

PERSPECTIVES ON THE TRANSITION OF LEARNERS FROM ADULT GENERAL EDUCATION TO COLLEGE

Marie (Aurélie) Thériault, Ph.D.¹

ABSTRACT: This article examines the transition of adult learners from adult general education to a college program. The ethnographic inquiry methodology used for this research relies on Long's theoretical model which postulates three different levels of dimensions in adult education (1989) and on Bélanger's lifelong learning model (2011). On this rarely-addressed subject, it engages the expertise of the field in a co-construction process and from an adult education perspective. The psychological, pedagogical, sociological issues (Long, 1989) that are at play show the significant commitment adult learners have to make to further their education, and the reconstructive path they have chosen to facilitate their social insertion. The need to create a bridge between Adult General Education and the college environment is posed as a way to support the educational emancipation of adults in Québec society.

Keywords: learners, adult general education, college transition, educational issues, cross perspectives

In 2016-2017, out of the 65,565 individuals who obtained their High School Diploma (HSD) in Québec, 8,993 came from Adult General Education (AGE). In contrast, out of the 67,602 individuals who obtained their HSD² in 2020-2021, only 4,995 came from AGE (Institut de la statistique du Québec [ISQ], 2022). This decrease in absolute numbers follows the downward trend in overall AGE attendance observed in recent years: in 2016-2017, 181,819 individuals attended AGE, compared to 159,044 in 2021 (ISQ, 2022). In addition, we see an aging of the learning population during this period, with the attendance rate of those aged 25 and over increasing compared to that of those aged 24 and under. The curve for 25 and over has indeed been on a steady rise since 2015, with 24 and under declining: from 50%-50% in 2015, numbers reached 57%-43%, respectively, in 2020 (Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes, 2022). Interestingly, the majority of adults enrolled in AGE are in basic training (Thériault, 2019). We therefore see two trends: first, the aging of the adult learning population; and secondly, the lower rate of HSD attainment in AGE. (Note that these figures would require targeted interpretation.)

Few adults from AGE decide to pursue a college education in the regular sector. In 2020-2021, only 1,876 AGE graduates, out of a total of 71,566, applied for admission through the Service régional des admissions du Montréal métropolitain (SRAM) (SRAM, 2021). Their admission rate was 74.7%, compared to 91.3% amongst students coming from the youth sector.

Ever since its inception in 1967, the mission of Québec's CEGEP³ has been at once social and pedagogical. Besides bridging the gap between high school and university (two-years programs), it provides also professional training (three-years programs) to those wishing

¹ Associate Professor, Département de psychopédagogie et d'andragogie, Faculté des sciences de l'éducation, Université de Montréal. Email: marie.theriault@umontreal.ca

to enter the workforce earlier. In Québec, this college system is public, and access is free. The modern-day CEGEP has replaced the classical colleges of yore, which were essentially elitist. The fact that CEGEPs are disseminated all over Québec has enabled young students from the farthest reaches of the province to access college-level education. The CEGEP model also plays a crucial transitional role in the educational and social insertion of adults and young adults, including through continuing education. In the present article, the term “CEGEP” thus refers the notion of college from a post-secondary and pre-university standpoint.

General Purpose of the Research

This study’s aim was to understand the psychological, pedagogical, and sociological components (Long, 1989) resulting from the transition of learners from AGE to CEGEP. Stemming from a cross-sectional and systemic perspective, the study elicited the participation of AGE stakeholders (a Principal, a Vice-Principal, a teacher, and a Guidance Counselor), as well as that of seven learners (five women, two men). In the course of this study, we have gathered statistical data on the HSD attainment rate in AGE, on the nature of school attendance in this order of education, and on the number of AGE graduates who have enrolled in CEGEP in the Montréal area (research location) over the past six years (research period). These figures reveal that such a transition remains marginal. Of interest were the reasons for enrolling (the “why”), the characteristics of the transition itself (the “how”) and the programs students have chosen (the “where”), taking into account the educational background and life experiences of the adult learners (their intrinsic ethno-pedagogical path), as well as the psychological, pedagogical, and social needs associated with their transition to collegial studies (Long, 1989; Thériault, 2019). The emphasis is placed here on the importance of understanding the links between the learners’ educational and life paths, their pedagogical paths in AGE, academic perseverance, the transition to college, and social insertion – the notion of “path” being defined here as a way of experiencing the transition into and educational specificities of the college environment, as it logically follows the pattern of previous paths. This article discusses the dimensions.

Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the academic paths, life paths, and characteristics of AGE learners who have persevered, gotten their HSD, and pursued their studies at the college level?
2. What made them decide to go to college, and how is their transition going?
3. What difficulties have they experienced in this academic context, and what have they done to overcome them?

Research Objectives

The general research objective was to analyze, on a psychological, pedagogical, and sociological levels, the academic paths, life paths and characteristics of AGE learners who enrolled in CEGEP just before obtaining their HSD (or DES). Four sub-objectives

were derived from this general objective (Thériault, 2019): 1) identify the elements explaining the success of adults in AGE, as well as the difficulties they experienced and the means that were implemented to overcome these difficulties; 2) identify existing links between AGE pedagogy, obtaining the HSD (or DES), and the reasons why AGE students go on to college; 3) articulate the potential obstacles adult learners might face in their transition to college; 4) describe this transition. Research followed a two-pronged approach that: 1) considered a perspective based on the knowledge of learners; and 2) considered a cross-sectional perspective based on the knowledge of educational and pedagogical interveners.

Conceptual Framework

This study used an ethnographic method, adapted to the context of adult education, based on Long's theory, related in Carré and Moisan's to self-training theory (2002) and on Bélanger's andragogical model (2011). These analyze adult learning from three specific angles, taken from their understanding of Long's theoretical model (1989). The psychological angle takes into account academic and life goals, expressed here as the adult learners' wish to control their path and transition from AGE to CEGEP, with respect to their aspirations. The pedagogical angle takes into account the educational perspective, expressed here as the learners' desire to control the components of their learning project (place of learning, duration of studies, academic and support resources, negotiating the various aspects of adult life). The sociological angle takes into account education as a social fact, namely here the ability to control education as an element of society which adults depend on, and which they may or may not master in view of their choices and capacity to "self-direct."

The nature of the ethno-pedagogical paths study participants have explained or analyzed is based on factors linked to these three aforementioned aspects: the psychological dimension (motivation, desire to succeed, self-esteem, the need for normalcy); the pedagogical dimension (the teacher/student relationship, achieving academic goals, the availability of resources); and the sociological dimension (programs, inner workings of the institution, transition to college, support measures, social insertion). Each of these dimensions is of scientific interest: the psychological angle allows us to draw precise ethno-pedagogical portraits; the pedagogical angle informs us on the experiential differences between Adult Education Center and CEGEP; and the sociological angle enables us to follow student progress, and informs us on their academic perseverance and social and educational insertion (Thériault, 2017).

Method

Research was conducted between 2016 and 2019, in an Adult Education Center located in the Greater Montréal Metropolitan area. It was deployed epistemologically through written and/or oral ethnographic surveys which, in our context, rested on the relationships between informants and on the investigator and her team. Our goal was to obtain a contrast of the perspectives of both adult education stakeholders and adult learners, through the chosen ethnographic process (Izard and Lenclud, 2000; Roberge, 1991). Life

story interviews were also used as a technique to better understand the intrinsic characteristics of adults, and it has proven useful in its capacity to produce ethno-pedagogical narratives (educational and life paths; Thériault, 2015). In all, ten key informants participated in the co-construction process: seven adult learners (four women, two men) who were completing their Secondary V (Grade 12) and transitioning to college; and four AGE pedagogical interveners (Principal, Vice-Principal, first-language French teacher, Guidance Counselor). Five questionnaires, designed by the researcher, were used for the survey, four of them being aimed at adult learners and one at the pedagogical experts. The research team did observations (the author has more than 20 years of experience teaching adults in public school), gathered statements from the participants, they shared their field notes. The synthesis of the process has been conducted by the researcher's team, the informants themselves and me the researcher. The ethnographic approach was addressed in contrasting ways, using the same kind of protocol, to both adults and experts.

