REFERENCE:
At-risk Students and Students with Special Needs

A reference for teachers working with
integrated special needs students
(at-risk students and students with handicaps and
social maladjustments or learning difficulties)

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Acknowledgements

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The need for the Reference

In the field survey conducted by the FSE on the integration of students with handicaps and social maladjustments or learning difficulties (special needs), a number of teachers expressed a desire for information on the various categories of difficulties and handicaps in order to gain a greater understanding of those problems and to obtain the support their students require. In response to that need, the FSE has created this *Reference* with the invaluable contributions of the FPSS.

The purpose of the Reference

The *Reference* is a tool primarily intended to support teachers working with special needs students who have been integrated into regular classes. It is important to understand that, even though their teachers have recourse to a variety of teaching strategies, these students, in order to have an equal chance of succeeding, will usually require the support of specialised personnel.

The present document is not intended to serve as a pedagogical or curriculum guide. From time to time, it will suggest materials to assist the teacher; however, it is in no way associated with specific instructional methods for any of the subject areas in the education program.

The *Reference* relies on educational research in describing the principal characteristics of these students, explaining the ways in which their difficulties may be manifested in class, and defining their learning needs. It then details the support they require as well as the specialised personnel qualified to respond to their special needs.

The structure of the Reference

Each of the four sections of the *Reference* is subdivided into six headings:

- definition;
- characteristics of the students;
- manifestations of their difficulties;
- learning needs;
- support they require;
- personnel qualified to provide the support.

A work in progress

This preliminary version of the *Reference* is subject to the test of time. Any comments on its content or suggestions for items that might be included in the future will be welcomed.

The importance of prevention, particularly in the case of at-risk students

In the schools, prevention is the keystone of priorities with regard to at-risk students. Both the Policy on Special Education (MEQ, 1999) and the provincial Provisions Binding 2005-2010 highlight its importance.

According to Royer, Saint-Laurent, Moisan and Biteaudeau (1995, p. 261) "an at-risk student is a youth having certain learning difficulties or manifesting behaviours likely to interfere with attainment of the learning and socialisation objectives of the school [translation]". These authors consider that the term **weak student** is equivalent to **at-risk student**. Their researches indicate that one student in four can be considered at risk and that an average class will include six or seven such students.

Prevention of reading difficulties as a priority

A number of researchers (INSERM, 2007; Torgeson in Godard, 2007; Giasson, 1997 and Saint-Laurent, 1995) advocate prevention, highlighting the importance for the school of focusing in particular on problems with reading, which is the main stumbling block of at-risk students. In the same vein, the *Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale* (INSERM, 2007) considers that preventive measures in reading target three types of student: preschool students demonstrating reading difficulties; students experiencing difficulty reading in the first year of elementary; and dyslexic students.

A grid for the identification of at-risk students at the elementary level

However, prevention is not solely targeted at reading. According to Goupil (2007), "a number of writers stress the importance of preventing difficulties; we, therefore, require criteria to determine needs."

Potvin (2002) proposes an identification grid[1] for the elementary level in order to evaluate the level (mild, moderate or severe) of at-risk students. It is intended as an easily administered and assessed instrument for teachers seeking a full picture of a student's risk profile. The researcher notes, however, that it cannot be used for diagnostic evaluation.

Teachers are encouraged to make prevention a priority, and, in return, should be provided whatever assistance is necessary to that end.

1. At-risk students

1.1 Definition[2]

At-risk students are students at the preschool, elementary or secondary level who display weaknesses affecting their learning or behaviour that may put them at risk of failure in their studies or socialisation, without immediate intervention.

1.2 Characteristics often found in these students

Potvin and his associates (2007) describe four types of at-risk students[3]:
- the "unmotivated" type;
- the "behavioural difficulty" type;
- the "hidden antisocial behaviour" type;
- the "depressive" type.

With regard to learning:

(Godard, 2007; Goupil, 2007; Potvin, 2007; Saint-Laurent et al., 1995)
- They have normal intellectual capacity;
- They exhibit weak academic performance in, among other subjects, English and mathematics;
- They lack independence;
- They are passive in completing assignments, since they have poor understanding of the tasks to be accomplished and lack strategic resources;
- They have a limited repertoire of cognitive and metacognitive[4] strategies, and therefore overuse those with which they are most familiar;
- They lack commitment and perseverance in performing assignments (weak scholastic motivation and low self-esteem);
- They are easily distracted;
- They may exhibit language difficulties.

This list is not exhaustive as it does not include all possible characteristics of at-risk students.

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1   http://www.uqtr.uquebec.ca/~potvin/grille_prim.pdf
2   Most definitions are taken from the Provisions Binding 2005-2010, Appendix XXVI, p. 196.
3   For information on these students and the proposed programs: Potvin (2007) *Y'a une place pour toi !*, p. 16.
4   Cognitive strategies are those intended to facilitate the acquisition, the retention and the use of information (for example, memorising, establishing relationships, classification). Metacognitive strategies concern the ability of a student to manage, adjust and to control cognitive activities in a learning situation. Goupil (2007) provides an explanation of each of these strategies and a list of associated tasks to be performed with students.

With regard to behaviour:

(Goupil, 2007; Poliquin-Verville and Royer, 1992; Saint-Laurent et al., 1995)

- They may have difficulties related to situational problems (personal problems, family problems, substance abuse...);
- They manifest behaviour that is disruptive or that does not respect established rules; as often as not, it is the cumulative effect of harmless but unacceptable behaviours that disrupts teachers and other students in the class. However, acceptance and tolerance of those behaviours may vary according to the values of those around them[5] (CSE, 2001; Goupil, 2007).

1.3   Possible manifestations of their difficulties

With regard to learning:

- They have trouble setting to work, since they don't know what to do or how to begin;
- They regularly require help in performing assignments or don't ask for help when they need it;
- They don't start or finish work at the same time as other students;
- They frequently display problems of phonemic awareness, fluency in reading, impoverished vocabulary and comprehension strategies. As a result, they often have trouble understanding the meaning of what they read, summarising a text, and retaining information acquired through reading;
- They write in disconnected fragments without taking the time to structure ideas in a composition. They rarely revise and correct mistakes;
- They memorise material without truly understanding it;
- They perform mathematical operations without understanding concepts. They cannot solve problems and try to find the answer without being able to explain process.

With regard to behaviour:

- They are overactive, fight with classmates, talk in class, distract the attention of the teacher and the rest of the class, refuse to perform assigned tasks, and can be disobedient;
- Alternatively, they can be shy, introverted or withdrawn.

1.4   What these students need to improve learning and behaviour

These students require special support and intervention. If they don't get help, they are at risk of failure in school.

To learn, they require:

(Goupil, 2007; INSERM, 2007; Giasson, 2006; Saint-Laurent, 2002 and Saint-Laurent et al., 1995)

- specific daily intervention[6] based on their needs in reading, writing and mathematics. For example: training in phonemic awareness, 15 minutes a day for 15 weeks, and, to improve reading skills, use of repetition drill (letters, words, phrases) for six minutes a day for six to nine months;
- specific help with reading comprehension strategies[7];
- systematic instruction in cognitive and metacognitive strategies that encourage them to ask questions when they are having difficulties;
- clear instruction regarding procedures (for example, how to use a correction grid for writing);
- interventions to improve academic motivation;
- teaching materials they can manipulate for better understanding of abstract concepts and visual support for procedures to be followed;
- instruction in methods to better organise their work.

