaping the results of this research. During this same period, over 800 research projects were conducted thanks to the new funding programs of the *Ministère de l’Éducation* (Gadbois et Gingras, 1981). Many of these projects received the support and advice of educational advisors, as much in advance (funding application, definition of research problem, etc.) as later (methodological support, budget follow-up, etc.).

* This article was written with the valuable collaboration of Guy Denis and Solange Ducharme, retired educational advisors from Cégep de Sherbrooke, and of Bruno Geslain, coordinator of the *Entente Canada-Québec* for the college-teaching sector and educational advisor at Dawson College from 1984 to 2005.

¹ Back then, the PERFORMA (*Perfectionnement et formation des maîtres*) program was a certificate program at the *Université de Sherbrooke* with the aim of providing CEGEP teachers with pedagogical training. The courses were generally given in the CEGEPs themselves, most often by an educational advisor.



MARIE-HÉLÈNE LAPRISE
Teacher of *Techniques de laboratoire: biotechnologies* and Educational Advisor
Cégep de Sherbrooke



SYLVIE BESSETTE
Educational Advisor
Cégep de Sherbrooke



ODETTE LUSSIER
Educational Advisor
Cégep Marie-Victorin

During these years, a good part of the work of educational advisors consisted further in disseminating the results of these various projects as well as those of scientific research beneficial to education (such as Bloom's taxonomy or objective-based pedagogy) during professional improvement sessions. As stated by Solange Ducharme, a long-time educational advisor at Cégep de Sherbrooke, «We were often used as transfer tools.»²

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The role of educational advisor in research was the focus of a study published in 1975 (Lévesque, 1975) the purpose of which was to describe the situation and to analyze the relevance of this function. The report of this study clarified the tasks relating to the position and concluded that included among the tasks of pedagogical animation, pedagogical consultation and teacher training were also tasks related to providing information and support for pedagogical research and development activities (Houle and Pratte, 2007).

THE GOOD TIMES

In 1980, the *Commission des conseillers en recherche et en expérimentation*, which had provided educational advisors with a place for important exchanges, disbanded under the threat of being abolished by the *Fédération des cégeps*.

Responding to the call sent out by Bernard Morin, its members created the *Association québécoise de pédagogie collégiale* (AQPC) which became the first organization to bring college researchers together. Its annual symposium is the ideal place for creating a network, disseminating the results of experiments and exchanging ideas. Since 1987, the AQPC has published a magazine called *Pédagogie collégiale* which has become a vehicle for communicating the results of pedagogical research.

In 1982, in an effort to complement existing research funding programs, the *Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l'aide à la recherche* (FCAR) created a new initiative called the *Programme d'aide aux chercheurs de collège ou sans affiliation institutionnelle reconnue* (ACSAIR). This program opened the door to disciplinary research and had an impact on the work of educational advisors who were now called upon to advise researchers in a variety of fields of research. Additionally, the creation in 1987 of the *Programme d'aide à la recherche sur l'éducation et l'apprentissage* (PAREA) and the *Programme d'aide à la recherche technologique* (PART) resulted in a considerable increase in the number of projects requiring support. To top it off, with regard to technological research, the limited number of specialized centres (CCTTs) meant that a significant number of projects came from teachers who did not receive support from such a centre. So, educational advisors in research were called upon to support a new research field, one that was very different from their initial training. As a result, the activity of educational advisor in research became considerably diversified. During this period, in colleges that were most actively involved in research, some educational advisors began working on more technical aspects, such as methodology. As stated by Bruno Geslain, an educational advisor who lived through the intense period of development in research at Dawson College in the 1980s, "Having spent a lot of time with researchers, I learned to support them in all facets of their work."³

With the advent of the 1980s, in collaboration with the *Centre collégial de développement de matériel didactique* (CCDMD), the role of supporting the development of didactic material was added to that of supporting research and innovation. There were years when this task occupied a large amount of the educational advisor's time. According to Bruno Geslain:

The definition of research at Dawson at the time was quite flexible and included the production of didactic material. It was only later, following the works of Robert Ducharme, that the concept of research defined as work and studies whose end objective is to increase knowledge or its practical application became widespread in the college network.⁴

Similarly, some educational advisors who were associated with research while at the same time being local representatives of PERFORMA, were given the additional tasks of following up and transferring results, and even the carrying out of *Groupe de recherche-action* (GRA) projects.

