

# The GOAL Post

## GOAL & the Curriculum

### Viewpoint

## Kids retain learning that has real-life relevance

by Rebecca Enright, Eastern Townships School Board

I recently met a student in the Work-Oriented Training Path who was questioning the need to learn long division. He planned to become a dairy farmer and saw no connection between the two.

**“If we’re not doing it, we’re not learning it.”**

My parents are dairy farmers and I was able to explain how they use multiplication and long division when mixing feed for the herd. With this new perception, this student’s attitude towards math completely changed.

The GOAL approach is simple: relate learning to life experience. Last year, when my Cycle Two class at Farnham Elementary was studying solar energy, we could have watched a video or discussed the concept in class. But I

believe that if we’re not doing it, we’re not learning it, so I had pairs of students build their own solar-powered water heaters. Using pie plates, Styrofoam trays, plastic bottles and other items that hold water, students placed their devices in the sun. At 20-minute intervals we recorded the water temperature in each container to discover which ones heated the water. Finally, we discussed why some devices were more effective than others.

This kind of learning stays with kids because it opens their eyes to how knowledge can be applied in real life. This year, when their science teacher asked the class, “What do you know about science?” the students replied: “We know all about solar energy!”

### Less review time

Many teachers would like to use more hands-on learning but feel it could limit their ability to cover the entire curriculum. My experience is the oppo-

site. Engaged students retain knowledge and need less review time. I’m not suggesting we boycott traditional approaches. Doing hands-on activities for



Farnham Elementary students show a “legs-on” understanding of perpendicular lines.

every part of the curriculum isn’t realistic. But if you design two this year and two next year and share ideas with other teachers, you’re getting more of the type of learning into the classroom that students crave and retain.

Rebecca Enright is a K-11 math, science and technology consultant and an elementary teacher.



Rebecca Enright, helping out on her family’s farm

## Where GOAL fits in the QEP

Look no further than the **Broad Areas of Learning (BAL)** to grasp how GOAL is implicit in the Québec Education Program (QEP). These five interdisciplinary areas “favour the integration of the learnings in various subjects” (*Pre-school and*

*Elementary*); “encourage students to make connections between what they learn at school, their everyday lives and social realities” (*Secondary Cycle*

*One*); and are “a reminder that life is at the centre of school learning and . . . school should make a major contribution to preparing students for it” (*Secondary Cycle Two*).

One of those areas, **Personal and Career Planning** (*Career Planning and Entrepreneurship in Secondary Cycle Two*) is especially pertinent. While wording varies slightly from cycle to cycle, this BAL aims for students to discover who they are as individuals; use their self-knowledge to plan for their futures; and become familiar with the world of work and the social roles and responsibilities they will one day assume.

Sounds a lot like GOAL, doesn’t it?

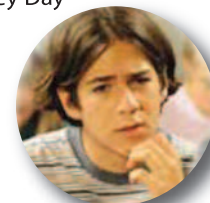
**“The more that school tasks resemble work in the real world, the more engaged students will be . . .”**

– Damian Cooper

(on the need for “authentic” assessment)

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*Making Dreams Come True*

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[www.learnquebec.ca/goal](http://www.learnquebec.ca/goal)



## All those little steps open doors for students

*Opportunities for students to explore who they are and where their interests lie permeate the culture of Riverside Regional Elementary School.*



Principal **Corinne MacDonald** is passionate about giving children in her Jonquière school a head start exploring different career fields, in part because of her own experience as a parent. “I was completely blown away when my mechanical-engineer son announced he was moving to Vancouver to pursue his real passion—acting,” she relates. “I wondered whether I hadn’t allowed him to tap into that part of himself.”

As much as the curriculum is about teaching language skills and math, she believes it must also prepare kids for life. “Children won’t remember how well you taught them grade 2 math, but they will remember if you exposed them to sufficient experiences.”

### Every student has a job

In that spirit, every Cycle Three student holds a school-related job, be it cafeteria helper, bus monitor or “guardian angel” to a younger student. Towards the end of grade 5, every child has a mini-interview explaining why he or she would make a good school host—a position reserved for the grade 6s. “I look forward to those two days

when we sit down with students to explore who they are,” says Corinne.

The school also organizes an annual Career Week. One year, each class explored the theme “Who is in my school?” Every member of staff—teachers,

“ It was like Halloween with a purpose. ”

cafeteria workers, psychologist, librarian, janitor, principal—visited different classes to explain what their job entailed and the education it required.