To improve behaviour in class, they require:

(Desbiens, 2008; Goupil, 2007; Giasson, 2006; Saint-Laurent, 2002; Saint-Laurent et al., 1995)

- trust and clarity in relationships;
- a clearly structured environment (a well-defined routine);
- clear and specific classroom rules (a maximum of five or six);
- positive consequences for actions;
- consequences directly related to the problem (since punishment that is not systematic or clearly motivated is a source of conflict);
- a positive self-image;
- work done in cooperation and not competition;
- systematic instruction in behaviour strategies (teaching social interaction through models of non-aggressive responses).

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5   According to the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* (2001), the proportion of students with behavioural difficulties has tripled in the last 15 years.
6   Torgeson (2005) in Godard (2007) specifies that ineffective interventions, insufficiently intense interventions as well as weakness in phonemic awareness and decoding are harmful to students.
7   Elementary: Giasson, J. (2003) *La lecture : de la théorie à la pratique.* Elementary and secondary: Cartier, S. (2007) *Apprendre en lisant.*
    Secondary: Document on reading in secondary: www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/publications/menu-rapports.htm

1.5 Support required[8] for students with learning difficulties

- An individualised education plan (IEP) to respond to their needs, where necessary[9].
- Targeting of difficulties to determine which preventive or corrective measures will help. For example, there are research-validated programs for helping at-risk students with reading and writing[10].
- Work at making sense of the learnings acquired. Help them to make the links between various learnings.
- Teaching of a variety of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, not focusing exclusively on memorisation, since a number of these students have trouble with short-term memory and others have trouble getting involved in their assignments.
- Simplification of complex tasks.

1.6 Support required for students with behavioural difficulties

- Creation of an individualised education plan to respond to their needs, where necessary.
- Preventive measures[11] the moment signs of behavioural difficulties appear. It is important to take preventive action in concert with the various persons involved (Desbiens, 2008; Goupil, 2007).
- Keep in mind that behavioural difficulties often camouflage learning difficulties.
- Supervision and accompaniment measures when giving assignments.
- Explicit instruction in work and organisational methods.

1.7 Who provides the support?

- For students with learning difficulties, special educators[12] intervene with those students demonstrating learning difficulties in reading, writing and mathematics. They conduct the evaluation and propose rehabilitative activities in conformity with the education plan devised for each particular case.

- For students with behavioural difficulties, special education technicians, psycho-educators, psychologists and, occasionally, social workers are available to work with teachers and parents in preventing behavioural difficulties.
- For students with behavioural difficulties at the secondary level, resource teachers deal with academic problems by, for example, helping the student catch up, ensuring that homework is done or participating in remedial education.
- In the case of certain problem situations, all the above along with the parents and other staff from student services may be called on to provide help to at-risk students.

1.8 With regard to the Provisions Binding 2005-2010

Part E should be consulted for information about how to recognise or identify students with handicaps or learning or behavioural difficulties.

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8 Support consists of resources and strategies intended to help students in the areas of learning and socialisation.
9 IEPs are not compulsory for at-risk students, but where support is called for they are often a good idea.
10 In reading, *Petits mots, j'entends tes sons* and *La forêt de l'alphabet* are designed for working on phonemic awareness. Also, Giasson (2003) in *La lecture : De la théorie à la pratique* describes the skills to be worked on at various reading stages.
11 *Fluppy* and *Vers le Pacifique* are two programs that have been tried out in a number of Québec schools with good results.
12 Depending on the school board's organisational plan, special education services are provided either by resource teachers or resource specialists.

Attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity

Behavioural difficulties (code 12)

Severe behavioural difficulties (code 14)

It is important to make a distinction between discipline problems and behavioural difficulties. Table 1 below clarifies that distinction. Students who are relatively well controlled through adequate supervision and structures should not be identified as having behavioural difficulties. However, when they are so identified, they require adapted educational services.

Kauffman (2006 in Goupil, 2007) has provided a classification model that has become a reference in the field[13]:

1. disorders related to attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity that the student cannot control (disruptive behaviours, inattention characterised by frequency, duration and intensity);
2. behaviour disorders (aggression);
3. hidden behavioural disorders (hidden antisocial behaviour);
4. delinquency, substance abuse and precocious sexual activity;
5. anxiety and related disorders (such as eating disorders);
6. depression and suicidal ideation.

Table 1
Distinction between discipline problems and behavioural difficulties

	DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS	BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES
Duration	A passing or episodic crisis Isolated incident	Persists for months (from three to six months)*
Occurrence	Occurs in a single context (e.g., the schoolyard)	Occurs in a variety of school and social circumstances
Frequency	In the normal range for the student's age From time to time	Three to four major incidents per week Several times a day
Seriousness	Little harm to self or others	Serious consequences for self and those around
Complexity	Isolated behaviour	A number of inappropriate behaviours

Reference: *Trousse d'intervention TAC TIC*

* The Provisions Binding 2005-2010 allows teachers to start the process of having a student identified after two months of observation.

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13 It is primarily the first three points that are of interest to teachers.

1. Students with attention deficit disorder (ADD) with hyperactivity (ADHD)

According to the *ministère de l'Éducation* (MEQ, 2003, pp. 191-192), "intervention with students exhibiting ADHD involves far greater effort as a result of the constancy and frequency of interventions required." It goes on, "Teachers have to protect themselves; otherwise, they risk exhaustion, and their students rely on their strength to grow." It proposes that teachers "break the solitude by speaking with someone familiar with the problem, seeking out the support of parents and others involved, knowing their limits, and **not being afraid to ask for help when they need it**."

It is also important to keep in mind that students with ADD or ADHD very often also suffer from learning difficulties. At a conference of the *Association québecoise pour les troubles d'apprentissage* (AQETA), Massé (2007) presented a paper proposing a number of approaches for working with ADHD students with reading difficulties. As well, the Alberta Ministry of Education has published a booklet *Building on Success*, available free on its Web site, which offers teachers a variety of behaviour modification and instructional strategies for dealing with students with ADHD.

1.1 Definition[14]

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder is a neurological condition. It involves persistent patterns of inattention or hyperactivity-impulsivity that are both more frequent and more severe than is customarily observed in other young people at similar levels of development.

1.2 Characteristics commonly observed in students

(Massé, L., 2007; MEQ, 2003)

ADHD:

- They have trouble getting to work, organising themselves;
- They have difficulty sticking to or focusing a task;
- They seem to have trouble retaining information (problems with short-term memory);
- They do not respect rules and instructions;
- They are excessively excited;
- They don't wait their turn to speak;
- They become unusually upset when they don't get their way;
- They are easily distracted;
- They have a poor sense of time and space;
- They work hastily at the expense of quality.

ADD:

- They are frequently distracted;
- They demonstrate a deficit of selective and divided attention.

