

# La **foucade**

A SUDDEN WHIM, WHIRLWIND OR PASSING IMPULSE



## Special Issue

**The Self-Determined IEP :  
Supporting Success for Students  
with Behavioural and Adjustment Difficulties**

A complement to Université Laval's free public Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)



*La Foucade* is published in French by the *Comité québécois pour les jeunes en difficulté de comportement* (CQJDC ; *Quebecois Committee for Children with Behavioural Difficulties*) twice annually. Past issues are available to the general public on the CQJDC's website at [www.cqjdc.org/revue-la-foucade](http://www.cqjdc.org/revue-la-foucade) (French only). Its contents may not be reproduced without acknowledging *La Foucade* as the original source. Any views expressed within published articles are solely those of the specific authors and *La Foucade* shall not be held responsible for their statements.

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Anyone who wishes to submit an article - whether discussing their research on youth who are experiencing social-emotional and behavioural difficulties or else describing their professional experience in this same field - is encouraged to do so. *La Foucade's* writing and publication guidelines can be found on the CQJDC website ([www.cqjdc.org](http://www.cqjdc.org)) with specific instructions for each category of article. Whenever possible, prospective authors are asked to submit a high-definition digital image to accompany their article and illustrate its topic. Articles are to be submitted by email to *La Foucade's* editor-in-chief, Line Massé ([line.masse@uqtr.ca](mailto:line.masse@uqtr.ca)). Feedback will then be provided to the author. Any corrections, where applicable, must be completed prior to final publication. The two deadlines for article submission are June 1<sup>st</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

## Dear Readers

Our choice of topic for this special issue stems from a partnership between the *Comité Québécois pour les Jeunes en Difficulté de Comportement* and *Université Laval*. All articles herein focus exclusively on IEP development in support of students presenting with behavioural difficulties in school settings. The concepts presented within these pages are affiliated with a training program entitled *The Self-Determined IEP: Supporting Success for Students with Behavioural and Adjustment Difficulties* which was launched back in August 2022 and has been made available to the public in Massive Open Online Course format (MOOC).

This issue assembles an assortment of articles on the chosen topic, all written in readily accessible language, and that could prove very useful to all school-based IEP-involved parties. We open with a word from the people behind this special issue. First, we hear from the CQJDC's Board President and Managing Director, respectively Mélanie Paré and Joudie Dubois, and then from Nancy Gaudreau, the MOOC Course Director in charge of *Université Laval's* aforementioned program. They elaborate on the context that led to their partnership and expand upon the objectives behind each learning module contained in this special issue.

Our special issue comprises 10 articles pertaining to various integral aspects in IEP implementation:

- building constructive partnerships with parents<sup>1</sup> to achieve IEP success;
- fostering self-determination in students who present with behavioural challenges;
- actionable tips to strive for more effective use of the 4 IEP Phases – namely the Formal Review Phase, Consulting and Needs Assessment Phase, Consensus Phase, and Implementation Phase.

These articles align with the six ULaval MOOC learning modules, using guidelines and protocols for each target audience, who are as follows:



texts aimed at teachers;



texts aimed at specialist support staff;



texts aimed at school principals.

This special issue serves as reading material for the free online training seminars offered by Université Laval. To register, consult the list of MOOCs on ULaval's website.

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1. The word parent(s) is used throughout as a simplification and refers inclusively to all primary caregivers who take on the parental role, whether they be natural or adoptive parents, foster parents, legal guardians, or otherwise.

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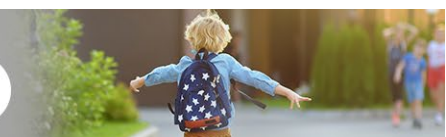
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## A Quick Word from the CQJDC's Board President and Managing Director

Mélanie Paré<sup>1</sup> and Joudie Dubois<sup>2</sup>



It is with great pride and enthusiasm that the CQJDC has partnered with *Université Laval* to bring you this special edition of *La Foucade*. Designed for use in conjunction with the MOOC program on the optimal use of self-determined IEPs, this issue contains a collection of articles intended to support the online training participants. It is comprised of ten articles that will help readers deepen their knowledge of self-determined IEPs in an attempt to foster educational success for students with behavioural challenges and social maladjustments.

*La Foucade* is a professional journal that is primarily geared towards supporting in-house school-based professionals - along with outside specialists - who accompany youth on their journey through social, emotional, and behavioural challenges. Having been published bi-annually for over 20 years now, the journal and its high-quality texts serve as a fundamental consultation resource in the field.



The publication of *La Foucade* aids the CQJDC in its trifold mission : to advocate for challenged youth, to foster greater wellbeing, and to enhance the quality of services available to them. Past issues can be consulted free of charge on the CQJDC website : [www.cqjdc.org](http://www.cqjdc.org).

We invite you to peruse our website, where you'll find a wide range of informative texts, handy documentation and even a list of professional development opportunities (video capsules, conferences, webinars, etc.) offered by the CQJDC.

In closing, we would like to extend our warm thanks to Nancy Gaudreau, to Line Massé and to the entire editorial team for their excellent work in coordinating this special issue, plus a special thanks to all the authors for their valued contributions.

You are about to embark upon reading one of the most fascinating and relevant editions of *La Foucade* to date !

Good reading ! ■

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## A Quick Word from the Course Director Nancy Gaudreau<sup>1</sup>



Université Laval is proud to partner with the CQJDC (*Comité québécois pour les jeunes en difficultés*) in its mission to foster well-being for youth living with social-emotional and behavioural difficulties and to enhance the quality of the educational services offered to them. As part of the course development process for our open-access online training initiative (Massive Open Online Course, MOOC), *Université Laval* teamed up with the CQJDC to put this special issue of *La Foucade* together. As a result, the issue serves as assigned reading material for the course entitled *The Self-Determined IEP : Supporting Success for Students with Behavioural Difficulties and Social Maladjustments*.

This MOOC was designed to respond more specifically to the needs of education professionals working with students that present with social-emotional and behavioural difficulties and who find themselves in need of an IEP. Led by *Université Laval's* Faculty of Education, this training initiative is the product of a collaborative effort using expert contributions from professors and research assistants at Université Laval, Université du Québec à Trois Rivières, Université de Sherbrooke, Université du Québec à Montréal, and Université de Montréal, along with expertise from specialists and experienced staff at the following School Service Centres : La Capitale, L'Estuaire, Pays-des-Bluets and École St-François.

Comprised of six training modules, the MOOC has three general instructional aims concerning the optimal use of self-determined IEPs, those being to :

- 1) Help participants fully grasp the set-up and design process.
- 2) Promote active participation for all involved parties.
- 3) Explore a range of tools to implement an IEP using self-determination.

Each module utilizes several instructional approaches and content-acquisition strategies (e.g. trivia games, video capsules, activities, consolidation and assessment exercises) while also providing discussion forums for participants to share ideas freely amongst themselves. All of the recommended course reading can be found right here in this special issue. To register for the MOOC or to learn more about it, you can visit Université Laval's MOOC website.

In closing, on behalf of the entire MOOC development committee, I would like to thank those who contributed to this special issue as authors and express my gratitude to the CQJDC for undertaking this wonderful joint project with us. ■

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## Building Constructive Partnerships with Parents for Successful IEP Outcomes

Line Massé<sup>1</sup>, Jeanne Chouinard<sup>2</sup>, Nancy Gaudreau<sup>3</sup> and Marie-Pier Guimont<sup>4</sup>

Several studies have highlighted how powerful parental involvement can be when it comes to student success, and even more so when an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is in place. Parents act not only as a child's advocates education agents throughout their schooling but are also the most stable presence to accompany the child through life.

Parental involvement has been quite notably associated with greater student retention and perseverance, with higher academic aspirations, with greater homework completion rates, with better social-emotional development, with fewer behavioural transgressions, and with more positive overall attitudes towards school as a whole (Desbiens et al., 2020).

When drawing up an IEP, parents appear to be best placed to defend their child's interests; moreover, their inclusion in the IEP meeting process helps everyone to see the child as a "whole" individual (Hebel & Persitz, 2014). Furthermore, parental involvement in IEPs has been linked to higher chances of achieving IEP targets and to increased student engagement (Sebastian et al., 2017). Conversely, a lack of parental involvement has been shown to have an adverse impact on an IEP's potential to effect the desired change (Níbhroin, 2020).

After a quick look at some of the challenges faced by parents concerning their involvement in their child's schooling, we will then offer up some professional tips on how to build constructive partnerships with parents.

### Challenges Parents Face

Being confronted with executive function deficits - and more specifically with emotional and behavioural self-regulation issues - can make the daily school routine and homework routine quite arduous and exasperating, boosting tensions in the



day-to-day family setting (Mautone et al., 2014). The situation worsens when a child also presents with learning difficulties.

Many parents of children presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) report that relationships with school personnel can be somewhat taxing, as teachers often submit complaints about their child's behaviours. Several factors would seem to adversely impact parental involvement in the child's school life (Bélanger & Saint-Pierre, 2019; Gwerman-Jones et al., 2015), and those would be:

- not listening to a parent's perspectives on their own child and/or non-acknowledgement of their position as an expert on their child's reality;
- a lack of awareness of certain behavioural profiles and even different forms of prejudice towards them;
- the fact that parents are only contacted when something goes wrong, never for positive reasons;
- assigning blame based on the parenting approach;
- general indifference towards and ignorance as to religious beliefs and/or cultural standards.

Parents often get the impression that they are being accused of being bad parents or that they have caused the troublesome behaviours in their own child. In the case of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), some parents feel unduly pressured, by the school or its staff, to get their child diagnosed and medicated.

While parents ought to be treated as partners working in conjunction with school teams on any key decision-making, they do not feel they are being treated as equals at all (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013). Some parents report that this general sense of inequality or disparity - whether due to school staff touting themselves as irrefutable experts or simply due to common parental fears of being unqualified to give an opinion or unfairly judged - hinders relationships with school personnel and interferes with the prospects of cooperation. Similarly, some report feeling as though IEP decisions have been settled prior to the consensus meeting, before they have a chance at any input, or that their suggestions are simply brushed aside (Bélanger & Saint-Pierre, 2019; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013). As far as the IEP itself, while the majority of parents consider it necessary, they often find it a rather inhospitable process that doesn't do much to foster open communication and collaboration between parties (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013).

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## Keeping Parents Informed

Regular interaction with parents is a critical success factor in securing their involvement in the child's educational endeavours. Various school-related topics can be broached as a means of interacting. Here are some ways you might alleviate some parental hardship and enhance school-family cooperation on IEPs.

### Explaining School Operating Standards

Start off the school year by enlightening parents and broaching key guidelines, such as behavioural requirements, performance expectations, program objectives, the ins and outs of classroom standards, typical homework assignments and at-home revision exercises, normal time investment on homework, tips to help children study well, best way to reach each other in case any issues arise, as well as any special accommodations and/or specialist services available to them either at or through the school (e.g. list of specialists, homework assistance programs, tutoring options). Positive connections made prior to any adverse incidents will greatly facilitate future interactions whenever a delicate situation arises.

### Progressive Reporting

Never wait for a situation to completely deteriorate before contacting parents. It's important to broach any challenges a child is facing at the first signs of any learning or behavioural struggles and to notify parents using the agreed-upon communication method (a note in their planner or agenda, an email, a phone call or an in-person meeting). Your messages should state a child's positive aspects (new skills, progress) and negative aspects (things to work on, difficulties), and include some possible solutions, when applicable. For the purpose of motivation and cooperation, it's crucial to also let parents know when their child is doing all right and things are going smoothly.

Communication **must** be a two-way street as parents' voices also need to be heard.

Many parents think twice about informing the school of their child's challenges for fear of their child being labelled or stigmatized (Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015).

We must encourage parents to share as much pertinent information as possible, reassuring them that, given the intimate nature of the parent-child relationship, their views and insights on their child will be seen as expertise. Teachers should be encouraging parents to contact them with an outline of their child's strengths, particular needs and any methods, tools or practices that have proven successful in the past.

In cases where formal assessments have been carried out, parents should be asked to share the findings and pass along any recommendations for educational accommodations. The full assessment reports should be sent to the relevant school specialists who can then deem which elements to share with the various teaching staff and how to best do so. It would be wise to ask parents to let teachers know when any significant events occur that could affect the child's mood or attitudes at school (e.g. a separation, a new sibling or a change in medication). If a teacher appears unwilling or reluctant, parents can always reach out to a third party (such as the school management team; a school psychologist, special educator, social worker or psycho-educator; or any other consultant they may have worked with in the past) to get help establishing a constructive dialogue with the teacher.

## Encouraging Parental Involvement in the Child's Education

Parental involvement in a child's education comprises several different processes or actions that support educational success and/or personal development (Mautone et al., 2014).

### Explicitly Valuing Education

Educators and school teams might want to point out how strongly a parent's attitudes towards schools or towards education can inadvertently influence a child's. When a child feels that their parents place value on schooling, it makes a difference. Here are some ways to do so:

- Parents can let their child know how important education and school success can be.
- Parents can inspire children to read and acquire knowledge.
- Parents can ask about what was taught or learned each day and enquire about homework assignments.
- Parents can check on progress and performance, and provide encouragement.

### Homework and Schoolwork Supervision

Parents sometimes erroneously believe that homework supervision requires them to be able to teach or explain concepts that children didn't fully grasp in class or that



they should be correcting the children's mistakes in their homework assignments. Teachers might do well to explain that the role is closer to that of a coach, supporter, motivator or facilitator – supplying a physical and psychological setting that is optimal for getting homework done.