Participating adult learners were followed during two periods: "Year 1" goes up to the end of their studies in AGE; "Year 2" spans the time of their insertion into a college program, including transition time. Long's model (1989) was applied in context to construct the questionnaires.

Questionnaires Aimed at Adult Learners

These four questionnaires were designed (Thériault, 2017) to draw out narratives on the academic background and personal life (ethno-pedagogical paths) of the learners we interviewed. The questions were also designed to gain information on academic perseverance and the transition to post-secondary education. Emphasis was placed on the nature and quality of the pedagogical relationship in these education settings, on the transition to college, and on the perceptions of learners regarding their social insertion or their psychological, pedagogical and social needs. The results of these questionnaires are not included in the present article.

Questionnaire Aimed at AGE Intervenors

The fifth questionnaire, *Questionnaire destiné aux expertes et experts pédagogiques*, consists of 20 questions divided into three blocks that cover the three dimensions of Long's model (1989). Block 1 focuses on the AGE environment: student paths, social insertion, academic perseverance. Block 2 deals with the pedagogical relationship at the AGE, student perseverance, and academic success. Block 3 focuses entirely on the transition from AGE to college. The goal of this questionnaire is to document the perspectives of adult education stakeholders as to the differences between AGE and CEGEP. The key results found in this article were drawn from this questionnaire.

Results

This article focuses on the perspective of pedagogical experts: how do they apprehend the learners' transition to college. The ethnography collected with the learners has been

indeed published previously (Thériault, 2017 and 2019). What follows is consequently the synthesis of oral ethnographic interviews conducted with educational experts on the subject of the transition from adult education to college, which is a crucial one in the lives of many adult learners. Results are articulated in three parts: 1) the role of AGE; 2) Learner paths and profiles; and 3) the transition to CEGEP. This synthesis has been realised by the team and is the result of an in-depth comprehension of the issues regarding the learners' transition to college, also a path of reconstruction for them.

The Role of AGE

The Principal we interviewed sees AGE as a bridge that students can cross to achieve realistic goals. "Realistic", because sometimes it requires of them to reassess their initial aspirations and objectives. It is indeed a journey of learning, but also of acceptance. She sees support and social insertion as the cornerstones of AGE, as these are the elements that will enable learners to play a role in society, and to feel that their contribution is valued. The Guidance Counselor reports that, upon arriving in AGE, learners fill out a questionnaire where they identify obstacles to academic success. Monetary concerns, the need to balance out school and work are common negative factors. Other obstacles are despondency, disconnection, stress, health issues, and an unfavorable home environment. The questionnaire also asks students what motivates them to further their education, beyond simply getting their HSD.

The Vice-Principal (VP) believes for his part that individualizing support and humanizing approaches are two essential components of AGE's mission of investing in the future and in social development. He maintains that the contribution of everyone at the Adult Education Center is necessary to achieve this mission. The VP also believes that, in the current context of labor shortages and of an aging population, actions must be taken to invest even more in adult learners, as AGE does not pertain only to their professional insertion, but also to their social integration. When AGE administrators, professional personnel and teaching staff put forth these values, they contribute to the creation of a fairer, more modern and equitable society. The VP notes that adult education attracts many young students who have good motivation and no learning difficulties or disabilities, as well as others who, in spite of such difficulties, manage to overcome these obstacles and to succeed.

The Principal points out that AGE is the target of many negative misconceptions, namely that it is purely an environment for students who have failed at school. She says that some parents are ashamed to send their child to adult education, and that they may even convince them not to enroll. The Guidance Counselor we interviewed maintains that colleges also adhere to these preconceived notions, thinking that AGE is for weak students and that classes there are easier than in the regular sector. College teachers are not necessarily conscious of the issues AGE learners have to deal with, says the Counselor, and because they can have up to 40 students per class, they can't personalize their teaching or take into account each student's strengths and weaknesses, as is the case in AGE.