1.3 Possible manifestations of the difficulties

ADHD:

- They squirm in their seat, stand up when they should be sitting, run about, climb up on things, and often speak too much;
- They have trouble sticking to a task, focusing on the task, and organising their work, even when they are interested;
- They don't complete assignments, forget things, such as agendas and textbooks, lose possessions;
- They overreact in frustrating situations;
- They are easily distracted by everything around them;
- They exist only in the present and often forget instructions that have just been given;
- They don't wait their turn, interrupt others, start working before the assignment has been explained (overagitated).

ADD:

- They frequently daydream;
- They have trouble focusing on the teacher's explanations;
- They are often unable to listen to explanations and take notes at the same time;
- They have trouble sustaining attention to their work;
- They don't follow instructions and don't finish assignments, but not as a result of defiance or incomprehension of instructions.

1.4 What these students need to learn and to improve behaviour

(Massé, L., 2007; MEQ, 2003)

- Instructions repeated frequently; clear and concise directions repeated after five minutes (since they have little or no sense of time);
- Verbal reinforcement by itself is rarely effective; what is necessary is a system of points that reinforce each individual step;
- Positive interventions before resorting to punishment (the ideal ratio is two to five positive interventions before a negative intervention);
- Daily evaluation of the positive aspects of their behaviour, since they require frequent feedback to sustain motivation;
- Consistent intervention;

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14   DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) (1996) quoted in *Working Together to Provide Better Support for Young People.*

- Consequences associated with breaking the rules (avoid discussion and negotiation, since they will have forgotten any discussion in a short time. Predetermined consequences should be enforced);
- A highly structured system of behavioural management and consequences that are logical and clearly established (post the rules of conduct, no more than five);
- A plan for transition between class periods.

1.5 Support required

- Create in IEP based on their learning and behavioural difficulties.
- Keep in mind that their problems are not wilful nor malicious; they have problems with self-control.
- Provide the day's schedule using a visual aid, since they have trouble situating themselves in time.
- Alternate periods of concentrated work with activities that enable them to catch their breath.
- Seek help immediately in the event of a crisis as well as a place where they can cool down under adult supervision.
- Provide necessary coaching in social skills.
- Work with others intervenors as well as parents to improve interventions.
- Tutoring help from another student for 30 minutes per week.
- Provide clearly structured materials and specific objectives.
- Medication may be of benefit to some of these students, but should not be the sole treatment for ADD or ADHD.

1.6 Who provides the support?

According to the *Ordre des psychologues du Québec* and the *Collège des médecins du Québec (2001)*, evaluation and follow-up of these students should involve a multidisciplinary approach. The psychologist is the front-line intervenor in the evaluation and intervention process with these students.

Cooperation among the various school partners (special education technicians, psycho-educators, psychologists or social workers), parents and teachers is essential to effective intervention.

2. Behavioural difficulties (code 12)[15]

The requirement to create an IEP

For all students who are considered to have ADHD, the Education Act (section 96.14) requires the school administration, with the help of the parents, those providing services to these students, and the students themselves (unless they are unable to do so), to create an individualised education plan (IEP) adapted to their needs. The administration supervises the implementation and periodic evaluation of the IEP and reports regularly to the parents.

2.1 Definition

Students for whom a psychosocial evaluation[16] reveals an important deficit in the ability to adapt manifested by significant difficulties in interacting with one or more elements of the school, social or family environment.

2.2 Characteristics commonly observed in these students

(Goupil, 2007; MELS, 2006; Saint-Laurent et al., 1995; Poliquin-Verville and Royer, 1992)

Students with behavioural difficulties fall into two groups:

a) over-reactive behaviour:
- hostile students (aggressive and impulsive behaviours resulting in rejection);
- thoughtless students (careless behaviour, without conscious intention to harm).

b) under-reactive behaviour:
- fearful students (hold back, don't take initiative, are excessively fearful of people and social contact, inclined to cling to an adult);
- depressed students (lack energy, motivation; every challenge seems insurmountable);
- withdrawn students (impassive to surroundings and avoid social situations).

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15   See Part E for identification of students with behavioural difficulties.
16   Evaluation by qualified personnel using systematic observation and analysis techniques and in cooperation with those involved.

2.3 Possible manifestations of their difficulties

(Goupil, 2007; MEQ, 1999)

Behavioural difficulties:

- They persist in unsatisfactory behaviours despite consequences prescribed in rules of conduct;
- They refuse any reasonable disciplinary structure;
- They assert themselves by creating a disturbance;
- They are uncomfortable when praised, as a result of low self-esteem;
- They have serious difficulties relating to their peers;
- They resort to aggressive, intimidating or destructive words and actions without justification.

Hidden behavioural difficulties:

- They refuse to respect norms;
- They are frequently absent from school;
- They have trouble concentrating and have a limited attention span;
- They may have learning difficulties as a result of their reduced attention span.

2.4 What these students require to learn and to improve behaviour

To learn, they need:

(Desbiens, 2008; Goupil, 2007; CSE, 2001)

- discipline subject to the learning objectives;
- tasks that require their participation (avoid individual exercises or assignments they may find boring);
- learning activities that involve working with others (avoid competitive activities);
- targeted interventions designed to foster motivation (explain how what they're learning is useful to them);
- reinforcement of learning and acceptable behaviours (avoid a scale of 1-3 (☺☺☹) in evaluating behaviour, which automatically condemns them to failure; instead, use a scale of 1-10 to provide a chance to develop improved behaviours);
- structured teaching periods (break the period up to allow them to move about, especially when their minds seem to be wandering);
- a classroom routine to make them feel secure;
- clear instructions for changing periods in order to prevent their becoming disorganised.

To improve their behaviour, they require:

(Desbiens, 2008; Goupil, 2007; CSE, 2001; Saint-Laurent et al., 1995; Poliquin-Verville and Royer, 1992)

- coaching in social skills and praise when behaviour is appropriate;
- examples (show them clearly what behaviours or procedures they are to learn and practise these with them);
- verbal strategies for conflict resolution;
- activities that require them to solve problems;
- a trust relationship with the teacher (they will resist at first, since they have often been rejected).

2.5 Support required

- Creation of a detailed IEP that involves family, teachers and other intervenors.
- Analysis of the risk factors that may be affecting their behaviour and the protection factors that might have a positive influence.
- Immediate help in the event of a crisis. Royer is clear on this: "Teachers must have a 'safety net.' There should always be someone able to intervene." (in Goupil, 2007, p. 195).
- Coaching in social skills where necessary.
- Collaboration among professionals and parents to ensure successful intervention.
- Integration into a group with reduced class size (a condition supported by research when integrating these students into regular classes).
- Classroom management based on clearly defined rules of conduct.
- Disciplinary policy that is highly structured and involves consequences that are clear and logical.

2.6 Who provides the support?

First-line intervention is usually provided by special education technicians, psycho-educators and psychologists. Given that no situations are alike, cooperation among parents, teachers and the various intervenors is essential to establish a protocol for intervention in crisis situations[17] and to ensure follow-up.

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17 The FPSS is preparing a kit on interventions in crisis situations. The CSQ has published a document concerning violence against teachers. The MELS just published its action plan to prevent violence.

3. Severe behavioural difficulties (code 14)[18]

According to the Education Act (section 235), these students should not be integrated into regular classes unless the evaluation of their specific needs specifies that integration would permit improved socialisation or learning and would not undermine the rights of the other students or impose an excessive constraint.