### Parental Participation in School Life

Schools can foster parental participation in school life. Participation might be in the form of becoming a classroom volunteer or joining the class to help supervise on excursions. Parents whose children are known to have behavioural challenges report that this exact kind of involvement aids in developing closer ties with their children's teachers, as well as with other school staff members. Having closer ties

facilitates cooperation when a less-desirable situation arises (Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015).

### Fostering More Active Parental Roles Throughout the IEP Process

During IEP Consensus Meetings, parents sometimes wrongly get the impression that they have only a background role to play, limited solely to reporting on their child's home life or being told how their child performs at school – they are not aware that they have influence over how things are to be done or over the final decisions made. There are specific actions that can be undertaken in order to foster active parental participation and optimal parental engagement.

### Parental Readiness

When an IEP is first called for, teachers and staff can proceed by immediately providing parents with information as to its purpose, as to the specific steps and stages involved, as to a parent's role at each step along the way, as to who can be present during a Consensus Meeting, as well as to the various services that the school can potentially make available to support students with SEBD. Table 1 clearly summarizes ways in which parents might be involved in each step of an IEP.

### Constructive Communication

IEP meetings can be emotionally charged events. When children qualify as having SEBD, their parents feel judged for their parenting approaches and concerned

**Table 1**  
**A Roadmap for Parental Involvement in the IEP Phases**

Which IEP Phase ?	A Parent's To-Do List
Throughout all Phases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish and maintain open communication with all IEP parties</li> <li>Defend the child's right to receive educational services that meet his/her own specific needs</li> <li>Foster the child's self-determination skills</li> <li>Get involved - actively participate in the child's school setting and educational endeavours</li> </ul>
Formal Review Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observe and note down the child's difficulties and challenges</li> <li>Report any observed challenges to the teacher or School Principal</li> <li>Familiarize self with IEP processes and procedures</li> </ul>
Consulting and Needs Assessment Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read over the child's report cards, grades, homework and assessments to get a picture of the relevant strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>Monitor the child while engaging in a range of different activities in a range of different contexts, taking note of which situations they navigate well and when they require extra support or assistance</li> <li>Talk openly to the child about their strengths and challenges, as well as their interests, hopes and dreams, educational needs and overall school experience</li> <li>Note down any pertinent information on the child's past experiences or background which may help the other parties to better understand the child's current challenges</li> <li>Build a profile of the child</li> <li>Share all relevant information with the person in charge of data gathering for the child's file</li> <li>When there is a current or previous IEP in circulation, read it over carefully ; ask yourself how pertinent the various methods were and whether the desired targets were met</li> <li>Think over the kind of progress we want to make, what targets to set, which methods to try and what solutions to propose for the child's IEP ; then try to prioritize them</li> </ul>
Consensus Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare any IEP-related questions in advance ; concerning the child's particular circumstances and/or services available through the school</li> <li>Advise the IEP Team if a trusted third party will be joining you at the meeting (relative, association, etc.)</li> <li>Share any new information on the child that perhaps wasn't shared during the prior phases</li> <li>Suggest things that could be done at home to help the child work towards the targets we're choosing</li> <li>Take a pro-active role in discussing solutions and in making decisions about the child's priorities, needs, targets and methods</li> </ul>
Implementation Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up all the necessary IEP methods and tools at home</li> <li>Encourage the child to try out a couple of methods from the IEP and note how they pan out</li> <li>If needed, set up an incentive system (using a daily tracking system) as a means to motivate the child in working towards the designated IEP Targets</li> <li>Check in with the child to see how they like the new methods and measures that are in place both at home and at school</li> <li>Work cooperatively and communicate regularly with the education team to share and discuss progress, problems encountered and the effectiveness of different methods used</li> </ul>

Source : Massé & Gaudreau (2021).

that their children are seen solely for their problematic facets (Bélanger & St-Pierre, 2019). Some even find that education professionals use too much unfamiliar terminology or incomprehensible jargon and they don't dare interrupt to ask a professional to reframe, rephrase or clarify the wording (Cioè-Peña, 2020). Education professionals should aim to use plain language when talking to parents about students. Lastly, when a parent's mastery of French is lacking and hence presents a barrier to their involvement and participation, an interpreter would be ideal – whether professionally trained or just someone from their entourage who can facilitate interactions between parties (Cioè-Peña, 2020). Inset 1 contains strategies to foster cooperative and communicative relationships with parents during IEP conversations.

### Timely Intervals for IEP Follow-Up

Parents often mention there is minimal communication and very few updates from the school side beyond the IEP Consensus Meeting (Ní Bhroin & King, 2020 ; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013). Better parental involvement can generally be fostered by reporting more regularly to parents, helping parents track student progress, and giving supportive tips on how to implement strategies at home.

### Closing Remarks

For parents to be more active in their children's educational endeavours, they must know and understand their parental duties, rights, and responsibilities pertaining

### Inset 1 Strategies to Foster a Cooperative and Communicative Relationship with Parents

- Emphasize how crucial the parent's role is to successful IEP design and implementation.
- Ask parents to share impressions on their child's current situation, e.g. get their take on the most high-priority needs and have them suggest a few strategies that might help.
- Use positive wording ; talk up the child's strong points and good deeds so you don't focus solely on the struggles, failures and challenges.
- Use simple language, avoiding technical terms
- Probe to be sure that parents have a full grasp of the child's situation as well as the proposed initiatives, measures and tools to use.
- Use active listening techniques with parents.
- Don't play the blame game.
- Show compassion with parents : Acknowledge that having negative emotions is valid, allow plenty of time to formulate their thoughts, keep bringing focus back to the child's needs.

to such matters (Fédération de comité de parents du Québec<sup>6</sup>, 2020). The "I have my IEP!" tool kit contains a handy document on this very topic (Massé et al., 2021).

A parent plays a fundamental role in a child's academic success, school life and well-being. Hence, gearing up for respectful and positive interactions with parents from the outset will certainly give each student a greater likelihood of success with respect to both SEBD and their overall schooling. According to Desbiens and colleagues (2020), the onus falls upon the school to account for diverse family cultures and structures and then to cultivate the proper conditions for productive rela-

tionships with parents – but above all, to never stop tending to those relationships all throughout the child's schooling. ■

**Keywords :** IEP teams, family-school collaboration, family-school partnerships, school cooperation, individualized education plan, parental involvement, educational involvement.

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6. In English, equates to Quebec Federation of Parents' Committees



## Fostering Student Self-Determination to Improve Achievement

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As teachers, it is our duty to “[...] instill a desire to learn into each student who has been entrusted to [us]” (Quebec Education Act, Article 22). The accomplishment of this duty can be very closely linked to the development of a student’s self-determination – a concept which is generally understood as an amalgam of knowledge, skillsets and beliefs that together aid us in making our own choices and decisions, setting and working towards our own goals, fulfilling our own needs – all freely of our own volition and without being told exactly what to think or do (e.g. by parents, teachers, friends) (Ryan & Deci, 2017). By fostering a students’ self-determination, teachers acknowledge that the students are capable decision-makers, that they are able to take charge and be (or become) independent – all of which encourages students to thrive and seek their full potential. Self-determination is hence a very powerful tool when it comes to successful educational outcomes. In this article, we will describe some self-determined behaviours and examine why they are essential building blocks to student self-determination at any age. Lastly, some concrete tips will be provided on how to support self-determination in students on a day-to-day basis.

### What Does Self-Determined Behaviour Resemble ?

Self-determined behaviour is when a person is able to plan future goals, to self-regulate and to act autonomously (Field et al., 1998). In addition, somebody using self-determined behaviours would demonstrate the following key characteristics (Wehmeyer et al., 2007) :



- 1. Makes sound choices and decisions.** based on own tastes, interests, capacity and preferences. Can decide after weighing pros and cons. Can effectively problem-solve and take responsibility for own actions. Understands consequences.
- 2. Sets goals, tracks goals and self-regulates to achieve them.** Is capable of self-observation, monitoring and self-control ; can set goals and assess whether they have been reached.
- 3. Believes in and defends themselves.** Promotes own interests, can stick up for self, knows that own abilities have value.
- 4. Has self-awareness and an internal locus of control.** Knows own strengths and weaknesses, and has developed some intrinsic personal motivation rather than just working to please others. Believes they have control over outcomes.

### Why Self-Determination ?

When it comes to successful school outcomes, everyone working in a school setting benefits from developing self-determined behaviours in students. In fact, self-determination has been proven to be a key factor in academic perseverance and in student retention. It would seem that the more self-determined behaviours a student adopts, the less likely they will skip school or wish to drop out altogether (Blanchard et al., 2004). Furthermore, it appears that students who exercise self-determination are more inclined to be proactive, take charge of their school life, and demonstrate resilience when facing obstacles (Field et al., 1998). Actively fostering self-determination can hence help students stay in school, have better attitudes towards school, as well as improve their future prospects.

The ability to employ self-determined behaviour tends to be influenced by three key factors : personal capacity, opportunities

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provided, and available support (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). Similarly, Field & Hoffman (2012) stated that self-determination can be facilitated or hampered by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Among them, educational practices and parental practices are the most influential with the greatest impact on a student's lived experience and on their belief in self-competence. Findings from a recent meta-analysis show how a teacher's classroom practices are comparatively stronger and more systematic predictors of self-determined motivational profiles in students (Bureau et al., 2022). In short, we can surmise that [teaching staff play a determining role in the prevalence of students achieving good levels of self-determination](#).

### How Do I Foster Self-Determination in Children ?

Generally speaking, by promoting self-determination you are helping students by satisfying the three fundamental psychological needs associated with self-determination. Those needs are: competence, connection and autonomy (Bureau et al., 2022). It is a teacher's job to supply opportunities for students to build self-knowledge and feel they have value, to solve problems and make choices, to make decisions and feel productive, to possess a sense of control over outcomes, to further and defend their own rights, to set goals and pursue them, and to develop a healthy inner dialogue (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

It is crucial to be aware that using self-determination in classrooms requires a paradigm shift in teaching practices: taking the dependent student model to a more independent one, the passive student role to a more active one (Bergeron, 2012). Switching paradigms necessarily involves substantial changes in attitudes, values and, inevitably, educational practices (Masciotra & Medzo, 2009). In reality, students develop self-determination in situations and settings where they feel safe and supported, where they can exercise independence and be accountable for their choices (Ryan & Deci, 2017). High-quality teacher-student relationships are hence formed, above all, by establishing a climate of trust and of emotional security. To achieve this, teachers must strive to earn students' trust and to show an interest in them as individuals (their particular interests, passions, hopes and dreams, etc.). Believing in students and in their ability to succeed is essential, especially given the fact that - when it comes to adopting self-determined behaviours - students are considerably impacted by the way

they are perceived by those who work in the school setting itself (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). Whilst leading a class, ideally teachers should act as more of a guide and facilitator, probing students to help them verbalise their own ideas, encouraging them to ask questions, and even explicitly modelling the desired behaviours. The following paragraphs outline concrete ways to build students' self-determination in day-to-day practice.

### Giving Students Opportunities to Make Choices and Decisions for Themselves

As a part of daily school life, students can be given more chances to make their own choices and decisions, in such ways as :

- Picking the order in which the day's or the lesson's activities will take place
- Choosing to work alone or in groups
- Giving input as to task length/duration
- Selecting what type of materials and tools to use for a task (e.g., computer)
- Dictating placement or location for a task (at desks, on floor, standing up)
- Task production format (written essay, video format)
- Choosing an appropriate restorative action after breaking rules

To aid students in appropriate and sound decision-making, teachers are encouraged to suggest some criteria to follow (e.g., effectiveness, efficiency, past experience, past successes and failures). Beyond this, students can be involved in setting new rules and designing new processes for the classroom and for tasks. In such cases, we need to remind students to justify their ideas and properly explain their proposals (e.g., why students need to raise their hands before speaking). As such, students find themselves more inclined to be accepting and to comply with rules that they have helped design, and whose purpose they fully understand.

### Building Self-Awareness

Various paths are available to aid students in recognizing their own strengths, challenges and personal tastes. Here are a few of the simpler ones to execute :

- Use a wide range of real-life learning and teaching strategies that lets students explore core content based on their own interests, tastes and preferences
- Mention each student's best qualities and special strengths
- For students with support needs, provide information in a suitably adapted format (e.g., a storybook, short video)

so that they can more easily understand their own specific profile, challenges, accommodation needs and strengths to leverage.

### Supporting Self-Regulation Skills and Developing Personal Autonomy

In order to become autonomous, students must learn to self-regulate. As such, teachers must guide them in formulating academic objectives and personal goals, in decision-making, in problem-solving and in developing a positive and healthy internal discourse. Here are some practical ways in which teachers can make that happen :

- Always set and communicate clear academic or learning objectives for all students
- Break modules or complex tasks down into manageable steps (e.g., a specific work plan)
- Ask students to set some of their own personal goals concerning exam performance, quality of production, or even just time management for a class period (e.g., I'll finish my text and check it over within the next hour)
- Aid students in setting realistic, achievable, suitably ambitious and measurable goals
- Leverage everyday situations (e.g., a scheduling conflict) to teach and model problem-solving skills
- Suggest a range of different calm-down techniques (e.g., breathing exercise, quiet spot)
- Increase student awareness as to the less desirable impact of their behaviour on both themselves and others
- Embed some self-observation, self-assessment and self-gratification exercises into lessons

### Fostering Self-Esteem and Generating a Sense of Self-Efficacy

On a daily basis, teachers can find ways to foster self-awareness and self-worth. Here are some ways to do so :

- Convince students that you fully believe in them and in their abilities
- Account for students' individual interests and skillsets when planning classroom activities and lessons
- Give truthful, encouraging and precise feedback on student work, effort and conduct, all on a frequent basis
- Show that you hold both collective and personal achievement in very high regard (and that it goes beyond classroom achievement)

- Assign tasks, roles and classroom duties that align with natural aptitudes and interests.