Learner Paths and Profiles

According to the Guidance Counselor, only about 30% of all AGE students earn their HSD within the year, and over 50% of them don't finish secondary school (high school) or won't have access to some other type of training. As for the Principal, while she recognizes that cases and experiences vary greatly, she maintains that adult learners share academic characteristics that can be associated with an intermittent path through the regular sector, one that's punctuated by significant learning difficulties. The VP specifies that while some learners are sent to AGE via the Québec Labor Ministry or Ministry of Immigration, there are others who have to work for a living, and a few who are already in CEGEP but need additional high school credits to get their college degree.

The Principal says that many young students have a challenging start at the Adult Education Center. They arrive there on October 1st straight out of regular high school, often at the insistence of their parents. This sudden transition is a shock for them, as it does not give them time to reflect on what field they could get into, assuming they don't go into higher education. Some drop out and come back numerous times, sometimes up to 15 to 20 times. They do this for various reasons: a difficult, unsupportive family environment; financial hardships; having to hold down a job; the many responsibilities of motherhood; learning disabilities; lack of organizational skills; drug problems, mental health issues; cultural pressures; and so on. The youngest in the AGE cohorts may have serious problems linked to the law, criminality, psychological and family issues, and an overall lack of support. But what are the deepest pedagogical causes of these dropouts? What can be done to convince pedagogic stakeholders to become more interested in their adult learners' previous academic paths, in the circumstances of their lives, to convince them to follow more closely the state and progress of these students? If at the institutional or social levels there are limits that inhibit such an endeavor, then we must use our ingenuity (perhaps through what one might call "creative misconduct") to go beyond the framework of individualized teaching in order to foster a new kind of learning, one anchored in a more dynamic pedagogy, in information and communication technologies, and in social media. (In regards to this, the VP notes that AGE lags far behind, as it's not given the means to appropriate and use such tools.) The Principal, on her part, maintains that individualized pedagogy is a must in teaching AGE students because of the frequency at which they drop out and return. More specifically, she speaks of a "diversified teaching", one that would require teachers to adapt to the situation and specificities of each student. But individualized teaching is both a facilitator and a barrier to success: a facilitator for the adult learner who is self-reliant; a barrier for those who are not and who hide their difficulties because they are ashamed of them. Thankfully, as the Guidance Counselor points out, the AGE environment facilitates both socio-professional insertion (integration into the job market) and social insertion (integration into society).

The Principal asserts that the quality of the pedagogical relationship plays a role in the learners' progress as, "for students, this is an emotional link, often the only social link they will share with another person during the course of the day" ([p. 17, Field Notes, 2017]). Some teachers are more skilled than others at building this kind of rapport with their students. The VP wonders if a relationship of trust and support can truly develop

between an adult learner and his or her teacher. Certain factors, such as the age gap and the difference in academic experience, can create an insurmountable distance between them. The Teacher, on the other hand, sees the teacher/student relationship as a key ingredient in academic perseverance. Mutual trust can be achieved through open communication, and through understanding the learner's life experiences and academic background. She believes that beyond the support of family and friends, the pedagogical, psychosocial, and counseling resources that are offered to learners have a positive impact on their ability to persevere and succeed. Interdisciplinary interventions are essential to this end: teachers, counselors, doctors and social workers must collaborate, and institutions must have the necessary human and financial resources at their disposal so they can maintain these services.

Learner profiles have changed over time in Québec. In the 1990s, new government programs brought a younger clientele to AGE, one marked by precarious academic backgrounds, learning disabilities, and a slew of seldom-before-seen psychosocial issues including drug addiction, involvement in bad social circles, and the inability to move on from the old educational system. Today, financial instability is an issue, especially among young people and single mothers. Those who have a job and work long hours often have to miss classes. Mental health problems are on the rise, and as the Principal points out, resources in physical and mental health and social services are much scarcer in AGE than in the regular youth sector, with a glaring lack of nurses, psychologists, and remedial teachers. The VP says his center doesn't have the means to hire mental health specialists, and that they only have one social worker on-site. Still, according to him AGE must adapt in the face of a younger population with changing profiles. Thankfully, community-based organizations can support AGE adults who want to pursue vocational training and/or post-secondary education, and AGE itself remains open to learners with complex educational paths.