² Comments collected by Sylvie Bessette, February 2009.

³ Comments collected in the framework of the ARC's History of Research Project, October 2007.

⁴ *Ibid.*



Keeping in mind the major development of research supported by educational advisors during these good years, it is not surprising that many of these advisors were involved in founding the *Association pour la recherche au collégial* (ARC) in 1988.

THE DIFFICULT YEARS

Colleges in the 1980s were marked by a computer revolution that met education head on, by The Reform of college teaching and by a major economic crisis that led colleges to eliminate resources intended for the provision of release time for researchers. Educational advisors, who were at that point mainly involved in the development and evaluation of programs of study, saw their tasks associated with research begin a gradual decline due to lack of time... and lack of researchers, despite the fact that a lot of work remained to be done for developing, testing and validating new approaches as well as new strategies in teaching and evaluation.

In the college network it is rare to find educational advisors who are able to devote all their energy to the development of research. In fact their role, whether associated with research or not, was transformed during this period. The arrival of The Reform of college teaching and the development of competency-based programs, a new approach, meant that educational advisors were the first ones to be trained in order to be in a position to support teachers in the process of developing new competency-based programs. The new set of processes surrounding the competency-based approach became a priority for educational advisors. Also, the advent of the *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (CEEC), without the benefit of added resources to meet its demands, had a direct impact on the amount of time that educational advisors could henceforth devote to supporting teachers in research. In spite of this context, several PAREA projects, which helped energize the milieu, were supported by educational advisors.

CURRENT CHALLENGES FACING EDUCATIONAL ADVISORS IN RESEARCH

In a recent survey conducted on educational advisors, college administrators and teachers pertaining to the function of the educational advisor in college, Houle and Pratte confirm that it is "rare⁵ to find [educational advisors] who are supporting research activities, as hardly 13% of them are researchers themselves" (Houle et Pratte, 2007, p. 78). Furthermore, only 36% of administrators believe that this activity is relevant to the role of an educational advisor.

Yet, in the last two or three years, it is educational advisors who have been called upon to draft the policies on research and the grant applications that will allow colleges to obtain financial support from funding organizations that are gradually opening their programs to colleges. College administration also entrusts them with the mandate to promote research among teachers and professionals and to assist them in drafting the funding requests, as well as in managing their time and their grants. In this context, since 2000 the role of educational advisor in research has consisted in establishing research even more solidly in CEGEPs, especially research in teaching and disciplinary research, while technological research has been mainly conducted in CCTTs.

⁵ The Houle and Pratte table shows 30%.

This role has, however, become increasingly bound up with the administration of research. In this situation, educational advisors must have a good knowledge of existing programs, both internal and external, and they must be involved with information activities as well as relevant training in order to be able to effectively guide those they assist. This support function involves having a good knowledge of the available network resources, the literature and what is happening in the milieu. Moreover, educational advisors often use animation activities in the milieu to let people know about the available resources and the results of research conducted in their CEGEP or elsewhere.

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In the last few years, colleges seem to be displaying a renewed interest in research. Several factors account for this change: notably the efforts of the ARC which are apparent on all fronts, and those of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) that is also working to see that the value of research conducted in Canadian colleges is recognized. In this new generation of college administrators, the strong presence of researchers and educational advisors who were previously associated with research may also play a role in this return to research... The admissibility criteria of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) also constitutes an important factor in the context of promoting increased interest in research, since these criteria help to open the door to disciplinary research, and this, within a political context that is favourable to



college research. Moreover, it is also within this context that during the process of defining their institutional research programs, establishments will need to put all their research “power” to work: whether through assumed leadership, advisors to support researchers and, of course... researchers. This way, research will gradually become an integral part of college business, rather than the affair of a handful of isolated researchers, and it will require an even more coordinated effort. The challenges facing educational advisors in the matter of supporting of research are also expected to grow. In fact, the repercussions of The Reform at the college level demand even more of advisors’ time and they are obviously priority issues for college administrators.