### Encouraging Self-Representation and Accountability

Self-determination also suggests a person defends their own ideas and their rights, advocates for themselves and their own ideas, and is accountable for their actions. In the school setting, there are plenty of ways teachers can provide opportunities to self-represent and be accountable. Here are a few of them :

- Design lessons wherein students can analyse, critique and express a point of view
- Welcome student insights and points of view
- For positive outcomes and achievements, ensure students recognize what led to their success (e.g. passing an exam because you invested time studying)
- Help distinguish luck from work ethic when it comes to results
- Try to have students reach out for help and formulate their needs themselves (to other school support staff) rather than act as a spokesperson

### Individual Education Plans : An Opportune Time for Self-Determination Skills

Using an approach that truly places the student at the heart of the education process, the implementation of an IEP is the perfect opportunity for any student to build independence, competency and a sense of belonging - in other words, to foster their self-determination. To carry this out, school staff need to assist students in recognizing and acknowledging their strengths and challenges, accompany them in making decisions, in gaining an awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and in setting self-determined goals for themselves. **Teachers must necessarily**

**engage in a self-reflective process to fully consider their own practices, attitudes and underlying values.** Student self-determination constitutes a long-term personal development target that should more often inform pedagogical practices and choices (Bergeron, 2012). In doing so, children will learn that they have control over outcomes in life and will learn to persevere despite obstacles, all of which builds foundations not only for success at school but also for later when they reach adulthood. ■



**Keywords :** self-determination, school-aged students, school teachers, IEPs, academic success, student retention.

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## How Education Professionals and Support Staff Can Support the Self-Determination of Students with Behavioral Difficulties

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At the time of initiating the IEP, school professional and support staff are usually already involved in one way or another in supporting students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Notwithstanding past practice, in order to now align closely with the “*I have my IEP!*” toolkit principles it could be deemed a valuable exercise to re-examine past strategies and refresh some practices in light of Self-Determination Theory.

In this article, we first look at the main foundations (theory, effects) behind the concept of self-determination. Then, we delve into ways to foster it by describing concrete steps that specialists and educators can take - either directly or indirectly - to support the child in question. Indirect support would include any support provided to the child’s teachers, parents or guardians, tutors, specialists and any other support staff (who are in direct contact with the student) to help them in accommodating the child’s specific learning or behavioural needs.

### Why Self-Determination Theory ?

When it comes to personal growth and development, seizing opportunities to fulfill a person’s basic psychological needs such as **autonomy, competence and connection** (also called relatedness or belonging) has been deemed a predominant factor in developing resilience (Ryan, 1995). Several studies have shown how crucial it is to satisfy those three core needs for healthy personal development and overall well-being to be achieved. Conversely, a failure to fulfill those very needs plays a substantial role in the incidence of psychopathology (Ryan, Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2016). Research has shown the influence of social contexts - in this case, the stakeholders in the student’s life - in facilitating his or her development.



In self-determination-based Individualized Education Plans, the emphasis is placed on figuring out which strategies and methods should be used to respond to a child’s need for **autonomy, competence and connection** as they go along on their very own journey to “transform” their own behaviours (refer to Table 1).

### Outcomes of Fostering / Neglecting the Fundamental Psychological Needs

A social milieu which fulfils (or neglects) a child’s fundamental psychological needs leads to the child developing behavioural response patterns - either engagement or disengagement - within the setting itself (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Therefore, in an educational setting where people are fulfilling a child’s need for **autonomy,**

**competence and connection,** the child will be more likely to engage. This can manifest on a cognitive level (more focus, sustained attention, staying on task, tackling harder items), an affective level (curiosity, connecting with learning material) and consequently on the behavioural level (perseverance, more active participation).

On the contrary, in an educational setting that neglects those same needs, the child will be more likely to disengage, which could manifest negatively on the cognitive level (boredom, minimal responses, picking simpler tasks), the affective level (agitation, discouragement) and the behavioural level (tardiness, avoidance). In other words, a student’s level of engagement or disengagement in their IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and in the desired behavioural change process is

**Table 1**  
Defining the Three Fundamental Needs

Fundamental Need	The Definition
Autonomy	the need to experience a sense of volition (e.g., to engage in a given activity by choice, voluntarily);
Competence	Feeling effective (e.g. feeling successful or capable of completing a task at school).
Connection (belonging ; relatedness)	A sense of closeness and reciprocal attention (e.g. high-quality interpersonal relationships).

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affected by the amount and type of support given (or not given) at school, and by implementing the right (or wrong) strategies that foster (or don't foster) personal development, skill acquisition, and better psychosocial adjustment.

### How to support the student's needs ?

While it may be easy enough to understand and seem like a logical path to follow, how exactly do we identify the fundamental psychological needs and then foster each concept in the field ?

#### Autonomy

In terms of **autonomy**, any support the child receives (via an adult's presence or direct action) needs to promote self-regulation skills or self-control within the child. This strikes an important contrast with both the idea of exercising control and of just letting go (i.e. total freedom) which can, respectively, thwart autonomy altogether or lead to acting as they please with no safety net. So, a child's autonomy is best nurtured by providing a structure or framework within which to self-regulate. Guided reflection is an excellent example of this, as one accompanies a student whilst problem-solving – requiring the child to brainstorm possible courses of action, think over the pros and cons of each, and make choices or decisions themselves.

#### Competence

In terms of **competence**, the social milieu plays a key role in its development, most notably through feedback given to the child as to their performance or level of functioning on given tasks (within the "I have my IEP!" program, that feedback is linked to a specific personal target in the Individualized Education Plan). Educational support staff should be highly aware of how positive and negative feedback impacts children. That is to say, that negative comments and feedback are linked to higher frustration levels concerning task competency development, as much for children and students at any level of studies, as for adults learning skills in the workplace (Fong et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Waterschoot et al. (2020)'s study findings suggest that cognitive-behavioural interventions that work on attentional bias mechanisms (meaning the ability to focus on the useful and relevant information as well as the positive aspects of the task or its performance) help regulate the feeling of competence

(self-efficacy) to lessen the negative emotional response to any critical feedback.

Beyond this, for interventions to enhance a child's sense of competency it is best to talk about competencies using a specific and measurable (SMART) objectives system. The very act of setting, striving to achieve, and reaching an objective has a high impact on a child's perception of competency and self-efficacy which, in turn, positively impacts performance further (see Locke & Latham, 2002): and what's more, it is commonly known that people who set objectives achieve better results than those who don't. Whether the goals being set are formal or informal in nature, it is equally important to ensure timely feedback is given with a positive impact; public recognition can lead to better skills and better performance in future (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

#### Connection

In terms of connection, it is essentially about forming positive bonds and having positive interactions with people, which can also generate further autonomy. Students must feel seen, recognized, respected – and see their surroundings in a positive light (which refers to the relationships developed with school personnel as well as classmates and other children at the school).

In contrast, an educational setting with a strict control ethos (such as punitive or coercive measures) that respects a child conditionally dependent upon their behaviour or that shows little-to-no empathy for their situation, jeopardizes their autonomy and self-regulation ability, with potential negative impacts on overall development (particularly for more vulnerable student populations, such as those with SEBD).

### Fostering student self-determination (one-on-one)

School specialists and support staff (SS) can directly aid students by walking them through the reflection process - in a range of ways - to identify their own needs with respect to **autonomy, competence and connection**. For instance, IEP can help a student to personally pinpoint what kind of support they might want or need from their teachers, from an academic, behavioural, or relational standpoint. IEP can also help students pick self-regulation methods to employ – or help them learn how to receive positive feedback and compliments as it can prove challenging to accept a positive outlook on oneself when a negative self-perception has been in play for so long (based on past experience), even when it comes from an outside viewpoint – and particularly so when there are underlying insecurities and attachment issues.

SS can help a student identify their own strengths and skills, plus look at how to leverage those and come up with attainable IEP Targets (within their zone of proximal development) and then support the student daily in working towards them. Lastly, IEP can help a child pinpoint which relationships are positive and good to maintain – ones that spark, drive or galvanize positive outcomes.

### Encouraging student self-determination indirectly, but supporting others skateholders practices

Given their day-to-day proximity to students, teachers play a crucial role in self-determination outcomes for Individualized Education Plans. In light of this, IEP can empower teachers to use practices that promote student self-determination,



but also by talking over their on-the-job experiences, how to set personal boundaries and attain work-life balance (e.g. avoid stress or burnout from handling behavioural transgressions).

For best classroom practices, observation sessions might be a good place to start, followed by a discussion with the teacher on which observable behaviours can foster children’s self-determination. For this, Ahamadi et al. (2022) suggest using a standard grid which categorizes teacher classroom strategies according to the three fundamental psychological needs (refer to Table 2).

On a broader scale, in an advisory role with school management, IEP can influence decisions on how student cases are handled. Perhaps when writing up a behavioural code (or updating one) is the perfect opportunity to discuss which support and encouragement methods the school will adopt to promote student self-determination. As it happens, some of the most popular strategies that schools



**Table 2**  
**A sample of behaviours that foster or hamper a child’s self-determination (inspired by Ahamadi et al., 2022).**

Teacher Behaviours	Typical Teacher Wording	Effect on Child’s Self-Determination
<b>The Need for Autonomy</b>		
Lets students make choices (embeds opportunities for child-directed class activities)	“You can pick whether you work alone or with a partner on this one.”	Gives child a chance to adjust tasks to their personal preferences and capacity.
Designs lessons that preclude involvement for certain students (e.g. some students have nothing to do at a given time).	“When you’re done, just wait patiently in silence until the others finish up.”	Impedes child from engaging productively (should they so desire).
<b>The Need for Competence</b>		
Sets optimal challenge levels (simplifies task or adds complexity when kids are struggling or seem bored)	“Most of you can start at the beginning with Question 1. For anyone who got 100% on the homework assignment however, you can just skip ahead and start from Number 13.”	Means child works at the right challenge level for their current skillset.
Uses labels which limit a student’s potential to overcome obstacles (e.g. categorizing a child based on a physical trait or difficulty).	“You’re too short.” “Math isn’t your strong point.” “You’re too hyper for that.”	Erroneously leads child to believe that they cannot learn at all nor overcome a difficulty due to inherent immovable traits (e.g. genetics).
<b>The Need for Connection</b>		
Promote cooperation (e.g. assigning project or group work within the students’ ability range).	“Let’s work together as a group to solve this one.”	Teaches child to pursue group goals and see group progress, but also individual contributions as there is a potential for individual feedback.
Unfairly reprimands (e.g. making snap judgments on children’s behaviour with no proof).	“Paul, you’re obviously the one disrupting James. Your name is going up on the board now.”	Breeds grudges and competitive vibes as students perceive “rules” and standards as unreliable benchmarks.

**Table 3**

**A sample of helpful and unhelpful approaches per self-determination (SD) need intended for use by school specialists and educational support staff**

Fundamental Need	Unhelpful Approaches / Hinders SD	Helpful Approaches / Supports SD
<b>Autonomy</b>	Standardized consequences. (e.g. set or pre-established consequences wherein a child passively incurs a pre-determined decision, such as detention or writing out sentences)	Using a problem-solving approach to foster the child's thought processes. (e.g. child has to think over consequences of own actions and find a way to make up for it or repair the damage done)
<b>Competence</b>	Reliance on criticism or guilt to handle misbehaviour or disruptions. Emphasizing failure and problem areas over effort and progress. Setting expectations too low. (e.g. lack of educational support provided to help child learn expected skills ; not accounting for child's challenges).	Reframing situations positively. Leveraging child's strengths and abilities to overcome challenges and find ways to fulfill needs. Calling attention to progress made and setting realistic objectives. Exercising social persuasion and showing belief in student's ability. (e.g. provide necessary background support to develop child's skills).
<b>Connection</b>	Using various forms of exclusion or restriction wherein the child misses out on opportunities to learn, participate positively and make progress. (e.g. relying on the pretext of not deserving to participate or not being capable of behaving, excluding child from group activities, outings, parties...)	Fostering a child's social-emotional skill development. Designing opportunities for pro-social contact via productive peer-work. Using differentiation measures to support the child's social inclusion and participation in activities. (e.g. offer more structure (autonomy) or a form of accompaniment)

employ are actually counterproductive to fulfilling a child's need for autonomy, competence and connection when experiencing SEBD. Punitive action which does not allow the child to develop any competency, nor make reparations to rectify relationships, is typically more detrimental to student engagement.

Le Table 3 provides examples and counter-examples to illustrate how IEP can help foster self-determination with respect to student conduct matters when advising and coaching both school management and teaching staff.