Mastery of the official language is another significant element. For a young person or adult of immigrant background, linguistic issues can hinder academic success – and as the Counselor points out, eventually compromise their transition from AGE to CEGEP. The VP notes that learners from immigrant families can face challenges even if they do not experience difficulties at home, as they must adapt to the way education is carried out in Québec as well as to local culture. Having said that, most AGE students come from underprivileged backgrounds, with very few coming from private schools.

The Principal considers that perseverance and success in AGE, as well as failure for that matter, rest essentially on the individual himself. Setting financial goals and aspiring to a worthwhile profession are essential ingredients of learner perseverance and motivation. The Counselor also deems it important for students to set goals and timelines for themselves, adding that individuals who are more stable psychologically tend to be more organized, have better relationships with teachers, and find it easier to stay motivated. For women, being the head of a single-parent family contributes to motivation. Conversely, lack of self-esteem or confidence in one's abilities thwarts success.

Transition to CEGEP

The Guidance Counselor notes that very few adult learners from AGE move on to CEGEP. According to the Principal and Vice-Principal, out of 100 students, only 35 to 40 graduates at the end of the year, and out of those between 10% and 15% will go to CEGEP, 25 to 30% will enroll in vocational training, and 10% will opt for semi-skilled trades. Only one or two of these 100 AGE alumni will make it all the way to university.

Most students have confirmed literacy skills [completed Secondary III or IV (Grade 10 or 11)] when they enter AGE. Adults enrolling with lower levels [Secondary I or II, or pre-secondary (Grade 8 or 9 or pre-high school education)] see their chances of accessing CEGEP compromised since they will have to invest years of effort before they can hope to make the transition. So, the lower the starting level, the more difficult it is to obtain the HSD, as students tend to get discouraged, seek a shorter academic path, or straight out abandon their studies to work full time. The Teacher notes that getting their HSD encourages students to go to CEGEP, but that it is essential that the support and resources that were available to them in AGE be maintained in college, and remain easily accessible. In her estimation, financial considerations weigh heavy in a person's decision to go or not to go to CEGEP. After getting their HSD, many lose government student aid, which negatively impacts on their capacity or desire to further their education. Those who need a job with a regular paycheck to survive are also less likely to continue. The Teacher also names drug consumption, along with social and family pressures, as having a negative impact on the transition from AGE to CEGEP – or likelihood thereof.

The Vice-Principal notes that some adult learners transition to vocational training right after finishing their Secondary III or IV (Grade 10 or 11), while others do so after getting their HSD. In both cases, the goal is to get ahead, to build a life for themselves. Adults who struggle in education often seek to acquire a semi-skilled trade, though the Guidance Counselor says he tends to direct AGE learners towards technical college programs such as nursing or X-Ray technology. The Counselor follows the students' admission files and gives colleges "additional information" on AGE applicants, but maintains he's no longer able to follow up on AGE graduates once they enter college.

The VP says the length of time students have to adjust and adapt to the collegial environment is key to a successful transition – AGE learners can indeed feel a little disoriented when first entering CEGEP. In addition, the obstacles encountered in AGE don't just disappear the minute they enter college: learners often face administrative problems and issues with student loans, all while they have to acclimatize to their new teachers, classes and surroundings. Adult learners have told the VP they find the academic structures of CEGEP much different than those of AGE, with college imposing tighter deadlines and heavier workloads – the Counselor finds the latter to be a common stressor in the questionnaire he gives students to fill out. And while in AGE students are supported and supervised, colleges don't monitor attendance or assiduousness. Teacher and Counselor both speak to the differences in schedules, teaching, and workload that await AGE students once (or if) they get to college. They also deem it important for them to learn organizational skills and master new learning tools.

The Principal nevertheless believes that AGE adults negotiate the transition to CEGEP more skillfully than young people straight out of secondary school because they have had to overcome more difficulties to get there. Here, maturity enhances the adult learners' resilience, helping them cope with financial troubles, work-related issues, and in the reconstruction of their self. The VP also cites maturity as a key factor in the success of adult learners in college, as their years in AGE have helped them develop strong work ethics and a will to give their best effort – something he's observed for instance in single mothers, who are often determined to get their college diploma in spite of the many hurdles they face in doing so. As for the Teacher, she finds college enables students to project themselves into the future. The desire to eventually have a good job or career, she says, is a major factor of perseverance for AGE graduates entering college. But if the resilience adult learners have acquired throughout their life may help them negotiate some of the negative impact college could have on them (facing prejudice, the judgement of others, social labeling), the adversity they have experienced in the past may inhibit their capacity to persevere and succeed in post-secondary studies.