In addition, the renewal of the teaching corps is a process that requires ongoing support for newcomers. What is more, pedagogical services in colleges are currently seeing the resignations of many experienced educational advisors, either to become administrators or to retire. Given the fact that they have devoted so much of their time to other tasks considered to be more important for almost 15 years, few educational advisors who are currently active have developed expertise in supporting researchers. At the same time, as a function of a variety of college practices, they are expected to have concrete expertise in the field of research itself in terms of designing, carrying out and writing up projects in order to respond adequately to the demands of funding organizations. And, they are also expected to provide the administrative follow-up and even, in certain cases, the scientific follow-up on research projects in order to help researchers write the progress reports which are essential for ensuring ongoing funding.

In this specific context, a new generation of educational advisors in research is

emerging with duties and functions that differ from those of their predecessors. The tasks associated with the administration of research and the research fields in which they must intervene have greatly evolved. Given these conditions, there is a great need for support and training.

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The ARC plays a crucial role with regard to the support and training of educational advisors associated with research. For example, this organization was responsible for the virtual exchanges which took place last winter on the writing of grant proposals for programs offered by Canadian funding agencies. More virtual exchanges are planned in the near future to allow advisors to discuss various ways of generating teacher interest in research and to explore the topic of managing research grants.

CONCLUSION

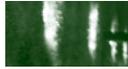
Educational advisors occupy a central position which affords them a global view of the various programs of study and of the disciplinary and pedagogical work undertaken by teachers. On the one hand, this position allows them to foresee an establishment’s research potential. On the other hand in addition to providing advisors with an opportunity to promote cross-disciplinary networking, it also allows them to contribute to the valorization of doing research. In this respect, educational advisors must be attentive to the needs and expertise of the personnel in college institutions in order to encourage research initiatives and to effectively disseminate the fruits of this labour.

In the present context, the central position played by educational advisors in research will also allow them to work on developing new, promising paths for college research, particularly in matters of inter-collegial or inter-order research, and also to work on involving students in research work.

This global view of educational advisors in research means that they will also be called upon to play an increasingly important role in the implementation of the institutional policies on research that they helped to develop, especially with regard to the ethical issues involved in doing research. Since they are probably the ones who will most closely follow the works of the researchers that they support, they will also probably be the first to detect potential ethical deviations in research projects or possible pitfalls that policies or research ethics committees could pose for researchers. In this respect, the competencies, professional rigour and ethical sense of educational advisors in research will be determining factors. ◀

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Odette LUSSIER has been working in the college network since the start of the 1980s. A literature teacher for more than 20 years, she is presently an educational advisor at Cégep Marie-Victorin. Actively engaged with teaching personnel, she is involved in numerous education files, including program development and evaluation. In the last few years, the research file has also been entrusted to her. In addition, she collaborated for five years on work for the Editorial Committee of the magazine *Pédagogie collégiale* and that enabled her to be at the heart of pedagogical developments in the college network.

odette.lussier@collegemv.qc.ca

Sylvie BESSSETTE has been an educational advisor associated with research at Cégep de Sherbrooke since 2003. Before that, she was a teacher in *Techniques de travail social* for close to 20 years. She has also carried out research projects, two of which were funded by PAREA. Passionate about research, Sylvie Bessette has collaborated with the *Association pour la recherche au collégial* (ARC), among other projects, on the development of a provincial support program for new college researchers. Since last August, she is also a member of the Editorial Committee of the magazine *Pédagogie collégiale*.

sylvie.bessette@cegepsherbrooke.qc.ca

Marie-Hélène LAPRISE has a doctorate in Immunology and teaches *Techniques de laboratoire: biotechnologies* at Cégep de Sherbrooke. In September 2008, she joined the college's research and development team as an educational advisor to set up the *Centre d'étude et de recherche étudiants-enseignants* (CERTEE).

marie-helene.laprise@cegepsherbrooke.qc.ca