### Closing Remarks

Some people wrongly believe that self-determination develops when a child is just told to make their own decisions and then

live with the consequences. As one principal so aptly put it: "A child doesn't develop self-determination if left alone with no structure at all, but rather when the structure is designed in such a way for the child to grow and flourish gradually within it." Opting to design Individualized Education Plans that rely on self-determination is an excellent opportunity to reconsider and reassess current practices used with children experiencing SEBD in light of the three fundamental psychological needs. Either way, it would prove necessary to look carefully over which elements of current practice can impede, and hence be altered, to fulfill a child's need for **autonomy, competence and connection** in order to mobilize the students to adopt more advantageous behaviours for themselves. ■

**Keywords:** self-determination, autonomy, sense of self-efficacy, perceived competence, sense of belonging, connection, full potential

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## Preventing the Onset and Maintenance of Problematic Behaviours at the Classroom Level : A Prelude to IEP Implementation

Nancy Gaudreau<sup>1</sup> and Nadine Fortin<sup>2</sup>

When students exhibit adjustment difficulties in the classroom setting - presenting as disruptive behaviours - active intervention is necessary to restore balance within the learning environment. When it occurs, some teachers may respond **reactively** to disruptive behaviour (without exploring root causes) in the hopes of quickly putting an end to undesirable conduct. Others will respond **proactively** (taking time to both analyze the situation and reflect upon its likely causes) so as to put preventative measures in place.

When disruptive conduct persists, teachers flag the issue to a school principal or specialist so that an IEP can be put in place to help the student. However, prior to setting up an IEP, it is crucial to first take a closer look at the effectiveness of classroom management techniques and to find out which universal intervention practices are already in use. This can be done in one of two ways: through a teacher self-assessment questionnaire; or via third-party observation of teacher practices (by one or two peers or a specialist) followed by a meeting to share and discuss each person's findings. This type of investigation would need to assess resource and tool management, expectation setting, the quality of teacher-student relationships, student attention and engagement, as well as the handling of classroom misconduct, knowing that every element of classroom management has an influence on student behaviour (Gaudreau, 2017). Often times, simple adjustments can suffice to put a stop to disruptive behaviour and to have a positive impact on the classroom setting overall.

### Managing Resources and Tools

Proper oversight of resources - such as time, space and materials - is at the heart of good classroom management. For instance, when students are given too much time to complete a task, they may become distracted or disruptive to others. On the other hand, offering too little time



may stress certain students, leading to agitation or feelings of anxiety. The environment must be predictable (e.g. with a schedule set and adhered to) in a well-laid-out space (i.e. organized with inclusivity and optimal participation in mind) so that all students can actively engage in the assigned tasks. Furthermore, teachers must move throughout the classroom, providing students with supervision and frequent feedback as they go. Certain resource-management strategies have been shown to be counterproductive and can even exacerbate students' behavioural problems. Here are some examples of what *not* to do :

- Seating students behind a partition in a corner of the classroom can make them feel excluded or simply reduce participation in learning activities.
- Giving students too many items to juggle (gear, documents, folders) without imparting relevant organizational strategies can lead to wasting valuable learning time, missing materials or just feeling "lost".
- Teachers staying in the same spot (e.g. at their desk) can lead to unequal sup-

port, loss of connection and insufficient supervision being offered to those placed further away from the teacher.

- Neglecting to post the day's (or lesson's) schedule/plan/layout, bringing out anxiety in some students.

### Setting Clear Expectations

Some students behave inappropriately because they are uncertain about what to do or how to do it. To make expectations clear, teachers must put class rules in place that are both taught to and discussed with students, using explicit examples and counter examples to illustrate them (Matsumura et al., 2008). Next, they must establish routines and procedures for the classroom to operate smoothly and for the environment to feel predictable and safe. This inevitably leads to "alpha" commands which, by definition, are short, precise and direct (e.g. "Marc, put away your notebook") stating the expected behaviour in a reasonable timeframe. Contrary to popular belief, it is exceedingly difficult to establish clear expectations. It requires a constant high level of aware-

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ness as to how instructions are being formulated and a solid command of non-verbal communication cues. Here are some examples of common errors when trying to set clear expectations :

- Believing that students know what is expected and hence class rules aren't necessary.
- Giving lengthy instructions with no visual or gesticular support.
- Telling students what not to do (negative spin) rather than stating the desired positive behaviour (e.g. "Marc, stop wasting your time" instead of "Marc, get to work now").
- Using a conditional tense or optional framing to communicate a definite requirement (e.g. "Marc, you should get to work.").
- Asking an irrelevant question that you don't need an answer to (e.g. "Marc, what are you doing?" instead of asking him to get to work).
- Failing to teach or show expected behaviours explicitly, assuming students understand the expected conduct.
- Reprimanding students for inappropriate behaviour without first considering whether you conveyed expectations clearly enough.
- Lacking consistency and coherency in your application of the rules.

## Fostering Quality Relationships

Students must feel comfortable and as though they are in a "safe space" in order to engage in the learning process. For this to occur, they need to feel like a welcome member of their class or group, most notably from their teacher's perspective. Through their actions and words, teachers serve as important social role models for students by promoting school social values (Hallett & Hallett, 2016). Moreover, research shows that the more positively a student views their relationship with their teacher, the more likely they are to behave well in class and engage in learning (e.g. Danielsen et al. 2010). Youth presenting with behavioural difficulties will often challenge the teacher-student relationship to such a degree that some teachers can develop an aversion toward them. When this occurs, we have observed that student behavioural issues are often exacerbated which can then, in turn, lead to academic disengagement, to a drop in grades and possibly even to school dropout (Doumen et al., 2008).

To develop and maintain quality relationships with students, first one needs to invest time in getting to know them, finding out about their interests and discovering their "uniqueness". This builds a solid foundation from which to adapt intervention practices. For students to persevere when experiencing difficulty, they must feel like their teacher believes they can succeed. They also need to be fully "seen": having a teacher recognise and engage positively with both their strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, even when a student's behaviour proves very challenging, teachers must unequivocally preserve the relationship with a focus on respect and kindness. In closing, here are some practices considered as likely to hinder relationships with students who are experiencing behavioural challenges :

- Expecting students to behave perfectly for long periods of time without intermittent validation. What may seem easy for some students could be challenging for those with behavioural difficulties. In order to persevere, SEBD students need their small achievements highlighted as they go.
- Seeing students' behaviours as personal attacks. Teachers must regulate emotions during challenging classroom situations. When a teacher feels hurt by a student's behaviour, they run the risk of reacting impulsively, thereby putting their relationship with the student in jeopardy.
- Labeling a student in a way that reduces them to their problem behaviour or their diagnosis. We have to keep in mind that students always have the power to change and that behaviour does not define people (while they are EXPERIENCING a problem, they are not THE problem).
- Belittling students through criticism or making hurtful remarks toward them.
- Routinely delegating the handling of student misconduct to other staff members (e.g. a special educator/remedial teacher) and hence delegating the relationship, thereby giving the student the impression of a general disinterest in them.

## Student Attention and Engagement in Learning Objectives

Student academic success grows by engaging in learning activities. To achieve this, teachers employ a wealth of strategies that rely on careful planning of both teaching and learning tasks. Teachers can use varied learning media, solicit active student participation, teach strategies

that foster independence, offer enrichment activities to avoid boredom and above all, ensure support for students experiencing difficulty (e.g. timely help from a teacher, referral to tutoring). Relatedly, Bernier's (2021) doctoral research illustrated that "receiving help from my teacher" was the teaching practice most frequently mentioned by students diagnosed with behavioural disorders as influencing their levels of engagement and wellbeing in class. Conversely, here are some more problematic practices found in some classrooms :

- Restricting student access to materials or tools under the assumption that they cannot use the tools correctly, thus making it harder to complete the activity or even engage with it at all (rather than taking the time to show how the tool is used).
- Excluding students from group activities on the premise that they will not be able to control themselves and participate appropriately (instead of modelling expected behaviour and giving a chance to develop the necessary skills).
- Giving instructions when students are either inattentive or unready to begin the activity. This sends mixed messages to students.
- Overlooking a student ; Not providing the help students require ; Giving up on them.

## Managing Misconduct in Classrooms

The last component of a teacher's classroom management practices which requires observation and reflexive analysis is the teacher's handling of disruptive behaviours. Teachers rely on a vast repertoire of effective strategies which are backed by research in the field. However, many teachers repeatedly apply the same strategies to address a diverse array of problems, without sufficient forethought as to root causes, as to frequency or as to the intensity of specific behaviours in specific cases. The most effective intervention practices will help students develop skills, whilst taking their specific abilities and underlying needs properly into account. For instance, teaching emotional regulation strategies to impulsive students or giving hyperactive students the chance to move around so they can stay seated for longer periods of time when necessary. Unfortunately, ineffective practices are still being used in many classrooms, in spite of their detrimental

effects on student learning, motivation and well-being (see Bernier et al., 2021 to learn more). Here are a few examples of what not to do :

- Believing that disciplinary measures and punishments will solve everything. Reprimanding students without teaching them a replacement behaviour or without giving them the chance to make reparations.
- Repeating the same intervention practice, even when it is clearly not working.
- Responding solely to behaviour as a momentary concern, while overlooking what precedes (antecedent) and follows it (consequence). A consequence can appear to be negative, yet be experienced positively from the student's perspective (e.g. removal from class).
- Pulling a student out of class before trying other accommodations first (e.g. adjusting time management, moving student elsewhere in classroom, clarifying instructions, offering extra help).
- Suspending students from school without first offering any at-home educational support and without explicitly assigning school work to complete, thus increasing learning delays and achievement gaps.



## Closing Remarks

Student behaviours are largely impacted by a teacher's class-management practices. It is therefore vital that sufficient time be taken to thoughtfully analyze any challenging behaviours, considering the context in which they occur. When observing students with behavioural difficulties in the classroom setting, class-management strategies are quite often found to be part of the problem and hence, in turn, also can be part of the solution to improving student conduct. Consequently, it is crucial to spend time adjusting certain elements of classroom management prior to drawing up an IEP. ■

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**Keywords :** classroom management, behavioural difficulties, teachers, individualized education plan, teaching practices, universal intervention practices.

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## Is an IEP Really Called For?

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An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is not always an inevitable requirement when it comes to cultivating well-being and academic success for school students presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Sometimes personal challenges prove transient or might be connected to a single event or set of circumstances. In such cases, some simple situational analysis can help pinpoint solutions to fix short-term concerns. For this reason, during the Formal Review Phase, specialists and educational support staff should experiment with a broad range of intervention techniques that could lead to improvements prior to diving straight into a full IEP process. Preliminary interventions can involve or be geared towards students, teachers and/or parents. Once these first steps have been taken, the qualified education professionals can then assist the school principal in determining whether or not an IEP is truly necessary.

### Meeting with Students One-on-One

Depending on the each context, location and the related requirements, education specialists may end up meeting directly with a student. The aim of such a meeting would be to better understand a student's lived experience, to compare student and educator perceptions, and then to explore solutions which might resolve the undesirable scenarios. To avoid duplication, the teacher should be asked if anyone else has already conducted this type of meeting prior to proceeding with it. Working in conjunction with other concerned parties, it would be important to talk over and decide who would be best placed to conduct the meeting (depending on the case specifics and the student needs). For the student to feel comfortable enough to open up, the interviewer should first bring up some positive elements (successes, best skills, good attitude, good behaviour)

before touching upon the problems and challenges. Fostering self-determination means working to establish a dialogue with the student – one that supports them in identifying and evaluating their own behaviours in order to generate solutions - rather than controlling the encounter by delivering a “descriptive” or “prescriptive” monologue.

### Developing a Shared Vision

Following this meeting, should a specialist staff member find that the student and educator perceptions greatly differ, it could prove beneficial to facilitate a mediation session involving both (or all) parties in

order to help them reach a consensus and come to a joint understanding of the problem itself.

### Observing Students Within Their Environment

To better comprehend how the student interacts with environmental factors which could be contributing to the onset or maintenance of the problematic behaviours reported, education specialists can carry out systematic observations of the student in their classroom setting, on the playground or in other school environments where they tend to spend time.



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## Meeting and Supporting the Teachers

When challenges persist, education specialists must first ensure that the teacher(s) has(have) properly implemented universal interventions (i.e. classroom management and educational practices) to address or prevent problematic behaviours, plus met with either the student or parents (or both) in an attempt to resolve the reported problem. If this has all been done, the specialist can then help the teacher in gaining a better understanding of the challenges the student is facing, in choosing which strategies align best with the student's needs (Nadeau et al., 2015), and in considering the teacher's own personal experience knowing that managing student behaviour can lead to stress and burnout (Knotek & Hylander, 2014). Professional support can be offered via a range of standard school-based consultation methods (Massé et al., 2021):

- **Short Consult:** Herein, a professional consultant offers information or advice through informal discussion with the teacher. This type of consultation often precedes all other types of support.
- **Private Consult:** Typically involves a more structured problem-solving approach, focusing either on indirect help for the student (via tracking) or direct help for teachers (to develop better classroom practices). It could include observation sessions, direct supervision of the chosen interventions, or simple training modules that fit a teacher's needs. Indirectly helping students generally means tracking behaviours that a teacher has deemed problematic, followed by a functional behaviour assessment which leads to an action plan (plus its development, implementation, follow up and evaluation) in order to modify the behaviours. When supporting the teacher in developing better practices, the emphasis is usually on either establishing universal interventions for positive classroom management or on developing students' social-emotional learning.
- **Conjoint Behavioural Consult:** Responds to SEBD students' needs by building strong family-school partnerships. Generally speaking, there are 4 steps:
  - 1) Collaboratively identifying the concern or targeted problem behaviour (teacher-parent-consultant);
  - 2) Jointly analysing the problem and picking interventions to put in place;
  - 3) Teachers and parents implement the interventions;



- 4) **Assessing intervention effectiveness together as a team.** Garbacz and colleagues (2017) argued that this type of intervention could precede any referrals to external partners, allowing teachers and parents to collaboratively gain an awareness of each other's core concerns, to select which interventions to prioritize and to monitor student progress.
- **Group Consulting:** Brings together various school team members (e.g. all of a student's teachers at high-school level) in order to jointly fathom scenarios that are challenging for the student with a view to resolve them. Steps are very similar to those of a conjoint consulting session.
  - **Teacher Support Team:** Usually offered by a multi-disciplinary team that is assembled based on needs identified by a teacher. A support team could include: the teacher who requested help; another teacher or specialist from the school (e.g. a resource teacher, occupational therapist, psycho-educator); support staff (such as a teacher's assistant or special education technician); a school principal or administrator; a parent or guardian; and even the student themselves (Trépanier & Paré, 2010). In some cases, outside specialists could be invited. During the Formal Review Phase, the focus would mainly be on identifying universal or preventative interventions to implement according to the reported needs.