On this subject, the Principal reports that a new program linked to a reform of the youth sector has been making it more complicated for adult learners to progress, especially for those in great difficulty. Besides obtaining the HSD, several new requirements have been added, and they are so exacting that they stand as a major obstacle to the transition from AGE to higher education, whether it be CEGEP or university. In her opinion, everything is geared to steer a certain AGE clientele towards short, semi-specialized trade programs, this at the expense of a more universal or diversified basic education. As for the VP, he explains that about twenty years ago some CEGEPs and Adult Education Centers had reached agreements to help students transition to higher education, and to demystify college-level requirements. Universities that were recruiting AGE graduates had done the same. But today, there are no more agreements of this sort between CEGEPs and Adult Education Centers. To this end, the VP suggests five possible initiatives that could facilitate the transition of learners from AGE to college: 1) invite CEGEP teachers to meet AGE students who are about to get their HSD; 2) assign CEGEP staff whose job would be to facilitate collaboration in the carrying out of insertion activities; 3) organize exchanges where CEGEP people visit AGE learners in their schools, and conversely, where learners from AGE visit a CEGEP; 4) provide more comprehensive information, so that AGE graduates have points of reference once they get to CEGEP; and 5) have colleges provide support for AGE students by showing them around, and by helping them develop studying, organizational, and work strategies. The AGE Teacher we interviewed agrees that measures should be put in place to ease the transition to CEGEP. Like the VP, she thinks there should be better communication between Adult Education and colleges, and that guidance counselors should be tasked with providing more information to AGE students in order to better prepare them for the academic and social realities of college. The Guidance Counselor interviewed in this study agrees, adding that mentoring with AGE alumni or CEGEP personnel could facilitate transition and help students choose a program that will motivate them and elevate their potential.

As a key accommodation measure for students living with a handicap or for those who have adaptation or learning disabilities, the VP would like colleges to show more

flexibility regarding deadlines and in their evaluation methods, thus recognizing the alterity and plurality of the students' academic backgrounds and experiences. By overcoming enormous obstacles both in school and in life, these individuals have shown great psychological, pedagogical, and societal resilience. The Counselor, for his part, advises AGE learners to strive to adapt to their CEGEP's evaluation measures, and points out that in college, students with special needs must submit a medical diagnosis in order to benefit from attendant accommodations, which is not the case in AGE.

When concluding her interview, the Principal said she would like to use her influence to prompt decision-makers to act so as to change the lives of adult learners for the better. She believes that structural obstacles should not undermine the motivation of institutional administrators who, as part of their mandate, should support those team members who strive to see AGE students succeed.

Discussion

Several elements of this ethnographic study converge as pertains to their psychological, pedagogical, and social dimensions (Long, 1989).

Psychological Dimensions

One psychological aspect of note refers to the impact a person's academic and personal background has had on them, and more particularly as regards to their academic path in secondary school, where a fragmented, discontinuous attendance may have delayed their journey to the HSD. While family issues may be one of the main root causes of such a fragmentation (traumatic home environment, socio-economic difficulties, etc.), other factors come into play, such as learning difficulties and disorders that have never been diagnosed or treated for lack of financial resources, or lack of services in high school. In that respect, the AGE environment acts as a resilience booster for adult learners. Their motivation must be rebuilt, their learning difficulties resolved, and in this they must feel the full support of their institution. Our informants agree that there are gaps in the services that Adult Education Centers provide: little psychological support with outside specialists is offered to teaching staff, and among students there is a clear socio-economic imbalance resulting in a form of discrimination against those who are financially disenfranchised. The capacity and right for individuals to access lifelong adult education are thus called into question (Bélanger's model).

