

Students of the Reform and their perceptions of teaching practices

This progress report details students' perceptions of some of the teaching practices in their Math, English (language of instruction) and History and Citizenship Education classes.

The Educational Aims of the Québec Education Program¹

The teaching practices presented in the Québec Education Program promote certain aims. The Program is designed to ensure the success of all students by taking into account the heterogeneous nature of the student population. As such, the Program encourages the use of a varied range of meaningful learning and evaluation situations adapted to the needs of students. In addition, teachers are required to accompany students in their learning journey by supervising them during group, class and school activities and encouraging them to develop and build knowledge and competencies in this context. The Program also invites teachers to pay special attention to the evolution of their students' learning by focussing on what they already know and pointing out what needs to be improved. Finally, evaluations are expected to highlight students' progress through frequent feedback, which allows them to see the areas that are going well and those that are not.

What students are saying about teaching practices

In the spring of 2008 and 2009, 2,501 Secondary II students completed a questionnaire on the various aspects of the teaching practices they observed in their classrooms. Thinking back to their Math, English and History and Citizenship Education classes, students were asked to report their observations on the following eight teaching practices:

IN THIS SUBJECT, MY TEACHER:

- 1** Makes a special effort to recognize students' individual progress, even if they are below grade level.
- 2** When giving report card grades, considers how much students have improved.
- 3** Encourages students to focus on the improvement they are making in their work in class.
- 4** Helps students learn from their mistakes.
- 5** Gives special privileges to students who do the best work.
- 6** Encourages those students who perform better than others.
- 7** Displays the work of the highest achieving students as an example.
- 8** Encourages students to compete with each other.

These practices can be divided into two main categories based on whether they focus on giving personalized feedback and supporting effort and progress (practices 1 to 4) or on social comparison and competition (practices 5 to 8).

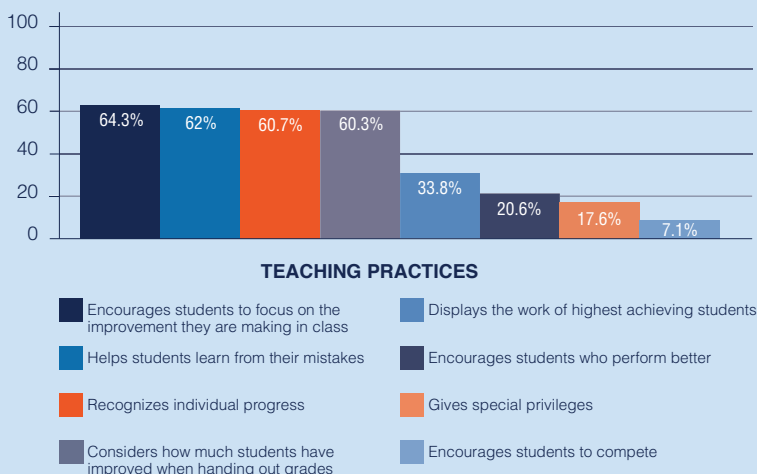
For each statement, students were asked to indicate how frequently they observed a given teaching practice in the classes indicated. They answered on a five-point scale, where 1 meant "Rarely or never" and 5 meant "Very often." The average proportion of students under each heading was then calculated. The findings presented here are based on the sum of the answers obtained for levels 4 and 5 of the scale (practice observed often/very often) and levels 1 and 2 (practice rarely or never/sometimes observed) for the three subjects combined.

¹ Ministère de l'Éducation (2006) *Québec Education Program. Secondary School Education, Cycle One*. Québec: Gouvernement du Québec.



As figure 1 shows, a majority of students reported seeing four teaching practices in particular.

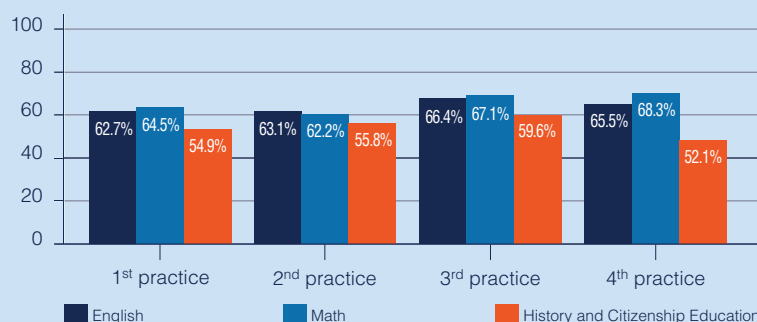
Figure 1
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO OBSERVED CERTAIN TEACHING PRACTICES IN THEIR CLASSROOMS



In fact, 64% of students mentioned that their teachers greatly encouraged them to focus on their progress in class, versus an average of 16% who reported never or rarely witnessing this behaviour. In the same vein, 61% of students thought their teachers made special efforts to recognize the individual progress of students, even those below grade level, while 19% mentioned rarely or never observing this practice. In addition, a slim proportion of students (18%) believed that teachers give special privileges to students who do the best work, versus 66% of them who rarely or did not note this particular behaviour in their teachers. Moreover, only 7% of students mentioned having the impression of being pitted against one another in competition, while 83% reported that their teachers rarely or never encouraged competition among them. Finally, one-third of students (34%) mentioned that their teachers display the work of the highest achieving students, while 46% rarely witnessed this behaviour in class.

Additional analyses were conducted in order to explore differences based on the subject areas. As shown in figure 2, practices that focus on giving personalized feedback and supporting effort and progress (practices 1 to 4) were seen more frequently by a greater number of students in Math and English than in History and Citizenship Education. This was not found to be the case for the other practices (practices 5 to 8).

Figure 2
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO OBSERVED CERTAIN TEACHING PRACTICES BASED ON SUBJECT AREAS



1st practice: Teacher recognizes individual progress.

2nd practice: Teacher recognizes improvement when handing out grades.

3rd practice: Teacher encourages progress made in work in class.

4th practice: Teacher helps students learn from their mistakes.

The findings presented in this progress report confirm that in their classrooms students are exposed to teaching practices that encourage and support their learning. The next wave of data collection in spring 2010 will allow us to compare these perceptions with those of students of the same grade level who were not exposed to Education Reform. It will also give us the opportunity to measure the differences in perception of teaching practices based on whether or not the student was exposed to the new Education Program.

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