A literature review of the various school consulting methods revealed that these consults lead to positive outcomes for

both students and teachers (Erchul & Sheridan, 2014). For SEBD students, the authors noted a considerable reduction in problematic behaviours as well as an improvement in both social integration and teacher-student relationships. Teachers saw an improvement in their practices, an increase in their sense of self-efficacy and a decrease in stress levels. More specifically, the Conjoint Behavioural Consult was linked to marked improvements in academic performance, in student social-emotional adjustment as well as in student-parent collaboration (Pfiffner et al., 2018).

## Meeting and Supporting the Parents

Education specialists and support staff can also meet with parents, much like they do with teachers and students, to gather further insight as to the difficulties their child is facing, as to potential contributing factors, and to envisage possible solutions together. If the challenges appear to be situational or linked to particular events, a specialist can offer a brief consult in order to help parents gain a better understanding of their child in the school setting, to identify potential courses of action, to supply resources that can support them in their role as parents, or to focus on their child's holistic development.

## Supporting the School Principal(s)

Education specialists and support staff can assist the school principal(s) by making certain that all proper preliminary steps have been completed prior to setting up an IEP (Gaudreau et al., 2021);

Lefebvre et al., 2021). They can share observations and their views, discuss the need for further or more in-depth assessment, as well as who would be best suited to carry it out. The multi-level reference framework (Nadeau et al., 2020) can be of great use to specialists, support staff and principals in structuring and planning out the services needed by both students and teachers before determining whether an IEP is in fact necessary.

## Closing Remarks

The Formal Review Phase is a preliminary step comprising a range of tasks and actions that serve to determine whether to move forward with an IEP or not. Education specialists and support staff may be involved in giving direct or indirect assistance to students and in working jointly with other relevant staff members or not, all depending on the needs of each case. Their core mandate is to help establish a shared vision and understanding of the student's circumstances by connecting with the student, teacher, parents and principal. As qualified professionals who can take a caring and objective stance with all parties, specialist support staff are an indispensable resource contributing to a student's success and wellbeing. ■



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**Keywords:** individualized intervention plan, IEP Formal Review phase, investigation, educational counselling, guidance, behavioural difficulties, teacher support, school specialists, education support staff.

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## The Formal Review Phase : A Crucial Step When Implementing an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Éric Morissette<sup>1</sup> and Véronique Cyr<sup>2</sup>

In Quebec schools, the school principal is charged with elaborating an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for any students living with disabilities, maladjustments and/or learning challenges (ÉHDAA). To that end, the school principal is responsible for all IEP-related decision-making and is expected to oversee IEP implementation (Québec et al., 2004). In addition, it is the principal's duty to ensure that all IEP contributors remain actively involved by assigning individual roles and responsibilities in order to foster the student's self-determination and make progress.

### Getting the Assistance and Support Process Off to a Good Start

The Formal Review Phase is the very first step in the IEP process where we begin mobilizing key players to help achieve concrete results and generate a significant improvement in student behaviour. It is worth underlining that the Formal Review Phase is the first official step in considering a student's case when ongoing challenges have been reported and is a step in which the school principal and the school management team are heavily involved. After reviewing some initial informal reports from teachers and educators who have suggested an IEP might be needed for a given student, the principal then gathers further information from anyone directly responsible for the child's education (i.e. parents and teachers) to conclude whether or not to move forward with the full IEP process. (Gaudreau, Duchaine et al., 2021).

In some cases, parents might even insist on an IEP. But ultimately, it is the principal and education professionals who determine whether an IEP is necessary and they may very well conclude that a student does not currently require one. The homeroom teacher, in conjunction with the school principal, must reassure parents by properly explaining any actions to be undertaken and the school's recommended

solutions, all naturally being centred upon pedagogical flexibility, educational accommodations, and positive disciplinary measures to suit their child.

### Taking on a Leadership Role

In management theory, the role of a school principal and school management would be deemed four-fold: Planning, Organizing, Leading and Controlling, otherwise known by the acronym P-O-L-C.

**P-O-L-C**  
Plan  
Organise  
Lead  
Control

Implementing an IEP - which gets underway with the Formal Review Phase - means planning out tasks for each IEP team member, including the parent(s) and the student themselves. This speaks to how important a school principal's role is as the head planner, organizer, meeting leader and quality controller for the child's IEP.

While planning, organizing and leading the Formal Review Phase, the school principal is given an opportunity to gain insight into the student's educational journey to date. Leading the IEP meeting is a shared task involving the principal, various staff members, parents, and of course the student - who is the core focal point of the

whole IEP. When behavioural changes are expected, student involvement is required in order that self-determination can ultimately lead to personal transformation and personal success. "An Individualized Education Plan is part of a dynamic support process that takes place for the benefit and with the participation of the student" (Québec Ministry of Education, 2004). Students are therefore expected to be actively involved throughout the entire IEP process during its implementation.

Involving students in correcting or modifying their own behaviour is essential when setting up an IEP ; this could be considered a major departure from current school practices. There is a reluctance by school principals to include the student, a lack of student involvement in designing the IEP itself, and a lack of student participation in its execution - all factors that need to be properly scrutinized and reformed to achieve a higher rate of effectiveness using such a core tool which can so heavily impact a child's educational success or failure. While it may be a mandatory task, the principal should voluntarily be seeking to build a strong sense of purpose and collaboration between all parties (family, staff and student) to encourage them to adopt the chosen educational means, methods and solutions.

By adeptly executing this first phase, the principal lays the necessary groundwork for the subsequent Consulting and Needs Assessment, Consensus, and Implementation Phases to come.



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## Influencing Educational Practices Through Strong Leadership

The quality of IEP implementation is impacted by a principal's leadership skills, particularly in the case of a student exhibiting behavioural difficulties. A well-run Formal Review Phase rallies school staff and enables school management to set an example by modelling desired intervention behaviours, while sharing their expectations and getting their views across to the entire IEP team.

To achieve this effectively, principals should base themselves, as leaders, on expertise specific to cases where students present with behavioural challenges. Principals should opt for the best supervisory and monitoring practices available when following up with IEP teams who are managing a child's behaviours in the field. Proper project management expertise promotes a greater sense of collective efficacy and gives teachers and educators confidence in the actions they undertake with these students (Murphy & Louis, 2018).

### Acting as a Facilitator

There are certain personal and professional qualities that IEP teams and parents both greatly appreciate in a principal. Taking on the role of mediator/facilitator and adopting a solution-oriented approach are two qualities that people value most.



With a positive attitude, a principal can question classroom practices, enquire about the various settings and ask for a list of any corrective measures tried to date. Principals should adopt a reflective and non-judgmental approach, making it clear the intent is to respond to the student's needs. This is an opportune time for school management to set up a working framework for the subsequent phases and overall IEP process.

Together, the IEP team assesses the student's situation, reviews the facts and considers which measures would be most pressing to put in place. This can be done perhaps even prior to the Consulting & Needs Assessment Phase where further data will be gathered via formal assessments and systematic observation by qualified professionals (e.g. a psycho-educator or psychologist). With the principal embracing an open, welcoming and approachable communication tone, the various professionals and educators will feel at ease and all parties present will feel reassured. The principal's mediation and facilitation practices should lead to an overall heightened awareness by everyone of the emotional and human aspects inherent to the IEP process in order to aid in dealing with this rather complex social situation. When interacting with educators or specialists who work closely with the student, the principal needs to remain alert to pick up on any cognitive distortions (such as self-serving bias or attribution bias). Adopting a cautious approach makes it possible, among other things, to emphasize the importance of self-determination in the student's IEP (Desautels, 2018 ; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

When driving a preliminary meeting, the principal's emotional intelligence is a key factor in handling the emotional responses that typically arise among attendees. As a facilitator, a principal must be mindful of everyone's feelings while at the same time adeptly quelling interpersonal tensions – all the while encouraging parents and other IEP parties to work cooperatively for the ultimate benefit of the student (Gendron & Lafortune, 2009).

### It's All About Teamwork

A principal cannot succeed alone. The student, parents and all other stakeholders need to be actively involved to achieve success. By delegating responsibilities, roles and tasks to different people, we aim to increase people's involvement throughout the process. By assigning joint responsibility, we are more likely to see improvement in student behaviour and have an effective and sustainable IEP.

In some schools, the higher demand for IEPs means a heavy workload and some principals end up delegating some of their duties, out of necessity, to a co-worker. For instance, a homeroom teacher might be asked to run an IEP meeting (perhaps jointly with a special educator, remedial teacher or psycho-educator) or be appointed to oversee some of the routine IEP follow-ups.

When it comes to a principal's expertise, the ability to facilitate meetings is an essential skill. Naturally, meeting facilitation skills will tend to prove most useful a bit later on in the IEP process, however it is best to think it over as early as the Formal Review Phase, so any training needs can be spotted (whether formal training, behaviour modelling or simply observation sessions). The principal has to be fully equipped to not only lead the meeting, but to use compassionate framing techniques to actively involve all parties present. Members of the education team or support services team can be valuable resources in developing this type of expertise.

Furthermore, knowing how to run a case-analysis meeting and being familiar with effective communication skills will contribute to the school principal's perceived self-efficacy (SE). It has been shown that a high sense of SE is a predictor of successful IEP meeting outcomes. A principal's sense of SE has been linked to an ability to lead school teams when handling more complex student cases. Such skills are greatly appreciated by the staff and teachers who, in turn, feel better surrounded (Bernier & Gaudreau, 2017).

### Coordinating IEP Implementation

Managing the Formal Review Phase requires a thorough understanding of the entire IEP process and an awareness of the various IEP tools which may be used for consulting and needs assessment and for Consensus Meeting facilitation, and which should be made available to support students, parents, teachers and other IEP stakeholders. To prepare effectively for a Formal Review, there are some important steps :

1. The teacher assesses the situation with help from the educational support services team.
2. The principal decides whether there is a need for an IEP.
3. If an IEP is deemed necessary, an IEP team is formed to ensure its effective management.
4. The principal assigns roles and responsibilities to each IEP team member.

Here are some key questions to ask at the analysis and reflection stage which can guide decision-making and the adoption of appropriate means and measures :

- Does student already have an IEP? If so, is continuing to work towards some of those objectives still pertinent?
- Has someone met with the parents to discuss the child's situation?
- Have other people in the student's life been consulted (in-house or outside specialists, extracurricular activities)?
- Have any specialists assessed the student or the situation?
- Has systematic observation been conducted for a clearer understanding of the student's behavioural dynamics?
- Did the teacher use effective teaching and classroom management strategies in terms of both academic and behavioural learning?
- Could the teacher's classroom management have contributed to the perpetuation or onset of any behavioural challenges observed?
- Did the principal and teacher(s) meet to review the educational practices employed or discuss methods already tried?
- Has the teacher been given any support or advice (from a specialist or the school services centre, etc.)?



## A Job Well Done and Worth Doing

A school principal (and management team) serves as a guiding force and as a unifying thread connecting the various interventions conducted and educational practices employed throughout a student's schooling. Over the years, and from one teacher or practitioner to another, a principal's ability to maintain effective communication and build productive relationships between the various IEP stakeholders is a crucial skill throughout its implementation.

Principals act as a source of knowledge and experience, providing guidance on how to best implement available resourc-

es and how to best achieve a student's designated IEP targets. A principal's soft skills will also contribute to increased cooperation between parties, to greater buy-in from everyone to better chances of successful learning and behavioural outcomes, and to more successful inclusion of the child (both at classroom and school level). A well-planned and well-run Formal Review Phase is an excellent forerunner to successful IEP implementation wherein the student must play an active - if not central - role in achieving personal targets by using the chosen means in conjunction with the adults who surround them. The child's presence is crucial throughout the

whole IEP process, even from the outset at the Formal Review Phase, which is significant in that it sets the whole IEP in motion. ■

**Keywords :** school principal, school management, leadership, educational facilitation, formal review phase, individualized education plan, IEP, students, children, self-determination.