As far as adult learners are concerned, we definitely observed a difference between men and women, the latter showing stronger self-motivation than the former, especially when they are mothers and heads of households. The psychological reconstruction efforts of AGE adults who transition to CEGEP is to be commended here, as well as the AGE's mission in this regard. It should also be noted that in Montréal, the city where this study was undertaken and where our informants work, many adult learners come from an immigrant background or have recently migrated; the fact that their academic history (degrees and diplomas from the country of origin) is not recognized in Québec, along

with their limited knowledge of the French language, greatly affect their capacity and motivation to start over, get their HSD and then move on to a college program.

Pedagogical Dimensions

The student/teacher relationship built through AGE programs plays a fundamental role in the resilience and perseverance of learners transiting to CEGEP. As the college environment is less structured than that of AGE, adult learners must learn to better self-regulate, and to make sure their level of motivation is in step with these new requirements. And all the more so considering that CEGEP were not necessarily structured so as to accommodate adult students shouldering adult responsibilities, be they linked to family, housing or work. Pedagogical support could also be lacking in the collegial realm, and so learning difficulties of the past may persist and stymie the student's progress.

Sociological Dimensions

For AGE students, the passage to higher education is motivated by their desire to integrate into society with greater knowledge, literacy and skills. Financial issues pose serious problems for these learners, so the prospect of eventually having a good, sustaining job or career is highly emancipating for them. Balancing studies and work also prove to be a challenge, especially for students who are parents or heads of households; for these, having financial support is critical. In Québec, student aid policies, as well as grants and loans programs, have proven to be insufficient, and the concept of lifelong education does not give way to formal socio-pedagogical actions – part-time attendance, for example, is not permitted in technical programs, and not funded by the system of grants and loans (Thériault, 2019). It's a fact that Adult Education Centers are more flexible, but their programs are not well-known to adults transitioning to CEGEP. All this gives one the impression that the bridges between AGE and the collegial sector have been severed, leaving researchers to wonder whether this state of affairs is a calculated societal hurdle contrived to impede on an adult's right to lifelong education, particularly when he or she has experienced socio-economic, psychological or pedagogical disenfranchisement and discrimination. This leads us to the notion of emancipation, something AGE wishes for all its students. Just like students from the regular sector, AGE graduates who transition to college, in a program that will eventually lead them to the career of their choice (and not one imposed by the State), exercise in so doing rights that are internationally recognized as theirs to enjoy. The education system, in turn, must make sure, as is its duty, that adult learners who have experienced difficulties and obstacles in their academic and personal life are treated with respect and are free to pursue their post-secondary education. Because in the end, what these adults want, for themselves and for their children, is to live in better conditions and integrate society in a fulfilling way.

Bridging AGE and College

All the academic stakeholders interviewed for this study want bridges to be created between AGE and the various collegial sectors. With simple means, targeted activities

could be implemented to promote the building (or rebuilding, since some of the desired practices have existed in the past) of such bridges, the aim being to get college institutions to better understand the challenges associated with the integration of AGE learners into the world of higher education. CEGEPs could put in place resources specially designed for these learners, including psychological, pedagogical, and social support and accommodations. And financial considerations should not be obstacles in the transition to higher education. Solutions regarding this should be prioritized, particularly for parents and for single mothers who are the head of their household. This debate urgently needs to be initiated.

Research Limitations and Future Explorations

Through its tightly focused method, this research has made it possible to study a subject current literature does not cover, namely the transition of AGE learners to CEGEP. The pedagogical experts' perspectives were explicitly presented in ethnographic form, with their view being supplemented with that of adult learners throughout the course of our research. Since reporting on this issue from a more longitudinal or broader standpoint was not our goal, there is no doubt that researching the subject using a larger sample of adult learners would make Québec's educational system more aware and cognizant of their academic journey through higher education, and of their concomitant social insertion. But in order to do so, we need to be able to locate the AGE alumni who have made it to college, and have precise profile indicators to avoid invisibilization in a stigmatizing way these adults who have experienced and overcome difficulties on their way to getting their HSD and then furthering their education even more. We are convinced that CEGEPs, true to their mission of emancipation and to their model, which is unique in the world, would deem it important to document this issue. The present ethnographic investigation argues in favor of such an initiative.

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