Despite the presence of constant support measures, these students may demonstrate aggressive or destructive behaviours that are both antisocial and of high intensity and frequency.

3.1 Definition

Students whose general functioning, as evaluated by a multidisciplinary team including a specialist from student services and using systematic observation techniques and standardised tests, present the following characteristics:

3.2 Characteristics commonly observed in these students

(Goupil, 2007; MELS, 2006; Alberta Education, 2005)

- They manifest numerous negative, provocative and antisocial behaviours;
- They show little sense of guilt for their actions;
- They do not respect established rules;
- They exhibit sudden mood swings;
- They are easily frustrated;
- They constantly challenge authority.

3.3 Possible manifestations of their difficulties

(Desbiens, 2008; Goupil, 2007; MELS, 2006; Poliquin-Verville and Royer, 1992)

- They are easily provoked to anger;
- They challenge adults and, without guidance or structure, they may defy authority;
- They deliberately violate other students' rights;
- They blame others for their mistakes;
- They are often angry and resentful;
- They may fight frequently;
- They don't keep their word;

- Without guidance or structure, they may commit irresponsible acts (vandalism, substance abuse, throwing things at others);
- They may experience significant learning delays;
- Given their serious difficulties, they may become less and less motivated in school;
- They have an extremely low tolerance threshold;
- They are often extremely impulsive.

3.4 What these students require to learn and improve behaviour

(Goupil, 2007; Alberta Education, 2005)

Careful classroom organisation:

- location of their desks should take into account neighbours, physical distractions, and space to move about;
- circulation in class should be easy (no encumbrances...);
- availability of a space that responds to their needs (quiet corners, etc.);
- desks may be arranged in rows or in other formations as required.

Schedule organisation and teaching strategies:

- well-established routines and clear expectations;
- advance notice of transitions;
- planning of short, frequent teaching segments separated by a variety of tasks;
- careful attention to small things that could provoke negative behaviours (hunger, fatigue, immobility...);
- highly structured activities;
- individualisation of certain objectives with frequent evaluation of progress;
- particular attention to motivation[19] in terms both of the type of activities offered and of the way they are enabled to accomplish those activities.

A welcoming classroom:

- a friendly, secure and welcoming environment;
- a positive tone of voice and precise observations (avoid sarcasm);
- attentive listening on the part of the teacher;
- a positive self-image through success in both schoolwork and behaviour.

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18   See Part E for the identification of serious behavioural problems.
19   Roch Chouinard (classroom management), Lyne Martin and Rolland Viau (French instruction) are excellent sources to consult with regard to motivation in school.

Establish a plan of classroom discipline and responsibility:

- clearly expressed expectations;
- their participation in creating the rules of conduct;
- consequences **in class** for minor inappropriate behaviours;
- consequences **outside of class** for major inappropriate behaviours (shouting insults, constant defiance, aggressive or dangerous behaviours).

3.5 Support required

- Establish a detailed IEP that involves family, teachers and other intervenors. Recourse to resources of the health and social services network may be required.
- Sustained support services provided for several hours a day (MELS, 2006, p. 11).
- A staff member always available to intervene in the event of unexpected situations (MELS, 2006, p. 11). Royer is clear on this: "Teachers must have a 'safety net.' There should always be someone able to intervene." (in Goupil, 2007, p. 195).
- Teaching adapted to their needs.
- A systematic support structure with the resources to help them develop relationships with their peers and with the various intervenors.

3.6 Who provides the support?

- Psychologists, psycho-educators, social workers and special education technicians are best qualified to provide specialised support for these students. These professionals should work in close cooperation with parents and teachers in order to establish a protocol for intervention in the event of crisis and to ensure follow-up.
- Special education technicians stress the need for collaboration of a psychologist to ensure continuing follow-up.

Learning difficulties

Specific learning difficulties (dyslexia...)

Mild intellectual handicaps

Light to moderate dysphasia

A student-based approach

On the one hand, the Provisions Binding 2005-2010 specify that services must be based on an individualised approach that responds to the needs and abilities of students with special needs and not on a category-based approach. At the same time, the *ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport*, (MELS, 2006) abolished the formal identification of students with difficulties in order to ensure that all students receive individualised attention without the need to be formally identified. Despite that, it seems that these students are among those receiving the fewest services on the grounds that they are not subject to formal identification.

Requirement to create an IEP

The Education Act requires these students to have an IEP[20].

Learning difficulties

The MELS and the Provisions Binding 2005-2010 make no distinction among learning difficulties. However, the American Psychiatric Association (2000) as well as a number of researchers treat them differently. Learning difficulties result from factors external to the students and take the form of poor school performance. They can be due to family or school issues, a lack of motivation, unfamiliarity with the language of instruction, or socioeconomic factors (Laplante, 2007; TAAC, 2005 in Goupil, 2007). Learning difficulties are temporary if students are provided support and adapted interventions.

Learning disabilities

Learning disabilities are permanent, persistent and intrinsic to the student without being related to intelligence (INSERM, 2007). Such disabilities can affect, among others, cognitive function (attention, memory, reasoning), as well as the acquisition, organisation, retention, comprehension or treatment of both verbal and non-verbal information.

The notion of learning disabilities implies a permanent condition resulting from genetic or neurobiological factors. Disability exists when a student's performance on standardised tests in reading, writing and mathematics, taken individually, is clearly below the level expected for a child of his age, grade and intellectual level.

Specific learning disabilities

Research deals with specific learning disabilities when these are associated with learning in school: reading, writing and mathematical disabilities (INSERM, 2007).

Note: Throughout this section, the term learning difficulties should be read in the sense of learning disabilities (permanent) and not in the sense of at-risk students.

1. Students with Learning Difficulties[21]

1.1 Definition

Elementary level

A student whose analysis shows that the remedial measures, carried out by the teacher or by other intervenors over a significant period of time, have not enabled the student to make sufficient progress in his or her learning to meet the minimum requirements for successful completion of the cycle with respect to the language of instruction or mathematics as provided for in the Québec Education Program (QEP).

Secondary level

A student whose analysis shows that the remedial measures, carried out by the teacher or by other intervenors over a significant period of time, have not enabled the student to make sufficient progress in his or her learning to meet the minimum requirements for successful completion of the cycle with respect to the language of instruction and mathematics as provided for in the QEP.

1.2 Characteristics commonly observed in these students

(Goupil, 2007; INSERM, 2007)

- They demonstrate the intellectual ability necessary for thinking and reasoning;

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20   See page 13, point 2: Behavioural Difficulties.
21   See Part E for identification of students with learning difficulties.

- They manifest a significant delay in learning compared with their peers;
- They have difficulty solving problems in certain subjects;
- They have trouble transferring learning to assignments;
- They are poorly organised and have trouble managing tasks;
- They seem to have problems with memory and attention when a large quantity of information has to be managed;
- They have difficulty learning new material (organising, analysing and synthesising);
- They have problems with motivation as a result of frequent failure;
- Their difficulties persist despite substantial effort.

