

What young people are saying about certain subject areas

This progress report describes the interest of Secondary Two students in reading, history and science. It also presents the perceived usefulness among students of three courses modified somewhat as part of the Education Reform: English, mathematics and history. The data were collected from a sample of 1,313 students who entered high school in September 2006, and so are currently exposed to Education Reform (additional details on the sample composition and representativeness are available at this address: <http://www.eres.fse.ulaval.ca>). The sample of students was 55% female and 80.1 % Francophone.

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND HISTORY IN THE CURRENT EDUCATION PROGRAM

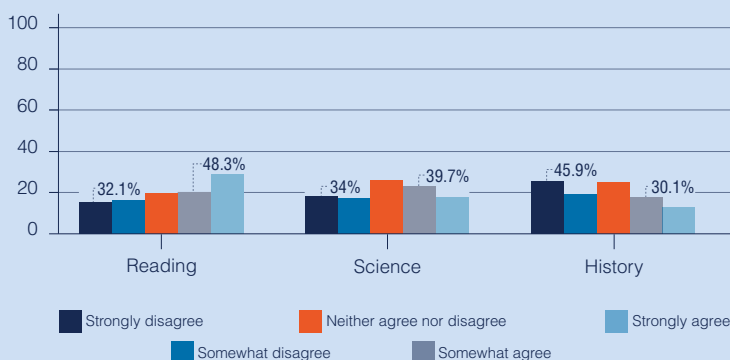
The new Education Program exposes Secondary Two students to a new reality in terms of the content of courses, evaluation methods and teaching practices. More specifically, 50 hours of classroom time of *English, Language of Instruction* have been added during the first three years of high school. The *History and Citizenship Education* program is offered during the first four years of high school (compared to two years prior to Education Reform), for an increase of 150 hours of teaching in this area. In addition, a citizenship education component has been added to prepare students "to participate as informed citizens in the social life of a democratic, pluralistic society that is receptive to a complex world."¹ Finally, the competency-based approach, the cornerstone of the new Education Program, is fully deployed across various disciplines, including mathematics, where students are required to solve complex situational problems. New sequences in mathematics are now available to students of Secondary Cycle Two.

¹ Ministère de l'Éducation (2006) *Programme de formation de l'école québécoise. Enseignement secondaire, 1^{er} cycle*. Québec: Gouvernement du Québec.

Level of interest in reading, science and history

The concept of interest refers to a student's general preference for subjects, materials and activities.² Students were surveyed on their interest in reading, history and science. They were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with 15 statements measuring interest (5 per subject area) using a 5-point scale, (where 1 meant "strongly disagree" and 5, "strongly agree"). Graph A indicates the average number of students under each category. Total agreement scores (levels 4 and 5 on the scale) and disagreement scores (levels 1 and 2 on the scale) are featured on the graph.

Graph A – INTEREST



An analysis of the findings revealed that 48.3% of students were interested in reading, 39.7% in science and 30.1% in history. These differences in the level of interest for the various disciplines were observed among both Francophone and Anglophone students. Additional analyses also demonstrated that girls expressed greater interest in reading than their male counterparts, while boys were more interested in history than girls. For example, 71.4% of girls expressed their disagreement with the statement "I have trouble finishing books," compared to 63.1% of boys. Disagreement, in this context, indicated an interest in reading. The same was true for this item: "For me, reading is a waste of time." The proportion of girls who disagreed with this statement was greater than the proportion of boys (76.2% versus 56.5%). As for history, 42.6% of boys disagreed with the statement "I like to consult a world map, an atlas or a globe," compared to 52.5% of girls. No gender difference was found in the level of interest for science. It should also be noted that a considerable share of students expressed neither agreement nor disagreement with the statements (between 20 and 26%).

² Archambault, J. and Chouinard, R. (2009). *Vers une gestion éducative de la classe*. Montréal : Gaëtan Morin Éditeur, p.167.



Perceived usefulness of English, mathematics and history courses

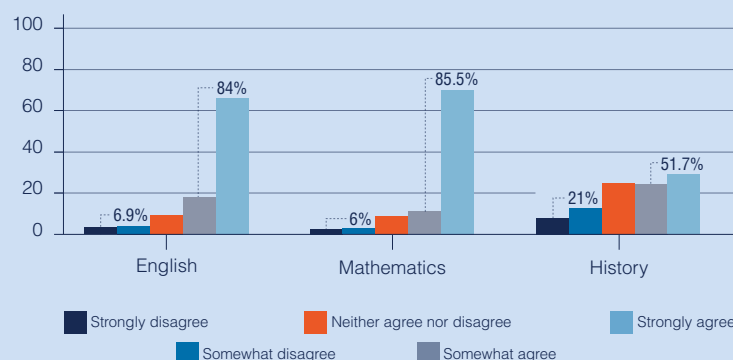
Students were also surveyed on how useful to their current, future and professional lives they perceive English, mathematics and history courses to be. This perception was measured using six items related to the three subject areas selected. Once again, students were asked to express their level of agreement with a series of statements, using a 5-point scale.

Following the same analytical process used for the data previously presented, we studied the results, which indicated that while students agreed that each of their courses was useful, they were much more likely to perceive mathematics (85.5%) and English (84%) as useful compared to history (51.7%).

For example, the level of student agreement with the statement, "I will use what I have learned in this course in many ways as an adult" was 85.4% for English, 86.5% for mathematics and 51.4% for history. Complementary analyses allowed us to conclude that these differences were present among both Anglophone and Francophone students. It should be noted that Anglophone students were expressing their views on the *English, Language of Instruction* course. Gender differences were observed, with girls perceiving each of the targeted courses as more useful compared to their male counterparts.

These findings suggest that students exposed to Education Reform view their English and mathematics courses in a positive light, but have mixed views when it comes to history. While it might be tempting to assert that these differences are due to the changes made to the history program, the results presented here do not allow us to conclude in any way that the results would have differed prior to the changes. Our next wave of data collection, which will be among Secondary Four students and is set to take place in spring 2010, will enable us to compare students exposed to the reform with those who have not been exposed to it. Taking into account the varying degrees of exposure, we will be able to begin systematically documenting the impact of Education Reform on students. The results presented in this report regarding interest in reading, history and science, along with the perceived usefulness of certain courses will therefore be discussed further in light of data gathered among the cohort of students not exposed to Education Reform.

Graph B
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS



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