Students With Behavioural Difficulties in Elementary School UNDERSTANDING, PREVENTION, ACTION

The number of young people with behavioural difficulties in Québec's elementary schools continues to rise. These students, who experience difficulties in their relationships with their peers and the adults in their lives, often turn to violence to express their emotions. How can schools better address the special needs of these individuals to improve their chances of success? This is the central issue of the brief that the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation released last February 15 in Sainte-Foy, at a conference held by the Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec: "Pour éclairer les routes du succès" [Shedding light on the paths to success].

Understanding

The percentage of students identified as having behavioural difficulties in Québec elementary schools rose from 0.78% in 1984-1985 to 2.5% in 1999-2000. Many factors have been cited to try to explain this phenomenon: changes in family structure, lack of parental supervision and repeated exposure of young children to violence in the media. There is a considerable discrepancy between boys and girls: 41 out of 1000 boys at the elementary level show behavioural difficulties compared with only 8 girls.

Schools are particularly attentive to violence in its many forms (bullying, hazing, taxing) and to more externalized behaviour (hyperactivity). However, other children manifest their problems in the form of passivity, dependence and depression.

Prevention

Regardless of the cause, behavioural difficulties have serious repercussions for the academic and social futures of these young people, including dropping out, unemployment, and isolation. The Conseil supérieur de l’éducation asks the school system to make the implementation of prevention programs beginning in the early grades a priority. It also encourages schools to better adapt their educational approaches and physical organization to the interactive style of boys, who are less open to school learning, and to be aware of behavioural difficulties specific to girls.

To offset violence in the schools, over and above isolated reactions to emergency situations, the Conseil gives precedence to the citizenship education approach, the theme of its 1997-1998 annual report. This involves teaching children to "live together" through common projects based on responsibility-sharing and the development of a feeling of belonging.

Action
The Conseil supérieur de l’éducation feels that parental participation is essential to student success in elementary school. Consequently, it encourages schools to get involved in social programs designed to support the parents of students with behavioural difficulties, by fostering the development of parenting skills.

The Conseil also feels that priority should be placed on supporting teachers who have students with behavioural difficulties, given the importance of the link between them and the energy that teachers must put into creating it. It would also like to see the establishment of means whereby teachers could help one another and consult with the professionals and technicians who are working with their students. Future teachers must be better prepared to take part in developing and implementing these action plans.

Finally, the Conseil has asked the Minister of Education to slate sufficient funds to enable the school system to offer more appropriate services, notably to girls with behavioural difficulties and students who are depressive and dependent.
Pour une école riche de tous ses élèves

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