1.3   Possible manifestations of their difficulties

- They have trouble creating strategies for problem solving, forecasting, organisation of thinking, planning, self-regulation;
- They do not make links between prior and current learning;
- They have difficulty following teachers' instructions (organising materials, managing time, establishing objectives, using memorisation techniques, and employing study skills);
- They have a great deal of difficulty particularly in the learning of reading, writing and mathematics (unable to keep up with their class and age group);
- They perform assignments with great difficulty, since they store less knowledge in short-term memory;
- They seem not to want to cooperate or do work properly (as a result of repeated failures generating low self-esteem).

1.4   What these students need to learn

(Goupil, 2007; INSERM, 2007)

- Specific instruction in cognitive strategies[22], metacognitive strategies[23] and compensation strategies;
- Re-education based on difficulties encountered with regard to process in reading, writing and mathematics;
- Specific work on scholastic motivation (they can learn given the right strategies).

1.5   Support required

- Intensive intervention in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Instruction adapted to their individual needs.
- Acquisition of strategies is essential to learning.

1.6   Who provides the support?

- Remedial professionals are qualified to intervene with students having difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics, always with the collaboration of the classroom teacher and the parents. They can conduct a diagnostic evaluation of difficulties and formulate re-educative activities in conformity with the education program and in light of any impairments.
- In certain cases, special education technicians, following instructions from the teacher, may help students understand, provide support in getting them to work, or ensure the application of strategies already taught so they can accomplish assignments.

2.   Students with specific learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysorthographia, dyscalculia)

2.1   a) Definition of dyslexia

Recent definitions of dyslexia refer to disturbed cognitive mechanisms (frequently an impairment of linguistic phonological correspondence) and the aetiology of disabilities (neurobiological origins) (INSERM, 2007).

Laplante (2007) notes that dyslexia is an impairment or a dysfunction of specific processes of reading and writing (the identification and production of words).

Dyslexia results from a specific language impairment of a constitutional origin characterised by difficulties in decoding resulting from phonological processing disability (Orton Dyslexia Society in AQETA[24], 1999).

b) Definition of dysorthographia

Dysorthographia is a specific disability to learn orthography associated with an inability to learn to read, whether the latter is apparent or not (INSERM, 2007; Laplante, 2007).

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22   Cognitive strategies are those intended to facilitate the acquisition, the retention and the use of information (for example, memorising, establishing relationships, classification).

23   Metacognitive strategies involve the ability of a student to manage, adjust and to control cognitive activities in a learning situation.

24   See the AQETA site: www.aqeta.qc.ca

c) Definition of dyscalculia

There are no universally accepted definitions or criteria for dyscalculia (INSERM, 2007). A consensus considers that students with dyscalculia have an inadequate understanding of the principles governing numbering activities and are distinguished by an atypical inability to memorise arithmetic operations (carrying over is a problem) and the addition and multiplication tables.

2.2 Characteristics of these students

(INSERM, 2007; Laplante, 2007)

- They are intelligent, generally express themselves well orally, but have difficulties with reading and writing;
- They are slow at processing in any activities involving the written word (reading or writing), and are consequently often unable to complete assignments;
- **Some** write unreadably, in both content and form (spelling and division of words: *tha tapple issent gud tu eat/that apple isn't good to eat*);
- They tire quickly when reading or writing as a result of cognitive overload.

2.3 Specific manifestations of their difficulties[25]

- They have difficulty reading (decoding writing), slow processing, paralexia (typical mistakes these students make: omission, substitution, addition and displacement of graphemes);
- They have weak comprehension of what they read;
- They commit frequent paragraphias (typical mistakes these students make: omission, substitution, addition and displacement of phonemes);
- They understand better orally. A particular utterance will be understood more clearly if it is expressed orally rather than in writing;
- They learn well when teachers use methods other than writing.

2.4 What these students need to learn

(INSERM, 2007; Laplante, 2007)

Not all students present the same profile of difficulties. For each dyslexic child, a multidisciplinary evaluation (resource specialist, psychologist, and, obligatorily, the speech therapist) should be conducted to determine the type of dyslexia in order to ascertain which reading and writing processes require attention and the particular interventions that are necessary.

2.5 Support required

- An IEP based on their needs.
- Evaluate students in reading and writing to identify which processes are weak.
- Specific, intensive remedial interventions in reading and writing[26].
- Explicit instruction for all interventions.
- More time to write examinations and tests, as well as computer support and writing aids, including correction tools.
- Speech-language therapy to certain students as provided in their IEP.
- Computer teaching aids for help with writing, including use of a correction tool when writing Ministerial examinations[27].

2.6 Who provides the support?

- Resource professionals[28] are qualified to evaluate difficulties in reading and writing and to create activities associated with those difficulties.
- Depending on the IEP, other professionals such as speech therapists and special education technicians, in collaboration with parents, can also provide support to these students in their learning.

3. Students with mild handicaps

According to the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2005), a mild handicap is distinct from a learning disability, since students with a mild impairment do not have the same intellectual abilities essential to thinking and reasoning. However, we have chosen to include them in the category of learning difficulties.

3.1 Definition[29]

Students with a mild intellectual handicap are those whose cognitive functions, evaluated using standardised tests administered by qualified personnel (in a school setting, this is usually a psychologist or, occasionally, a guidance counsellor), show a level of general functioning that is clearly below average, as well as impaired adaptive behaviour appearing gradually during the period of development.

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25 This is far from a comprehensive analysis.
26 For an example, see page 8.
27 MELS, Info sanction, No. 554, Jan. 22, 2008
28 Depending on school board organisation, remedial services are provided either by resource teachers or by resource specialists.
29 From Goupil, G. (2007).

3.2 Characteristics commonly observed in these students

(Dunberry and Dumas, 2008; Goupil, 2007)

- As a result of delayed or arrested development, they may demonstrate:
  - cognitive functioning at a level below that which is normal for their age;
  - difficulty establishing links between information, prior experience and the targeted learning objective;
  - problems with abstraction and conceptualisation;
  - difficulty organising information without help;
  - problems in communicating and socialising in a manner appropriate to their chronological age.

- As a result of slow or delayed intellectual development (abnormally long fixations at certain stages of development), they may have:
  - lack of judgement and discernment;
  - lack of inhibition;
  - problems perceiving logical relationships (analysis);
  - difficulty with seeing others' point of view;
  - difficulty in anticipating the future (planning);
  - difficulty in dealing with more than one thing at a time;
  - problems in understanding abstract dimensions (abstraction).

- Less efficient processes for treating information (attention, selective perception, encoding, short-term memorising, and recovery from long-term memory).
- Problems with transfer and generalisation.

3.3 Possible manifestations of their difficulties

- They have difficulty focusing their attention on relevant information;
- They have difficulty in quickly managing all information provided to them;
- They lack strategies and therefore process information inefficiently;
- They lack an ability to employ strategies (do not recognise contexts for applying strategies);
- They have trouble establishing links between what they know and the learning objective (weak and poorly structured knowledge base);
- They have a weak vocabulary (weak and poorly structured knowledge base).

