



A few indicators of students' socio-motivational profile

Comparative data from secondary IV students exposed to Education Reform vs. those not exposed to it

The initial comparative data to come out of the ERES Project revealed that secondary IV students exposed to Education Reform (ER) feel less well-adapted to high school, are less engaged in school work (Anglophones and Francophones at high risk only), and, in the case of boys, have lower self-esteem. However, there were no significant differences found between students exposed to the ER and those who were not in terms of social adjustment, personal and emotional adjustment and intrinsic motivation. These findings complete the data presented in the previous bulletin (volume 3, number 1), which explored the effects of ER on teaching practices, classroom climate and usefulness of courses.

Suggested changes to the new Education Program for Québec schools

The new Education Program for Québec schools proposes various changes, including "a shift from the goal of access to education for as many as possible to that of educational success for as many as possible."¹ The key preoccupation of this new program is to turn out "[...] autonomous people, capable of adapting in a world marked by exponential growth of information [and] constant change [...]."² Education ER therefore aims at providing students with condi-

tions to ensure their success, enhance their adjustment skills and develop their competencies in order to better meet the needs of today's society. The changes introduced by the program are also designed to better respond to the needs of students, by providing them with an educational environment in which they are motivated to strive, persevere and succeed.

Methodology

The socio-motivational profile of students was measured using data collected through a questionnaire administered to 1,190 secondary IV students attending high school before the implementation of ER and 883 secondary IV students who were exposed to the ER.³ Students answered questions measuring their adjustment to high school, academic motivation and self-esteem. Table 1 presents brief definitions of the dimensions selected.

Statistical analysis was used to assess the presence of significant differences between both groups of students (those exposed to ER vs. those not exposed to it) and control a series of factors to ensure that any differences found was not due to those factors.⁴

Findings

The levels of social adjustment and personal and emotional adjustment were found to be comparable among students, regardless of whether or not they were exposed to ER. However, on the academic adjustment front, students exposed to ER were less positive in this area vs. students not exposed to it. In addition, at-risk⁵ youth studying under the new program expressed a lower level of institutional attachment than their at-risk counterparts not exposed to ER. As for students at a low or moderate risk, no significant differences between both groups were found in terms of institutional attachment. Graph 1 (figuring on next page) illustrates this finding.

Table 1
STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dimensions measured	Definition
Adjustment to high school	
Academic adjustment	Attitudes and behaviours of students towards the academic demands of their teachers, study program or institution <i>Ex.: I have a hard time concentrating when I try to study.</i> <i>(This item indicates difficulty with academic adjustment.)</i>
Personal and emotional adjustment	Psychological (ex.: feeling distressed) and physical (ex.: loss of appetite) reactions to school <i>Ex.: I found it hard to deal with the stress of academic life.</i> <i>(This item indicates difficulty with personal and emotional adjustment.)</i>
Social adjustment	Student perception of their social engagement in extracurricular activities and the quality of their interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers <i>Ex.: I had good friends and acquaintances at school and could talk with someone about any problem I might be having.</i>
Sense of belonging to the institution	Level of student commitment to the goals of the institution and quality of the sense of belonging to the institution <i>Ex.: I felt confident that I could adequately meet future challenges here at school.</i>
Academic motivation	
Intrinsic motivation	Student is motivated by learning and the satisfaction derived from the work carried out and attendance at the school. <i>Ex.: Why do you go to school?</i> <i>For the enjoyment I get in learning new things.</i>
Identified motivation	Student is motivated by the importance and meaning he gives his academic work. <i>Ex.: Why do you go to school?</i> <i>So I'll be able to work later on in a field I like.</i>
Self-esteem	
Self-esteem	Sense of personal satisfaction about oneself <i>Ex.: I think I have some good qualities.</i>

¹ Ministère de l'Éducation (1997). *Québec Schools on Course. Educational Policy Statement* Gouvernement du Québec, p. 3.

² Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (2007). *Québec Education Program, secondary Cycle Two*. Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, chapter 1, p.1.

³ The sample of students was selected using a random draw from the total number of students who started secondary school in September 2004 for those not exposed to the ER, and in September 2006 for those exposed to it.

⁴ Factors included parent education and income, paid employment, gender, student risk status (scale composed of items answered by parents, measuring their child's level of aggressiveness, attention deficit and prosociality), school system (Anglophone vs Francophone) and socio-economic background of schools (SEE) ranking.

⁵ Student risk status is determined by a high level of aggressiveness and attention deficit and a lower level of prosociality.



Moreover, the results indicated that intrinsic motivation is not associated with exposure or non-exposure to the ER. However, Anglophone students exposed to the new Education Program had lower levels of identified motivation than Anglophone students who were not exposed to ER. Among Francophone youth, the level of identified motivation remained the same in both groups, regardless of whether they studied under the ER or not. In addition, students exposed to the ER and deemed at risk by their parents displayed lower identified motivation than students deemed at risk by their parents, but not exposed to the ER. As for students who showed a low or moderate level of risk, no significant differences were found in the area of identified motivation from one group to the next. This finding is presented in **Graph 2**.

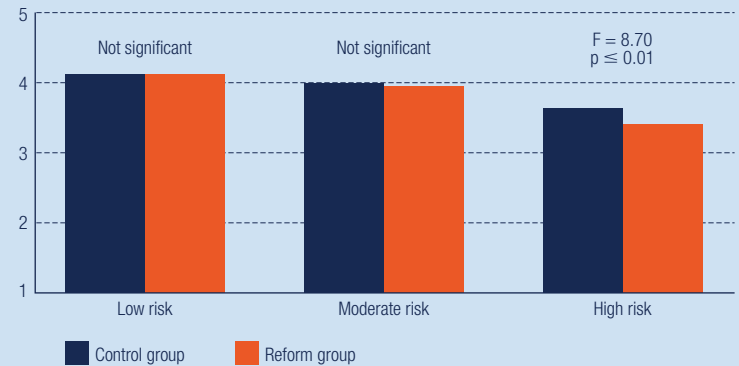
Finally, the findings suggested that boys not exposed to ER had a more positive opinion of themselves than boys exposed to the ER. This difference in levels of self-esteem was not observed in girls.

Conclusion

The preliminary findings presented in this bulletin suggest that students exposed to ER have slightly less positive perceptions than students not exposed to ER when it comes to certain socio-motivational variables. It should be noted that the data on students of the ER were collected among youth who started high school in 2006-2007, which corresponds to the second group of students to be exposed to the ER. Given that the ER had just been implemented at that time, educators were still in the midst of managing the transition. Student perceptions may reflect this state of flux.

Now that we have presented these initial data, it is important to explain how the ERES Project will continue to enrich our knowledge on the impact of ER. First, the subsequent phase of data collection among this group of students as they start secondary V (spring of 2011), will allow us to validate whether they still hold the same perception. Furthermore, the results of the standardized French exam in secondary V and those of a standardized math test will be used to gain insight into the impact of ER on academic success by comparing students exposed to the ER and those who were not. These findings will be further rounded out with data collected from a third group of students, who started high school in 2007, and from their parents. Finally, further follow-up with students of the ERES Project during their transition to college or vocational training will enable us to examine the longer term impact of ER on the future of our young people.

Graph 1
STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AVERAGE SCORES⁶
OF STUDENTS FROM THE CONTROL GROUP VS. STUDENT OF THE REFORM
REGARDING INSTITUTIONAL ATTACHMENT



Graph 2
STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AVERAGE SCORES⁶
OF STUDENTS FROM THE CONTROL GROUP VS. STUDENT OF THE REFORM
REGARDING IDENTIFIED MOTIVATION



⁶ Using 5-point scales, where 5 means *almost always*, and 1 means *almost never*.