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## Getting All Relevant School Parties Involved with Individualized Education Plans for Students with Behavioural Challenges

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Ms. Yolonda is an Elementary School Principal. Today, she is leading an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting concerning Marcus, a fifth-grader with severe behavioural difficulties. The meeting takes place while he's attending his English class, and she is pleased to learn from Marcus' homeroom teacher that he is a strong athlete and performs very well in both his physical education and English classes. This strikes a contrast with yesterday's meeting she had with the day-care supervisor who informed her that Marcus behaves in a very disruptive manner at lunchtime. Since those staff members weren't able to be present at the meeting, she wondered how she could incorporate them into the IEP development process. Ms. Yolonda strongly believes that they play a key role in the student's everyday school life.

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a key tool in planning and coordinating school services to meet the needs of students facing learning and behavioural challenges. However, as is sometimes the case with students and parents involved, some categories of school staff are very rarely included or even approached to be part of the IEP process. As an example, an online survey of 245 elementary and secondary physical education teachers in Quebec revealed that less than a third of them had taken part in an IEP meeting in the two years preceding the survey (Verret et al., 2019).

### The 'Missing' Communities

Among the most notable crowd missing from IEP meetings at the elementary school level are day-care personnel and specialist subject teachers (i.e. physical education, second languages, visual arts, music). In high school, it is more typically a host of different subject teachers, hall/lunch monitors, and extracurricular activity leaders.

These parties work closely with school students on a daily basis and often witness progress in settings beyond the classroom. Thus, in keeping with the ministerial guidelines on the principles guiding the establishment of IEPs (MEQ, 2004), these various school professionals' input could help gain a deeper understanding (using systemic analysis) of the student's overall assessment and bring out their strengths in various areas of development (MELS, 2004).

In addition, the establishment of IEPs is governed by various articles of law, in particular by the Education Act, that define the responsibilities of the various school staff and professionals. This law stipulates that teachers have the same duty towards students with disabilities or difficulties, as they would for all students under their responsibility. Among other things, they have a duty to further the education and personal development of each student entrusted to them (Gov. of Québec, 2019a, Article 22). With this in mind, it is fair to question the all-too-common exclusion of certain school staff when establishing IEPs. It is also relevant to think over the best way in which to include them; while remaining mindful of how their involvement can impact their daily professional lives.

### Tips on Getting More School Staff Participating

As a start, it could be helpful to simply gather everyone's viewpoints and then to let everyone know of the chosen IEP strat-

egies for each student. Although this is not yet standard practice, some schools have taken such initiative with promising results, which seems promising. For instance, some schools hold team meetings, typically led by school management or a key resource person such as a special educator, to present IEPs to all those who are closely involved in the student's educational trajectory. Although these initiatives are certainly exemplary, we have to consider that some school staff might be working with a very high caseload on a weekly basis - in some cases more than 350 students. It would therefore be unrealistic to expect them to be at an IEP meeting for every single case.

More specifically, a wider range of school staff members could be called upon to participate in meetings, at the principal's request, particularly when students are experiencing substantial difficulties or, perhaps when that staff member's very presence could significantly impact progress for a given child. All this leads to higher-quality information, broader applications and more collaborative solutions. For instance, a day-care supervisor could attend IEP meetings so as to disseminate relevant information to their staff.

They could perhaps just as easily gather useful information from co-workers to bring along to the IEP meeting and subsequently ensure the measures are properly implemented in the day-care setting so students can work on their targets outside of the classroom as well.



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Table 1 lists actions to undertake along with practical examples on how to involve other parties as the IEP unfolds. This supports student growth and development throughout each IEP phase.

As suggested in Table 1, one can draw on expertise from different IEP parties by consulting with them prior to IEP meetings and to cover the following aspects :

- 1) Accounting for a child's strengths, skills and needs from their own perspectives.
- 2) Noting which strategies they are prepared to use with the student.

This allows their feedback to be factored into IEP meetings and suitable methods can be assigned for implementation within each person's context. After the meeting, following up with each party allows them to play an active role in the Implementation Phase and to work coherently with the other members of the education team.

### Closing Remarks

In closing, although there are limitations in the level of involvement each party can take on throughout the IEP process, it is to the school administrators' advantage to work more often with them during select phases of the IEP process. This is especially relevant when the student has adjustment challenges or special needs that align with someone's particular skillsets. Staff members' skilled perspectives can be incredibly valuable in getting a more accurate picture and in recommending the most appropriate resources for the student's skillsets and needs. ■

**Table 1**

### Suggested actions, tools and examples on how to further involve other teachers, school staff and educators in IEPs

Actions to Undertake	Examples
<b>All phases</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up and maintain communication channels with the student's parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Send the parents videos of their child successfully accomplishing tasks</li> </ul>
<b>Investigation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employ proven universal practices</li> <li>Establish and maintain a positive environment</li> <li>Ask school specialists for recommendations on which measures to adopt for specific difficulties you encounter with a student</li> <li>Request support and additional services to meet student's needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let the student stand up at back of class (behind classmates) while listening to instructions</li> <li>Set clear expectations with each student about behaviour</li> <li>Help foster positive relationships by bringing children together</li> <li>Boost student engagement by offering tasks with options and variations</li> <li>Implement strategies to prevent unruly behaviour (such as allowing a student to go change in locker rooms before peers)</li> </ul>
<b>Consulting &amp; Needs Assessment Phase</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In discussion with child, identify child's abilities and higher-priority issues</li> <li>Discuss student needs openly with them</li> <li>Together, identify some resources that can be used in the student's particular situation</li> <li>Go into the student's online file to add strengths and challenges to the list, hence further contributing to the student profile (when applicable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use a formal assessment checklist to observe and note down student's strengths in social, cognitive, emotional and motor skill scenarios</li> <li>Use a simple checklist tool with the student to pick which resources/methods they could employ on their own or best use with support of a staff member</li> <li>Have students consider which measures may be better suited to specialist subject classes (sport, music, etc.) or in an after-school care setting</li> </ul>
<b>Consensus Phase</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suggest personal targets you think should be included in student's IEP</li> <li>Familiarize yourself with the chosen methods, tools and measures to be adopted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult the progress tracker report drafted by the special education professional</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation Phase</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply the chosen methods, tools, etc.</li> <li>Document any particular interventions to help assess what's effective</li> <li>Communicate any progress to other IEP parties or to school management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fill out a progress tracker report yourself</li> <li>Open up discussions with other members of staff</li> </ul>

Inspired by Verret & Gaudreau (2021a, 2021b)

**Keywords :** behavioural difficulties, special education, school specialists, support staff, counsellors, individualized education plans, involvement, increased participation, specialist subject teachers, day-care workers, hall/lunch monitors

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## A Foray into Psychosocial Assessment and Functional Behaviour Assessment Processes in Support of the Individualized Education Plan

Jean-Yves Bégin<sup>1</sup>, Marie-France Nadeau<sup>2</sup> and Line Massé<sup>1</sup>

In the school setting, for students presenting with adjustment difficulties, especially ones that manifest behaviorally in the classroom, their chances of success in the school setting are all too often in jeopardy (Breslau et al., 2011). When this happens, trained education professionals undertake the task of thoroughly assessing a student's situation, so that interventions can be put in place to meet their learning and socialisation needs (Massé et al., 2020; Quebec Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2015; Myara, 2021; Woods-Groves & Hendrickson, 2012). Within educational settings, two types of behavioral assessments are typically performed: the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and the Psychosocial Assessment (PSA). In this article, we delve into some of the procedures associated with these two fundamental assessment types that often inform intervention plans and IEP design on the behavioural level.

### Functional Behaviour Assessment

Several studies show that mobilizing intervention practices based on an FBA leads to fewer behavioural issues and better school performance for students presenting with various challenges (Harrower et al., 2010; Hurl et al., 2016). Relying on the principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis (Cooper et al., 2020), Functional Assessment differs from Functional Analysis (the latter being somewhat more complex) in its reliance on observational data and on semi-structured interviews with the child's teachers. An FBA seeks to describe and understand triggers and underlying causes behind undesirable behaviours by considering factors that set off (known as predictors) or maintain (known as reinforcers) them (Betz et al., 2011; Steege et al., 2019). An FBA can highlight which individual (personal) factors and environmental (setting) factors act as a source or motivation for the investigated be-

### Distinctions between an FBA and a PSA

The FBA (Functional Behavior Assessment) tends to be performed in relation to a precise repeated undesirable behavioral pattern that has manifested (often daily or on a frequent basis) – it serves to identify predictors and triggers for the behavior, in order to then adjust prevention and intervention strategies employed by teachers and other school professionals. The FBA relies on observational data and semi-structured interviews to describe and understand the relationship between the undesirable behaviours and the environmental conditions under which they occur, and can later be incorporated and referenced within the PSA (Psychosocial Assessment) when initial interventions do not achieve the desired outcomes. The PSA tends to be performed when a child presents with a more persistent behavioral disorder. As far as assessments go, the procedural steps are more structured and involved, often requiring greater resources, time, and depth of investigation. It is typically used for school enrolment declarations, for medical files, and as a foundation for more complex IEPs and intervention plans. For students experiencing behavioral challenges, an FBA should be conducted and incorporated into any PSA.

haviours by characterizing how the child interacts with the setting, the teacher, and their classmates by attempting to clarify the purpose of such behaviors, otherwise known as “needs” or formally known as “functions” of behaviour.

### The SORC Model of Behaviour

The theoretical FBA framework discussed in this article is Nelson and Hayes's (1981) SORC (Stimulus-Organism-Response-Consequences) Model which, in turn, is a variant of the classic ABC (Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence) Model (Bijou et al., 1968). The SORC model also fits within a cognitive-behavioural approach but with the added advantage (over the classical approach) of accounting for the child's past experiences (learned) while the classical approach focuses solely on current environmental variables affecting observable behaviours.

In the SORC Model, stimuli (S) are events which precede the behavior and could influence its chance of surfacing. They are antecedents to the concerning behaviours and include both contributing/predisposing factors (distal stimuli) and precipitating factors (proximal stimuli or triggers). Contributing/Predisposing factors refer to latent or underlying conditions (e.g. student-teacher relationships, task types, previous frustrating experiences, a child's current lifestyle factors) that could predispose the child to adopt the specific

behavior. Let's consider Albert (a twelve-year-old sixth-grader) who had a troubling weekend with his father being hospitalised. As situations go, this could easily plunge any child into a psychological state that predisposes them to letting out or conveying those emotions in the form of an inappropriate behavior. Conversely, precipitating factors refer to a specific event or trigger occurring immediately prior to the concerning behavior and that acts as a catalyst - such as a sound, verbal instructions, or physical contact. For instance, young Albert, whose father is hospitalised (contributing/predisposing factor), accidentally gets hit in the face by a wayward ball at recess (precipitating factor) and punches (concerning behavior) the child who threw the ball.

Organismic variables (O) refer to a child's strengths and vulnerabilities, needs and motives. Herein the word “organism” comprises an entire set of thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and cognitions/beliefs/cognitive processes within the child at the time the behaviour presents itself. On the organismic level, Albert's emotions are already heightened and he feels persecuted as he thinks everyone is upset with him.

Response (R) refers to a child's observable undesirable behavior(s). In the above example, that means when Albert punched the child who threw the ball.

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Lastly, consequences (C) refer to any resulting stimuli, acts or events that follow the behaviour. In FBA terms, consequences of a child's behavior can be classified as positively reinforcing (such as attention, rewards, privileges, etc.) or negatively reinforcing (avoiding a difficult or unpleasant task, escaping punishment, etc.). Consequences reinforce inappropriate behaviours when they fulfill the child's deeper underlying need. In Albert's case, the consequences would equate to his classmates' responses, plus having an adult intervene and withdraw him from recess playtime when he really wasn't feeling in the mood to have fun.

Once all the components of the SORC Model have been duly identified, the final step in a FBA is to first try and grasp, and then describe, the relationship between the surrounding stimuli/factors (S-O-C) and the behavior itself. This consists of hypothesizing as to the role (function) the behavioural response (R) plays and the purpose behind it.

For starters, behaviours can be assigned two main purposes or functions: obtaining a positive result, or on the contrary, limiting or avoiding a negative result.

Stemming from these two main functions or purposes, Friend, Bursuk and Hutchinson (2014) describe eight secondary functions (or intentions) behind behaviors.

Table 1 has been adapted from the categories suggested by the aforementioned authors and rather shows nine secondary functions that can be pinpointed (Massé et al., 2020). In Albert's case, the hypothesis surrounding the function of his behaviour is that he acted out to express his negative emotions so that the nearby adults and classmates might notice that he is having a tough time with what's happening at home. When concerning behaviors persist after FBA interventions are applied (with unsatisfactory results), a trained professional would likely then proceed with a PSA as the next step.

## Psychosocial Assessment

Psychosocial Assessment (PSA) is a systematic and thorough process – it involves collecting both individual and environmental data on a behaviourally challenged student and then interpreting the interrelationships that occur between the person and the setting in order to submit a clinical opinion on the case in question. PSA can be conducted prior to drawing up an Individualized Education Plan and done

solely by a qualified member of a professional order (Office des Professions du Québec, 2021). The goal is to pinpoint the child's specific difficulties, skills, needs and available resources in order to then select the best possible path forward to help improve the child's social and overall functioning, their school experience and academic performance, and their quality of life. The person who conducts the assessment must provide a written or verbal report of their clinical findings to the various parties concerned (student, parents, teachers, etc.).