3.4 What these students need to learn

(Dunberry and Dumas, 2008; Goupil, 2007)

- Models to show how things can be done (learning by example);
- Modelling for the acquisition of appropriate social skills to, for example, work in groups;
- Modelling and guided practice before working on their own;
- Accompaniment (verbal mediation, metacognitive questioning) to establish relationships among the various learnings and create classifications;
- Learning strategies for acquiring learnings and concepts and for developing skills, attitudes and competencies;
- Explicit teaching of strategies is important, for both academic and social learning (since these students have limited strategies);
- Concrete materials to support the creation of awareness, to facilitate understanding, to establish relationships, and to encourage the learning of new concepts;
- Frequent opportunities for practice and training to create learning habits;
- Help in the construction of awareness and understanding (consistent recourse to concrete reasoning).

3.5 Support required[30]

- An IEP based on the needs of the student.
- Choices so they can develop the ability to make decisions (choice of workshops, materials, assignments with the same objective).
- Adapted tasks that take into account their abilities and their chronological age (keeping in mind the interests of the group).
- Use of hands-on materials in all subjects combined with verbal mediation to support the construction of awareness.
- Assignment of tasks to be performed in stages (suggest a process to accomplish the task).
- Visual aids (objects, pictograms, illustrations, symbols, etc.), IT (information technologies), illustrated books (*High Interest, Low Difficulty*).

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30 While the MELS feels that they have the same needs as those with learning difficulties, these students have needs that are both specific and different. They require particular support in order to progress in their learning.

3.6 Who provides the support?

- Psychologists can help in analysing the needs and abilities of students.
- Resource specialists, working with the classroom teacher, are qualified to provide specific interventions in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Special educators can help students and assist them in adapting the assigned task by making it simpler or more complex and by adapting necessary materials.
- All of the above should work with the parents to help the student succeed in school.

4. Students with light to moderate dysphasia

For students with light to moderate dysphasia, it is suggested that you refer to the comments on students with severe dysphasia (code 34) in Part D. While their condition is less severe, the characteristics, the manifestations and the needs are similar, even though each student's situation is unique.

Language disorders (code 34)[31]

Pervasive developmental disorders (code 50)

Moderate to severe intellectual handicaps (code 24)

Psychopathological disorders (code 53)

NOTE: Sensory and physical handicaps will not be dealt with in this *Reference*.

Requirement for an IEP

The Education Act (section 96.14) requires school administrations, in conjunction with the parents, personnel providing services to these students and the students themselves (where they are able to do so), to create for students deemed to have special needs an individualised education plan (IEP) that is specifically adapted to those needs. The administration is responsible for the implementation and periodic evaluation of the IEP and for regularly informing the parents.

1. Students with language disorders (code 34)

Problems with language arise when language does not develop in harmony with cognition (Godard, 2007). While these students have normal intelligence, language interferes with that intelligence. It is therefore important to ensure that they have a clear understanding of concepts. For example, in mathematics, they find the notions of "one more" and "one less" to be challengingly abstract. In reading, a word such as "when" may be incomprehensible to them, even within a context.

1.1 Definition

Students with language disorders are students whose overall functioning, through an evaluation carried out by a multidisciplinary team of specialists using systematic observation techniques and appropriate tests, leads to a diagnosis of severe dysphasia.

Students diagnosed with severe dysphasia suffer from a serious and persistent language development disorder significantly limiting verbal interactions, socialisation and learning at school.

These students are considered handicapped when an evaluation of their level of functioning indicates:

- marked difficulties in the areas of language development, verbal expression, and cognitive verbal functions;
- moderate to severe difficulties in the area of verbal comprehension.

"Fundamental language disorder relating to the expressive or both the expressive and receptive spheres, indicated by variable impairment affecting the development of more than one language component: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics[32]."

1.2 Characteristics commonly observed in these students

- They are intelligent, but reveal weakness in language: language is the impediment to learning;
- They lack phonological, syntactic, semantic (lexical and morphological), and pragmatic references at the level of oral language;
- They have observable difficulty reflecting on language;
- They have difficulty communicating, in both speaking and writing: nature of discourse, intention of communication, etc.;
- They may express themselves with difficulty and display a range of problems (depending on the type of dysphasia);
- They have trouble forming their thoughts (e.g., difficulty in lexical access);
- They have trouble retaining information in short-term memory;
- They have trouble understanding and following instructions provided only orally;
- They have trouble structuring time and space;
- They have trouble with abstraction and generalisation;
- They display a certain behavioural rigidity;
- They attempt to communicate despite their difficulties;
- They are very independent once they understand what to do.

1.3 Possible manifestations of their difficulties

- They remember only the last instruction given;
- They have observable difficulties with regard to the expression and the comprehension of sentences, both oral and written: grammar (morphology), non-standard word order (syntax), incomprehension or absence of complex sentence structures, etc.;
- They have noticeable difficulty with comprehension in reading (subordinators and coordinators and even word recognition);
- They have trouble establishing causal links between the ideas and events of a narrative;
- They have noticeable difficulty recalling a narrative;
- They have limited vocabulary;

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31   To be identified as having a language disorder, the student must have been diagnosed with severe dysphasia.

32   Current definition recognised by the *Ordre des orthophonistes et audiologistes du Québec, Fréquences*, Vol.17 No. 3, August 2005, p. 10.

- They have observable difficulty acquiring new concepts (space, time, duration, quantity);
- They have trouble with behaviour and relationships as a result of not understanding and not being understood;
- They have difficulty with spatial and temporal organisation (e.g., do not understand the concepts of past, present and future);
- They have trouble taking verbal information into account in various situations.

1.4 What these students need to learn

- Specific instruction in reading and writing strategies;
- Specific instruction in grammar, since they have particular difficulty with the acquisition of grammatical skills;
- Systematic teaching of vocabulary (subordinating and coordinating conjunctions, prepositions, adjectives, verbs);
- Visual supports in developing abstract concepts;
- Guidelines and routines, since they tend to be rigid in both cognition and behaviour;
- Extra time to complete their work;
- One instruction at a time, because of their difficulty with short-term memory or lexical access (retrieving given information from memory);
- Clear explanation of any instructions provided in writing, since they find language confusing;
- Working procedures in reading, writing and mathematics, taught explicitly;
- Technical learning aids (there are some useful software programs).

1.5 Support required

- An IEP to respond to their needs.
- Regular support[33] characterised by frequent assistance several times daily or weekly (MELS, 2006, p. 11) and teaching particularly focused on the development of language skills.
- Assistance in reading questions in evaluation situations or ensuring that they have understood questions.
- Provision of additional time to complete assignments.
- Targeted practice in language skills (phonology, semantics, syntax, morphology and pragmatics).
- Work on expressive and receptive language skills, as required.

1.6 Who provides the support?

- The speech therapist is qualified to provide help in oral language.
- Resource personnel can provide support for learning.
- Special education technicians can assist with individualised work strategies and the development of social skills. In some cases, they can help students working with computer learning materials.
- All those involved should work closely together with the parents and teachers to enable these students to succeed in school.

2. Students with pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) (code 50)

Pervasive developmental disorders

Autistic spectrum disorders are chronic developmental disorders influencing the understanding of what is seen, heard or felt. They represent a complex neurological disorder affecting brain function. Most people affected have normal intelligence despite cognitive anomalies (reasoning styles, difficulty decoding situations...). The range of this intelligence is expressed in terms of high-functioning and low-functioning autism. A vast range of both expressive and receptive language difficulties is also observed. All those affected have difficulties (degrees and natures vary) in the area of social interaction and behaviour (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1).

