

# Mentoring

# An exercise in innovation

**MIROIR—the acronym for *Mentorat Individualisé Recadrant nos Observations pour Inspirer notre Réflexion*—is a personalized teacher mentoring program that has been in place at CEGEP de Trois-Rivières since 2010. We sat down with literature teacher and union representative Claude Lamy and Johanne Thibeault, the language teacher who spearheaded this project, to find out more about an initiative that is breaking new ground in Quebec.**



PHOTO: JULIA DAUS

**France Désaulniers**  
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Their eyes sparkle; their passion is manifest. The MIROIR program, open to any teacher interested in taking part, is more than just a universal, interdisciplinary project—it's the crowning achievement of years of research. This isn't about field-of-study expertise; it's about mentors, trained in coaching techniques, helping their colleagues—the mentorees—take a step back, engage in a little introspection and spend some time reflecting on their career and teaching goals. There are no cookie-cutter solutions here.

Claude Lamy says one of the defining features of the program is that participation is entirely voluntary: "MIROIR isn't a response to some problem; it isn't something imposed by the college. This is an exercise in professional development that a teacher chooses to undertake. It requires openness and a willingness to take stock, to do some soul-searching, and to question and challenge oneself."

MIROIR is a tool, adds Johanne Thibeault: "Having teachers act as mentors is premised on the fact that they have a deep love for the profession. The bond of trust that develops between the participants is fundamental. They work together to determine needs, come up with a plan—a roadmap of sorts—and identify challenges and hurdles. And they do it as a team."

***"I consider it a privilege to teach."* Johanne Thibeault**

So what prompts someone to seek out this kind of experience? "The reasons are varied. Maybe, for example, it's the

teacher with 18 years on the job who no longer wants to be teaching the same course the same way. She would like to move beyond her comfort zone but needs to validate certain things first," explains Thibeault. "Or the expert who begins teaching and is suddenly in the throes of a professional identity crisis. The one thing that CEGEP and university teachers have in common is that they are all experts in their field, but they also want to grow and develop as educators. Some teachers question how far they should go in their dealings with students, for example. They may feel ill at ease, uncomfortable. And then there are questions of ethics: Is it alright for a teacher to do this or to do that? Is there



PHOTO: FRANCE DESAULNIERS

a professional code of conduct? Others may be looking for new challenges, better ways of planning their courses so they don't have to spend every weekend correcting work, or perhaps a more effective approach to managing their class."

Another key strength of the program, says Lamy, is its interdisciplinary nature. "Participants interact with colleagues who teach in other fields and departments and who have a different perspective on teaching than their own. This breeds openness. Of course, we do have access to other tools through our collective agreement, such as departmental resource people, education workshops and support measures."

***"It's time to rediscover the pleasure of teaching, for those who have lost it, and for those who are too stressed out, to discover it in the first place."*** *Claude Lamy*

"But this project is part of a wider reflection on the teaching practice. It places the individual at the centre of his or her own education and teaching. The demand is there, and so is the need! This is a career development exercise that has an impact on the quality of teaching."

Teachers have a tendency to take everything to heart: when students lack motivation, they blame themselves; when students fail, they also blame themselves. Burnout lies in wait. MIROIR helps facilitate career insertion by breaking the isolation and promoting the development of healthy teaching habits

## The union, an essential partner

According to Thibeault, an initiative like this can only work with the involvement and partnership of the union. This has proven to be case in examples from the United States and Europe, and it is equally true of the Trois-Rivières program.

The union sold the members of the Parity Committee on the value of mentoring and convinced them that this is the path to take, adds Lamy. Having a peer-based process makes all the difference, and the results have been notable: higher teacher retention, fewer leaves, less conflict... It's a long-term preventive measure. Furthermore, each mentor—and mentoree—brings the experience back to his or her department, and this has a ripple effect on colleagues as well as on students.

"Without the means to support teachers, you can't evaluate teaching. And evaluation, as outlined in the collective agree-

ment, is strictly a formative thing. This context was taken into account when setting out the formula. While it may be at the departmental level that urgent situations occur and are settled, we felt it was crucial that professional development support be available throughout a teacher's career."

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Serving as a mentor means passing along teacher life skills; it means giving others the support we wish we had been given, acting in the interests of students and of better education. Mentors want to share their experience and ensure a healthier learning environment for students. That is MIROIR's legacy.

## An initiative that is spawning fruit

In early 2013, *CEGEP de Trois-Rivières* and *Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières* announced their collaboration on a project on mentoring and knowledge transfer in higher education teaching. Funded by the Quebec Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MESRST), this collaborative initiative is unique in Quebec and will lead to the establishment of the *Centre interdisciplinaire de perfectionnement pédagogique et de recherche en enseignement supérieur* (CIPPRES)—an interdisciplinary centre for teaching development and research in higher education—at *CEGEP de Trois-Rivières* in 2015, although the research activities are already well on their way. The teacher mentoring project at *CEGEP de Trois-Rivières* will serve as a reference for the mentor professors at UQTR.

We at FNEEQ believe this project, which is rooted in an approach of respect for the individual, answers a very real and expressed need and could be useful throughout the CEGEP system. Other institutions of higher learning would surely benefit from this expertise.

**Stay tuned!**

## Testimonials

***"To me, teaching is a fascinating profession. I am excited at the idea of helping my colleagues and thrilled at the prospect of stirring or reviving that passion in others through the MIROIR project. We are much happier in our job when we find our comfort level and discover the pleasure of teaching!"***

*Hélène Hébert, mentor,  
Department of Dental Hygiene*

***"I've been teaching for a few years now and recently spent some time with a wonderful mentor reflecting on the kind of teacher I want to be for my students. We then worked together to adjust my personality as a teacher to more closely reflect who I really am. I now enjoy my job more and more with every new semester!"***

*Simon Lévesque, mentoree,  
Physics teacher*

<sup>1</sup> For more information: <http://miroir.cegeptr.qc.ca>