## Approaches

When it comes to the use of PSAs, this article is based on the developmental psychopathology approach (Letarte & Lapalme, 2018) that combines elements taken from eco-systemic, behavioural and cognitive-behavioural approaches. This multi-disciplinary approach does not

view a student's adjustment difficulties as problems occurring solely within the individual, but rather as the result of how an individual interacts with a given setting. Proponents of the approach assert that there are manifold causes and influences involved in a person's developmental journey, those being biogenetic, psychological, family-based, social, cultural and economic. According to this approach, numerous factors affect a person and constantly interact with each other throughout life. Their reciprocal influences can prove positive, serving hence as protective factors when facing adversity, or else these interactions can heighten the risk of or trigger the onset of adjustment issues. Therefore, psychosocial assessment seeks to understand why and how the students themselves and their surrounding settings contribute to fostering or hindering their developmental process.

## Formal Data Collection

**Table 1**  
**Secondary Functions of Disruptive Behaviour**

<b>Response to a Physical Urge or Need</b>
Child acts out in order to fulfil a physical urge (eat, sleep, needs space, etc.) or due to a basic physical need not being suitably met.
<b>Wanting/Seeking Sensory Stimulation</b>
Child acts out in order to receive sensory stimulation or positive sensory reinforcement.
<b>Self-Protection/Avoidance</b>
Child acts out when feeling vulnerable or else to avoid an unpleasant activity or outcome, by protecting self, escaping or finding a way to put an end to it.
<b>Wanting/Seeking Power or Control</b>
Child acts out in order to exercise control or power over an event or situation. The greater a child's developmental maturity delays, the more dispossessed of power they feel, subsequently feeling more vulnerable, and hence being more likely to seek any means of control over events and situations.
<b>Visibility or Recognition</b>
Child acts out in order to be noticed and benefit from attention.
<b>Belonging</b>
Child acts out in order to be included or feel accepted among peers or with a single peer.
<b>Need for Expression</b>
Child acts out in order to express feelings, thoughts or concerns, or to demonstrate an ability or knowledge.
<b>Gratification - Pleasure and Joy</b>
Child acts out in order to feel good, to experience pleasure, to receive positive reinforcement (tangible or intangible), to obtain preferred tangibles, or to be able to do an enjoyable activity.
<b>Justice or Vengeance</b>
Child acts out under the impression that some injustice (real or imagined) has occurred or that his/her rights have been denied, and for the purpose of demanding restitution or to retaliate through some form of vengeance.

Taken (and translated) from Massé et al. (2020).

The trained education professional carrying out the assessment must collect information to construct a working hypothesis concerning the issues the child is encountering. To properly structure and ensure the thoroughness of these information-gathering efforts, it is best, according to scientific literature, to use a concept mapping method which covers the main risk and protection factors which are typically associated with the child's issues (Pauzé, 2018). Those factors then become the focal point of the assessment process. One advantage of concept mapping, given the potential importance of all possible factors on child development and adjustment, is the low likelihood of omitting a determining factor or of neglecting any key facet of the child's reality. Once data collection and analysis are over, the concept map can serve a new purpose when sharing assessment results with different parties - as a way to show the many aspects that underwent careful consideration, the risk and protection factors that emerged and, hence, the recommended focus of upcoming interventions.

To obtain a comprehensive student profile, a multi-method, multi-respondent approach works best (McConaughy & Ritter, 2014; Sattler & Schaffer, 2014). A multi-method technique consists of combining a range of direct and indirect data collection methods. Direct methods could comprise a selection of different observation method or techniques such as observation of the child in a natural setting, analogue procedures or self-assessment. Indirect methods could comprise interviews (structured, semi-structured or otherwise) with the child or other parties; or else questionnaires, scales and normal-

ized screening tools; a review of existing student files and specialists' assessments (when pertinent); and a review of the child's school work (in class, homework, exams, tests, portfolios).

As for multi-respondent approaches, the idea is to collect information from various sources within the student's usual circles (parents, homeroom teacher, subject teachers, etc.). By using a multi-respondent approach - including a wider range of human input (child, teacher, parents, day-care staff, sports coaches, extracurricular activity monitors, social workers, and so on) - the predictive validity of the assessment increases and the risk of misinterpretation decreases (Sattler & Schaffer, 2014). Combining the many roles and contexts in which each respondent interacts with the student furnishes a multitude of perspectives and diverse information on the child. Triangulation of the many viewpoints allows for information to be compared and validated (De Los Reyes et al., 2015). In doing this, an assessor reaches the most informed, comprehensive and objective perspective possible in order to arrive at a well-considered and sound clinical hypothesis that can then help hone interventions and IEP targets with greater foresight.

### Presenting Assessment Findings

Once assessment findings have been drafted and prior to submitting reports through official channels, it is best to share findings with the primary parties involved (those being the student and parents). A post-assessment meeting must be held before the IEP meeting occurs. It can be a very delicate exercise and should be

carried out in accordance with the current disclosure-of-information regulations in effect and while adhering to the relevant professional code of ethics. A post-assessment meeting should aim to:

- 1) Present key findings.
- 2) Help student and parents properly understand all the information.
- 3) Allow students and parents to voice their concerns.
- 4) Outline potential measures to help resolve the issues of concern.

### Preparing for a Post-Assessment Meeting

An assessment report must be written up ahead of the meeting. Sufficient time should be allocated to go over the data and findings, and for the student and parents to respond, voice ideas and ask questions. At least one hour should be set aside to present the report itself and the findings, which would naturally have been boiled down into a clear synopsis beforehand with the most pertinent shareable points flagged. A venue should be chosen to properly safeguard confidentiality and to minimize the chance of interruptions. The presence of both (or all) parents at this meeting is recommended.

### Best Practices - Conducting Meetings

After warmly welcoming the student and parent(s), the person presenting the assessment findings would first reiterate its purpose, then go over the rules governing confidentiality of findings, and list the individuals who, due to their role or involvement with the student, will have access to the report in order to best support the student. The presenter should insist on the assessment's primary purpose being to gain a deeper understanding of a student's overall situation and surroundings, so that appropriate solutions can be found to meet individual needs and foster adjustment within the setting. A summary of assessment findings is then presented, focusing on the clinical assessment and the impact of those findings going forward.

This information should be presented as clearly as possible to avoid any ambiguity, focusing on the student's personal context. In order not to overwhelm or discourage the parent(s) and student, the presenter should include details of the child's educational challenges, without forgetting to make mention of their abilities, strengths, potential and other positive



elements. Parents often want to get to the root cause of their child's issues. Therefore, time should be taken to properly explain any such causes and to help parents overcome any misconceptions they may have. As the meeting progresses, a presenter must stop occasionally and ensure that both the student and parent(s) fully understand the content, plus take time to hear how they feel. In the case of a child with significant challenges, it is best to be prepared for negative reactions such as anxiety, denial, anger, or ambivalence. The presenter should use empathy to encourage attendees to openly engage and articulate their feelings. Once the findings have been covered, the presenter can broach potential ways to resolve some issues and give their own personal recommendations. Attendees should then have another opportunity to express their views or concerns. The next steps are then clarified, such as preparing for an IEP or an individualized service plan meeting to allocate support services and resources. A presenter might also suggest reading material for the student and parent(s) to gain a better understanding of the issues at play, or refer them on to additional support options.



## Closing Remarks

Fostering educational and social adjustment for behaviourally challenged students requires a sustained and coordinated effort on the part of all involved at the school level. To truly foster self-determination for these students – even more so when under an IEP – it is crucial to first clearly define the child's current

situation and surroundings by conducting a thorough and methodical assessment. This article describes two assessment methods – namely, the functional behavior assessment and the psychosocial assessment – which are recognized for their effectiveness in fostering the acquisition of behaviors conducive to success in school settings. Although they are distinct and complementary, the key take-away is the same: a desire to clearly discern a specific child's needs and serve as a foundational component of the Individualized Education Plan's Consulting and Needs Assessment

Phase, hence setting the student and the IEP up for successful outcomes. Via these two assessment methods, non-teaching professionals can contribute to the joint effort and teamwork surrounding an IEP. They do this by working for and with the student, the parent(s) and the school team who all, ultimately, hold valuable pieces of a puzzle that leads to better understanding the needs of a child from different perspectives – something a well-designed Individualized Education Plan so heavily depends on. ■

**Keywords:** behavioural difficulties, psychosocial assessment, functional assessment, specialists, schools, intervention, individualized education plan.

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# Running an Individualized Education Plan Meeting : Keeping Students at the Heart of the Matter

Nancy Gaudreau<sup>1</sup> and Nadine Fortin<sup>2</sup>

Several factors influence a student's development of self-determination. Among them, the educational practices embraced and adopted by teachers, other school staff and parents have an important influence on a student's educational experience and their notion of self-efficacy. With this in mind, they all have the power to significantly affect the role students play in designing their own Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and in motivating students to work together with members of the education team towards their joint goals.

It is with this idea in mind that this article describes different strategies for running an IEP meeting. These strategies (or "formats") aim for active student participation in IEP conversations and IEP decision-making, insofar as the IEP targets chosen as well as the best methods and means to achieve the intended goals.

## IEP Meetings : A Pivotal Moment

All phases in the IEP process provide the student with opportunities to develop self-determination. That said, the IEP meeting is really the ideal setting to show that every involved party believes in a student's ability to learn and succeed. This is the optimal time to foster student engagement in the change process. It is important to stress that even the smallest of changes can be as significant as big ones and that all students possess the necessary resources to bring about change (Ajmal & Rees, 2005). To achieve this, it is critical to foster an "intention" to change within the student : no commitment, no change !

The IEP meeting is a pivotal step in establishing an IEP as it allows all the parties involved to agree upon the student's needs and look at which measures, strategies and means would be required to achieve the chosen targets. However, to be effective and efficient, each party, including the student, must prepare ahead for the IEP meeting, even subsequent to

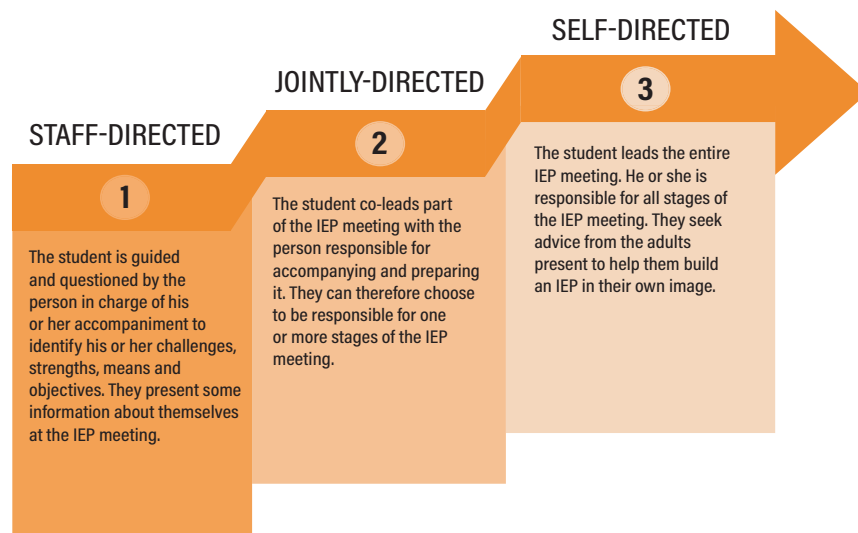


having individually contributed to the IEP Consulting and Needs Assessment Phase. This advance preparation often requires support from teachers and educators, especially in the case of first-time IEPs. In order to maximize a student's participation in this meeting, we first need to assess their current capacity for self-determination in order to then choose the appropriate IEP meeting format. This will encourage them to leverage, and even enhance, their ability to act with self-determination and to serve their own basic needs for autonomy, competence and connection (belonging).

## Degree of Student Self-Determination For IEP Setup

Three format options are on the table for running a meeting : a self-directed, jointly- directed or staff-directed IEP meeting (Mason et al., 2004) (see Figure 1). The degree of student empowerment and involvement may vary according to age, developmental stage, ability and motivation. Due to the fluctuating nature of child development from year to year, the IEP format best suited to the student needs should be revisited each year, accounting for their actual self-determination level at the time (Gaudreau, Duchaine et al., 2021).

Figure 1. Degrees of Student Empowerment and Involvement in the IEP meeting



Source : inspired by Mason et al., 2004, p. 19

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## The Staff-Directed IEP Meeting

Even when consulted and involved in the Consulting and Needs Assessment Phase, a student may not be sufficiently independent or confident to run their own IEP meeting. Note that this is not a question of age, but rather of development: there are elementary students who possess more self-determination than some high school students. In such cases, it is more appropriate to choose a staff-directed IEP meeting format.

On a more concrete level, that means the student will be present for the entire duration of the meeting led by a member of the school's education team (possibly by the school principal, a teacher, or a specialist). The person running the meeting will ensure the student plays a central and active role in the discussion by asking them questions and inviting them to share their point of view. The student will also help pick IEP Targets and choose the methods and means the student believes will help achieve results. To create this air of inclusion, the person running the meeting will always address the student first, then move to the parents, and lastly ask the school staff to complete each round of communication. Table 1 provides sample phrases and questions that may be addressed directly to the student as the meeting unfolds.