Functioning of the cognitive structure of those suffering from PDD

Harrisson (2004) compares the functioning of the cognitive structure of those suffering from PDD with those not affected to the functioning of a car. The latter function like a car with automatic transmission, while autistics function like a car with manual transmission: they process information consciously, manually and one item at a time. Information enters one item at a time and through the only effective portal available—vision. Students with PDD see only what is visible and cannot decode the non-verbal. Their brain deals only with what it knows and classifies information in blocks.

2.1 Definition

Students with pervasive developmental disorders are students whose overall functioning, through an evaluation by a multidisciplinary team of specialists, which must include the

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33   Only for students who have severe dysphasia (code 34).

psychiatrist[34], using systematic observation techniques and standardised tests in accordance with the diagnostic criteria of the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) leads to one of the following diagnoses:

- Autistic disorder
- Asperger disorder
- Pervasive developmental disorder - Not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS)
- Rett syndrome
- Childhood disintegrative disorder

2.2 Characteristics commonly observed in students with PDD (without intellectual handicap)

(Ouellet et al., 2007; Alberta Education, 2005; Harrisson, B., 2004)

a) Academic difficulties:

- They lack the ability to understand concepts and abstractions, have limited comprehension of words and gestures;
- Some display exceptional memory in certain fields;
- They suffer from sensory modulation problems.

b) Social dysfunction:

- They have difficulty establishing relationships with their peers;
- They have notable problems with non-verbal communication and social skills compared with their intellectual potential;
- They are unable to share and express feelings.

c) Communication deficit:

- They experience oral language delays;
- They have trouble initiating or sustaining conversation;
- They use stereotypic language;
- They are incapable of symbolic play.

d) Limited activities and interests or stereotypic behaviours:

- They have limited interests and stereotypic behaviours;
- They resist change;
- They display mannerisms.

2.3 Possible manifestations of their difficulties

(Goupil, 2007; Ouellet et al., 2007; Alberta Education, 2005; Harrisson, B., 2004)

- They resist change;
- They become anxious in the absence of structure;
- They cannot decode intonations and tone of voice associated with emotions;
- They have trouble organising themselves in space and time;
- They are unable to concentrate and pay attention;
- They display special language and communication problems such as absence of language, echolalia, pronoun inversion, etc.;
- They have difficulty establishing and maintaining visual contact;
- They have difficulty processing multiple signals;
- They do not recognise emotions in others;
- They exhibit stereotypic behaviours that help them feel calm and secure;
- They are hypersensitive to certain environmental stimuli (loud or sudden noises, etc.);
- They display inflexibility in their learning processes.

2.4 What these students need to learn

(Goupil, 2007; Ouellet et al., 2007; Alberta Education, 2005; Harrisson, B., 2004)

- A permanent structuring of their personal space (define spaces for work and for play and help them situate themselves in time);
- Structuring of their schedule in time (the day's schedule provided in writing or as a pictogram);
- A permanent assigned seat, not in the centre of the group, where there are too many stimuli;
- Patterns in their daily routine (introduce concepts in order and in sequence) with a clear beginning and end;
- Use of pictograms (limit verbal as much as possible);
- Time to process information with consistent verification of their comprehension (they lack the reflex to indicate they do not understand);
- One instruction at a time (speak slowly);
- Frequent periods when they can work by themselves (helps to reduce anxiety);
- A peaceful environment (low noise while working);
- A repertoire of adapted behaviours that enable them to participate (explicit learning);
- Thorough explanation of all that is expected of them (students with PDD cannot figure things out for themselves);

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34 This professional is not specified by name in the definition provided in the Provisions Binding 2005-2010.

- A seven-day schedule, since the link with home is extremely important;
- Use of visual aids[35], which is one of the more effective teaching techniques (helping them to learn, communicate and develop self-control);
- Peer-tutoring (working in groups with classmates), since attention from peers is highly motivating;
- Meaningful assignments (not counting blocks for the sake of counting blocks);
- Models of behaviour to be developed;
- Generous reinforcement to encourage independence.

2.5 Support required

- Sustained support with services provided for several hours every day (MELS, 2006, p. 11).
- A full repertoire of measures (time-out, relaxation, social scenarios) is essential to make students feel secure and enable them to face the world.
- Use of pictograms is highly recommended, since oral instructions should be reduced to a minimum.

2.6 Who provides the support?

- A staff member should be available to intervene at all times in the event of unexpected situations (MELS, 2006, p. 11);
- Psychologists, psycho-educators and social workers are all in a position to provide support with these students;
- Speech therapists are qualified to provide help in oral language;
- Special education technicians can adapt material, help students adapt to changes in routine, and develop independence;
- All of the above should work closely with parents and teachers to enable these students to succeed in school.

3. Students with moderate to severe intellectual handicaps (code 24)

3.1 Definition

Students with moderate to severe intellectual handicaps are students whose cognitive functions, evaluated by a multidisciplinary team, which must include a psychologist[36] or, if needed, a guidance counsellor, using standardised tests, show a level of general functioning that is clearly below average, as well as impaired adaptive behaviour appearing from the beginning of the development period.

3.2 Characteristics commonly observed in these students

(Goupil, 2007)

- They are limited in the cognitive realm, which restricts learning abilities and requires an adapted pedagogy and program;
- They have limited personal and social autonomy, which results in increased need for help in organising themselves;
- They have more or less difficulty in sensory, motor and communication development, which requires adapted intervention;
- Their limitations in the realm of cognitive development make it impossible for them to achieve the competencies expected for their age group in the end-of-cycle competency report of the QEP;
- They have clearly limited perceptual, motor and communication skills, which requires individualised evaluation and stimulation techniques;
- They have extremely weak skills in the area of personal and social autonomy and therefore require constant support and supervision in accomplishing their daily school assignments.

3.3 Possible manifestations of their difficulties

- They have difficulty focusing their attention on important information;
- They have trouble managing quickly information provided to them;
- They lack strategies and process information inefficiently;
- They do not know how to employ strategies (do not recognise the context for applying a particular strategy);
- They have trouble establishing links between what they know and the learning objective (weak and badly organised knowledge base);
- They have a weak vocabulary (weak and badly organised knowledge base);
- They have trouble transferring and generalising learnings.

3.4 What these students need to learn[37]

- help in organising themselves in new activities;
- basic instruction in functioning independently;

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35 The *Boardmaker* software program is a graphic data bank with 3,000 communication symbols: www.mayer-johnson.com
36 This professional is not specified by name in the definition provided in the Provisions Binding 2005-2010.
37 The needs are similar to those of students with a mild intellectual handicap, depending on the severity of their difficulties (see page 20, point 3.4).

- support in learning;
- adapted instructional materials;
- manipulation of concrete materials to assist in the formation of concepts;
- supervision and guidance appropriate to their difficulties;
- clear objectives to encourage learning;
- a school environment sensitive to their situation.

3.5   Support necessary

- An IEP appropriate to their needs.
- Sustained support with services provided for several hours every day (MELS, 2006, p. 11).
- A staff member available in the school at all times to intervene in the event of unexpected situations (MELS, 2006, p. 11) (preferably a person with authority).

3.6   Who provides the support?

- Psychologists, as these students suffer from a cognitive impairment.
- A speech therapist, where the student suffers from serious language difficulties.
- The special education technician can assist with social integration (special activities, recess, lunch hour, etc.).
- An aid for handicapped persons if the student requires help as a result of reduced functional autonomy.

4.   Students with psychopathological disorders (code 53)

Students suffering from difficulties arising from psychopathology are more liable to perform poorly in school, to drop out, and to experience suicidal ideation. However, where diagnosis is timely and treatment provided early, the performance of these students can show considerable improvement[38].

4.1   Definition

Students with psychopathological disorders are students whose overall functioning, through an evaluation carried out by a team of multidisciplinary specialists, *which must include a psychiatrist or a child psychiatrist*[39], using systematic observation techniques and standardised tests, leads to a diagnosis of a psychiatric disability that appears through a distortion in several areas of development, particularly in the area of cognitive development.

4.2   Characteristics commonly encountered in these students

(Goupil, 2007; Alberta Education, 2005)

- They may exhibit disorganised behaviour or episodes of serious disturbance, as a result of acute anxiety;
- They may experience extreme emotional distress or extreme confusion;
- They may experience, among other things, auditory hallucinations (hear voices);
- They may have delusions (feelings of being watched, spied on or persecuted);
- They may experience distortions of reality (whatever the teacher does, they will say they are being picked on or put down....).

4.3   Possible manifestations of their difficulties

(Goupil, 2007; Alberta Education, 2005)

- They are too anxious to control their environment (e.g., instead of saying it is too noisy, they will say they are tired);
- They are extremely anxious when facing examinations;
- They react to certain things, but those behaviours are a reaction to an event beyond their control;
- They may ask to go to the toilet because they need to calm down;
- They have difficulty applying themselves to their work;
- They exhibit repetitive behaviours;
- They seem to cling to parents or teachers, since they need support to control their anxiety.

4.4   What these students require to learn or to improve their behaviour

(Goupil, 2007; Alberta Education, 2005)

- Means for controlling their anxiety;
- A bond of trust with their teacher;
- Help in verbalising their fears;
- Additional time to complete assignments;
- A quiet place apart from other students to write examinations;
- Permission to listen to music while working on assignments or writing tests;
- The chance to move about when they find an assignment too demanding;
- Teachers who address them in a calm and reassuring tone of voice;
- Clear understanding of the steps for performing a task so they can create a mental representation of the process;

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38   From the Alberta Education document, p. 1.
39   These professionals are not specified by name in the definition provided in the Provisions Binding 2005 2010.

- Problem-solving strategies;
- Regular verification of class work;
- A quiet place to work (without pressure to perform better);
- A regular schedule and program;
- Predictable classroom procedures accompanied by routines;
- Clear and precise instructions;
- Classroom rules clearly posted and noted;
- Limits governing behaviour in school (establish and enforce them, and eventually they will pay off);
- Help in using relaxation and adaptation strategies (relaxation breathing, a safe place to go to, counting to ten, etc.).

4.5 Support required

- Creation of an IEP (individualisation of certain objectives in terms both of behaviour and socialisation as well as instruction, with frequent progress evaluations).
- Continuing services provided for several hours each day (MELS, 2006, p. 11).
- A staff member available in the school at all times to intervene in the event of unexpected situations (MELS, 2006).
- Assignments broken up into several stages, since they are not able to commit the normal time required for an assignment.
- Help in acquiring a positive self-image.
- Sufficient accompaniment for psychosocial development.
- A calm, non-confrontational response, focused on reducing their anxiety;
- Creation of an environment sensitive to the problems.

4.6 Who provides the support?

- Psychologists, psycho-educators, special education technicians, working with classroom teachers and parents, can provide individual and routine follow-up.
- Special education technicians can also help to prevent escalation and defuse situations resulting from a high level of anxiety.
- The team members should support one another by sharing information concerning difficulties and by establishing common practices so that expectations at home and in the school are consistent.

4.7 Suggestions for teachers working with students with psychopathological disorders

(Alberta Education, 2005)

- Maintain a file that is organised, objective and concise.
- Record their level of participation in classroom activities and assignments.
- Make note of all strange comments or references to imaginary experiences (conversations, voices, etc.).
- Keep any drawings or artistic creations that are unusual.
- Keep a copy of all correspondence sent out.
- Learn about the effects of the disorder on the family.
- Learn how to recognise the signs of relapse (withdrawal from activities, deterioration in personal hygiene).

4.8 Beyond the mandate of the school

Psychopathological difficulties are mental health problems; certain dysfunctions may require specialised services beyond the mandate of the school.

A) Teachers wishing to have a student with behavioural difficulties identified (8-9.04)

When the teacher feels that a student should be identified as having behavioural difficulties:

- because he or she has observed one or more behaviours over a period of at least two months,
- and support services are insufficient or altogether lacking, therefore he or she can ask the school board to identify the student.

Following the observation period of two months, the procedure is as follows:

- request the creation of the ad hoc committee by the administration (within 15 working days) to study the case submitted and to make recommendations.
- once the student is identified by the Board as having behavioural difficulties, he or she is weighted for purposes of compensation for exceeding the maximum class size. The weighting is retroactive and comes into effect no later than 45 days following the request.

B) Teachers wishing to have a student with learning difficulties identified (8-9.06 and 8-9.07)

When the student has no IEP and is receiving no services, the procedure is as follows:

- the teacher requests study of the situation by the ad hoc committee;
- the administrator convenes the committee;
- the committee recommends to the administration of the establishment the creation of an IEP or the identification of the student as having learning difficulties.

When the student has an IEP but neither the student nor the teacher is receiving support services, the procedure is as follows:

- the teacher requests study of the situation by the ad hoc committee;
- the administrator convenes the committee;
- the committee can make recommendations to the administration regarding whether or not the student should be identified, the appropriate classification of the student, changes to the classification or to the IEP, the evaluation of the IEP, and support services provided (8-9.06).

C) When a student is recognised by the school board as having learning difficulties but receives no services, **he is weighted for purposes of compensation for exceeding maximum class size** (8-9.07)**.**

D) When the student is recognised as having behavioural difficulties, **he is weighted for purposes of compensation for exceeding maximum class size whether or not he is receiving services** (8-9.07)**.**

E) When teachers wish to have a handicapped student or a student with severe behavioural difficulties identified, the procedure is as follows:

- notification to the administration;
- creation of the ad hoc committee by the administration (15 working days);
- the ad hoc committee studies the case, requests evaluations, recommends a classification, integration (where appropriate), and support services to be provided.

F) When the student is identified as having severe behavioural difficulties associated with psychopathological problems, teachers must be provided with support and the student is weighted for purposes of compensation for exceeding the maximum class size.

G) When the student is identified as handicapped, teachers must be provided with support or the student is weighted for purposes of compensation for exceeding the maximum class size.

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www.aqeta.qc.ca

Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec (CTREQ)
www.ctreq.qc.ca

Centre François-Michelle (déficience intellectuelle légère)
www.françois-michelle.qc.ca

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