## The Jointly-Directed IEP Meeting

When a student has a decent grasp of the challenges they are facing at school and seems comfortable expressing themselves in front of adults in the school setting, a jointly-directed IEP meeting is recommended. This meeting format means the student co-leads the meeting with support from someone who works at the school and can select which parts of the meeting they wish to lead. Prior to the meeting, the student plans the IEP meeting layout in conjunction with the other person responsible for co-leading. For instance, the student might choose to perform the opening words to welcome and introduce those attending. The co-leader could then specify the purpose of the meeting and then prompt the student to present a profile of their abilities, strengths, challenges and needs (as per input gathered from all parties during the Consulting and Needs Assessment Phase), and alternating so on. For this kind of meeting, it is crucial to reassure the child that they are not "alone" and can rely on support from the education team members as needed.

Table 1

Roadmap for a Staff-Directed IEP Meeting (inspired by Gaudreau et al., 2021)

Meeting Stages	Sample Questions & Interactions with Student
<p><b>Welcome</b></p> <p>Aim : Put people at ease ; clarify purpose of meeting</p>	<p><i>Good morning/afternoon, Samuel ! We're all here today to discuss your educational options and look at support strategies together to reach your goals. To begin with, I'd like everyone to introduce themselves and talk about their role in your life so we know how they can help us out. Let's start with you then – tell us a little about your life (e.g. age, grade, school history, the people you live with, etc.).</i></p>
<p><b>Current Situation</b></p> <p>Aim : Provide context for student</p>	<p><i>So, Samuel...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What do you like about school ? What don't you like about school ?</i></li> <li>• <i>What are your grades like ? How do you feel about your grades ?</i></li> <li>• <i>How's school life overall ? Do you have a few friends ? Do you feel safe at school ?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Student Profile</b></p> <p>Aim : Create a full profile of student's abilities, challenges, strengths and needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What do you usually spend your free time doing ?</i></li> <li>• <i>What do you think you're pretty good at ? What things are kind of easy for you ? What are you proud of ?</i></li> <li>• <i>What things do you find more difficult or challenging ? What subjects or activities require a lot more effort ?</i></li> <li>• <i>What kinds of things bother you at school ?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Over the last few weeks (or days), I know you've spent some time with the support staff and your parents talking about your strengths (abilities) and challenges (difficulties). Can you tell us today about your greatest strengths and your best talents ? What about your challenges ? What do you think you'd want to work on and improve ?</i></p>
<p><b>Set Goals</b></p> <p>Aim : Pick targets to work towards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Of these challenges, which would be the most important to help you feel more successful at school and in your relationships with others ?</i></li> <li>• <i>If you imagine your school days going a bit better in a few weeks from now, what's different from now ? How are you acting ? What are you doing differently at home or school, etc. ?</i></li> <li>• <i>Can you name three things that you could try to do differently and that might get good results ?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>*Ask student to describe behaviours in detail as if describing a scene from a movie, or a little birdie watching from outside.</i></p>
<p><b>Choose Methods &amp; Means</b></p> <p>Aim : Decide how to achieve IEP Targets</p>	<p><i>Before today's meeting, you had the opportunity to talk with your parents, teachers and educators about different ways to achieve your targets.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Among the support strategies everyone's suggested, which ones seem most useful / efficient / adapted to your particular needs ?</i></li> <li>• <i>Among the support strategies that school staff and your parents are currently using, which ones do you want to keep going with ?</i></li> <li>• <i>What else could we do (or do differently) to help reach your targets ?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <p>Aim : Do a rundown of IEP highlights ; signing of IEP ; designate follow-up procedures ; thank participants</p>	<p><b>After presenting the IEP highlights</b></p> <p><i>Are you satisfied with how our meeting went today ? Do you feel confident in your ability to achieve the IEP targets ? Any questions for us ? Anything else to add to your IEP ?</i></p> <p><i>Thank you for participating actively in this meeting and I wish you success in achieving your goals.</i></p>

Source : inspirée de Gaudreau, Nadeau et al., 2021.

## The Self-Directed IEP Meeting

Certain students have been through the whole IEP process before and are very aware of how an IEP works and its purpose. Among these students, some will be able to run their own IEP meeting with some advance preparation and, in particular, by actively getting involved in the Consulting and Needs Assessment Phase. With support from someone who works at the school, these students can run the meeting themselves using a pre-established checklist as a guideline to follow whilst running it (see Bernier et al., 2021).

Following a typical IEP meeting workflow (as per Meeting Stages listed in Table 1), the student will first express a point of view on each item, then invite their parents and the other participants to chime in, taking turns. Throughout the meeting, a designated IEP team member will be responsible for noting down all pertinent points stemming from the discussions along the way, using the school's IEP form to get everything put on record.

## Closing Off - What Next ?

Once the IEP meeting is over, it is best to ensure that all participants feel engaged, committed and able to implement the IEP. If necessary, a member of the school team can reassure those involved that support and resources are available to help them, such as specialists, and so on. Then, communication and follow-up standards should be clarified and put in place to ensure regular communication between all relevant parties (e.g. daily or weekly interaction between the family and school). In this respect, it is critical to implement observation, assessment and communication measures that reflect the student's level of self-determination. For example, if the student has been able to self-direct their IEP meeting it would not be logical to use a behavior tracking form based on an evaluation of the student's behaviour by the homeroom teacher.

In this case, it would be more relevant to favour a behavior tracking form based on the student's self-assessment of their behaviour in class.

In Quebec schools at this time, it is common for IEP meetings to take place in the absence of students and to ignore their point of view. This significantly limits the school's ability to gain the commitment of these students in a process that encourages them and leads to their success. Let's remember that each student comes up with unique solutions to their problems based on their own unique story. We must therefore adapt to their reality and take an interest in their proposed solutions as these often prove to be the best solutions. Let's give them a chance to express themselves. ■



**Keywords:** individualized education plan, student participation, student involvement, running a meeting, self-determination.

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## Fundamental Practices in Individualized Education Plan Implementation

Charles Lefebvre<sup>1</sup>, Nancy Gaudreau<sup>2</sup> and Nadine Fortin<sup>3</sup>

In Quebec, section 96.14 of the Education Act requires that an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) be implemented for each and every student who has a disability, a learning difficulty or is experiencing social, emotional, or behavioural challenges (Gov. of Quebec, 2021a). IEPs are to be designed cooperatively involving parents, the student, school staff members and other parties (where appropriate, depending on a student's situation), and periodically reviewed. All parties are then expected to follow the chosen measures, strategies and methods documented within it. IEP design must comply with procedures and stipulations outlined in the relevant School Service Centre (SSC)'s or School Board's policy on educational service delivery for students with disabilities, learning difficulties and social maladjustments. In addition, in accordance with Articles 4 and 5 of the Basic School Regulation for Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Education, the SSC must set up a student assistance program aimed specifically at supporting such students in their academic journey and at seeking solutions to any challenges they may encounter (Gov. of Quebec, 2021b). This is where the IEP process really comes into play. In this respect, Article 29 of the Basic School Regulation stipulates that school staff must communicate at least once a month with any parents whose children have IEPs or parents whose children may not end up meeting the program requirements. While there is a legislative framework for IEP creation, implementation and assessment, how do we then acquaint ourselves with the optimal conditions and key practices that need to be put in place in order to keep the IEP functioning pro-actively and to encourage communication between the various parties involved?



### Putting Theory into Practice

We all know that the day-to-day reality of a school setting can sometimes make IEP implementation quite tough. There can be communication issues, a lack of cooperation and teamwork, various absences, the sheer diversity of behavioural and learning problems faced, the differing severity levels of those, school staff and parents experiencing feelings of despair, a child's anxiety or psychopathological responses to be handled, among others. Admittedly, to help students with socio-emotional and behavioural difficulties to be successful, the process of going through each of the many IEP steps, requirements and phases can sometimes feel arduous and be perceived negatively as a "compulsory" paperwork task. Rather, it should be viewed as a key intervention tool in a student's schooling journey, both in terms of academic learning and of a child's adjustment skills, and seen on a more holistic level.

### Adopting a Holistic Approach

The first priority is to get the whole school team on the same page, sharing the same holistic and systemic view of the IEP as a key tool used for the benefit of all parties - students, school staff, and parents alike. This can mean rethinking its use in daily school life, and to start placing the student and parents at the very heart of the

design and feedback process, rather than as mere subjects or outside observers. For this to happen, it is absolutely necessary to clearly define the various players' roles and responsibilities that will apply during the IEP Implementation Phase. Early on, decisions must be made on when and how - in a concrete and timely manner - the IEP's effectiveness will be assessed to ensure things are progressing according to plan.

### Effective Communication for Successful Partnerships

A second fundamental is fostering strong communication between parties. A number of studies show parental involvement as a protective factor when it comes to student perseverance (Weiss et al., 2006). To foster commitment and engagement, Constantino (2003) and Weiss et al. (2006) suggest that teachers engage in communication practices that facilitate healthy school-family cooperation. Teachers usually favour written communication; however, the effectiveness of this method in establishing relationships with parents is questionable (Deslandes & Royer, 1994). Deemed somewhat impersonal, written communication can even prove harder for parents to interpret or understand, especially for those with lower levels of education or reading difficulties.

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To get on board, parents need to feel directly involved in their children's school progress and social-emotional development. Communication with parents should therefore take on a "socio-educational dynamic" centred around the child's learning. (Favre, 2004). It is not enough to communicate with parents on a sporadic or random basis. Parents need to be included in school life and in the school system – which can be done by encouraging regular visits to the school, by sharing information on school activities, and by communicating with them at regular scheduled intervals (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 2011). School staff may need to change the way a parental role is perceived, seeing them as "equal partners" in their own right rather than just "receivers of partnering directives." (Kherroubi, 2008). A good way to achieve this is to implement "two-way" communication (Bouffard, 2008).

Good communication allows parents to be more involved in their child's schooling journey (Lueder, 2011). In real life, what does this mean? Typically, the teacher or education professional would inform the parents as to the methods used at school to support a child's emotional self-regulation, and suggest that the parent become involved in putting those methods into practice.

In two-way communication, methods are pre-discussed with parents, and depending on maturity levels, with the student as well (Lueder, 2011). According to Epstein (2011), two-way communication would lead to parents having a better grasp of the roles and tasks performed by school staff and others in their child's immediate circle and, consequently, lead to greater respect for the school setting on the part of parents.

### Progress Checks and Balances

A third fundamental element is the implementation of tracking systems and follow-ups to measure the perceived effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the chosen IEP methods and tools put in place. In some cases, adjustments may need to be made part-way through an IEP's Implementation Phase in order to achieve the agreed upon targets. To build a student's self-determination it is crucial that a student be consulted and take part in the necessary adjustments, since they are the focus of the whole process. Furthermore, close collaboration between teachers, support staff, other education professionals, parents and the principal, remains crucial throughout the entire Implementation Phase. It's also worth mentioning that external partners must also be part of the consensus process when they are partners in the student's IEP. Here are a few points for discussion or consideration

that could help to develop or adjust the IEP objectives during the Implementation Phase :

- Are the current IEP measures actually helping the student reach the learning targets?
- Are the IEP targets still realistic and attainable?
- Are the recommended actions and interventions happening, occurring and going as planned?
- Has the team encountered any difficulties? If so, how could we overcome them?
- Have all parties involved in the student's case, including those who were not present at the IEP meeting, been fully informed of all decisions and changes made during the Implementation Phase?
- Are parents regularly kept informed of their child's progress? What means of communication is being used?
- Is the student still aware of the IEP objectives to reach?
- How does the student view own progress in terms of the established targets?

This practice of reflecting on progress should be performed several times during the Implementation Phase to ensure targets are being met and, if necessary, to carry out suitable adjustments.



## Recording Progress

A fourth fundamental element is about logging any data collected during the Implementation Phase. School staff and parents need to be able to view the data that has been compiled on student progress in order to assess whether targets have been achieved and consider the effectiveness of the strategies chosen conjointly during the Consensus Phase. What resources have been effective at fostering student development? What observations can parents share on how the chosen methods have been implemented? What are the signs of student progress? What tools have been selected for tracking and data collection? A variety of record-keeping tools are available in schools and in the “I have my IEP!” kit (see Gaudreau et al., 2021).

## Closing Remarks

An IEP is an important tool for students experiencing behavioural difficulties. For it to succeed, all the adults in a student's entourage need to keep the child actively engaged, so that the chosen targets and strategies can be applied with consistency and have a transformative impact on the child's weaknesses or vulnerabilities. Efficient communication between the involved school staff members, an ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the pre-established strategies, and regularly scheduled communication with parents and students are all key recommendations to ensure that this tool achieves the intended results. It is also crucial to treat



parents as equals and encourage two-way communication, as it is essential to these students' personal development that the adults who are responsible for them all agree on a common course of action and work towards a common goal... that goal being a successful educational experience for the child. ■

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**Keywords:** individualized Education Plan, communication, collaborative practices, working together, IEP Implementation Phase.

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This MOOC discusses the implementation of a self-determined approach to Individualized Education Plans for school-aged students presenting with social, emotional, and behavioural challenges. It provides a platform aimed at increasing the involvement of all related parties throughout the entire IEP process. Over the course of the MOOC, attendees will better familiarize themselves with the many tools available in the “I have my IEP!” toolkit – all of which were built for this very purpose.

This MOOC was designed for anyone working in primary and secondary schooling establishments, such as teachers and educators, education professionals or specialists, school principals and management teams, as well as all manner of support staff. Anyone who so wishes can take advantage of this MOOC to set up an actual IEP as the course progresses through each IEP Phase, using the tools and methods shown.

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