Another time, students at every level researched (in an age-appropriate way) a career that interested them. The week culminated with everyone coming to school in a costume reflecting their chosen career. “It was like Halloween with a purpose,” recalls Corinne.

### Students compose questions in class

Cycle Three takes the process further with a day of presentations each year by speakers in fields the students suggest in advance. In class, students compose questions for the speakers; on the actual day, they practise their oral communication by coming up to the microphone to ask their questions. “At this age, it’s all about opening doors,” says Corinne. Or as her son told students last year via Skype: what matters is to keep looking for what is really going to motivate you.

## Models of good behaviour

Ten years ago, when principal **Corinne MacDonald** came to **Riverside Regional**, Cycle Three students were behind 40% of behaviour incidents. “I was flinging out suspensions like Frisbees,” says Corinne. That’s when the idea of giving every Cycle Three student a job was born.

### Learning responsibility

“When you give kids responsibility, they learn to be responsible,” says Corinne. Today, Cycle Three’s share of incidents is down to 8% and “some students who kept us busier than most during their earlier years have become models of good behaviour for younger students.”

## GOAL can be as simple or as complex as you wish

Applying the guidance-oriented approach to learning can involve hands-on projects that students love (but require time to plan and carry out.) Or it can be as simple as telling students, “Do you realize that plumbers (or vets or airline pilots . . . ) couldn’t do their jobs if they didn’t know what we just learned?”

### Ask yourself these five questions

If you can answer “yes” to the following questions, GOAL isn’t just high on your radar—it’s in your classroom.

1 “Do I give my students examples of how concepts studied in class can be used in actual occupations or everyday living?”

2 Do I help my students reflect on what an area of study is teaching them about their own interests, abilities, likes and dislikes?

3 Do I look for people, places and activities in the school/community that can add real-life context to classroom learning?

4 Do I give parents suggestions for helping their children apply in-class learning to everyday situations at home?

5 Do I discuss ways to make classroom learning more relevant with GOAL consultants, guidance counsellors, librarians and other colleagues?

## Getting parents involved

At parent-teacher meetings, the ETSB’s **Rebecca Enright** preps parents on how they can use everyday situations to reinforce the math their kids are learning. Does the child want to redecorate his space? Get him to calculate the area of his room and then figure out how much paint is needed. Is the family planning to drive to Toronto? Ask your child what time you need to leave home to arrive in time for a 4:00 p.m. check-in. For more ideas, check Rebecca’s wiki at [http://mypage.etsb.qc.ca/groups/elementarymathematics/wiki/c085a/Math Parent Ideas.html](http://mypage.etsb.qc.ca/groups/elementarymathematics/wiki/c085a/Math%20Parent%20Ideas.html)







## Students who felt marginalized come into their own

An in-school silk-screening venture is enabling a group of students to master required competencies—and build on GOAL’s twin pillars: self-knowledge and career awareness.

The “T-Shirt Factory” at Philemon Wright High School in Gatineau owes its existence to a chance comment made by a student in the Work-Oriented Training Path’s Prework Training program. She told vice-principal Julie Fram-Greig that her class didn’t feel that they fit in or had a place in the school.

“Students have ownership of something important to the school.”

“That really bothered me,” says Julie, who knew that some of these same students were also very anxious about going on the work placements that are essential to their program. And it got her thinking. The school had some silk-screening equipment left over from the old technical programs. Why not use funds available for WOTP to get the equipment recalibrated and back into use?

Youth worker/behaviour technician, Ilona Jones, took on the task early last September. Under her guidance, Prework students set up a production space and learned to operate the equipment. By the end of September, in time for Philemon Wright’s

annual “Spirit Day” celebration, they had silk-screened 1,000 t-shirts for the entire school population. They have since handled several additional orders and produced a pamphlet for other Western Québec schools outlining their at-cost services. They have learned to work safely, deal with suppliers and organize distribution—all skills that dovetail with work-placement competencies.

“This has turned their year around completely,” says Julie. “The students have ownership of something important to the school and the experience has given them the confidence to complete outside work placements.”

### Spreadsheets in math class

Now that she knows that the T-Shirt Factory is viable and the kids are interested, Julie envisions linking its operation directly to the curriculum in such courses as “Introduction to the World of Work” and “Preparation for the Job Market.” She can see students creating spreadsheets in math class to track orders.



Through their T-Shirt Factory experience, students are gaining confidence and acquiring essential competencies.

She credits Ilona’s ability to connect with her students for much of the experiment’s success. “Ilona understands what level of support they need, teaches them and then lets them go do it.”

**Need more copies of The GOAL Post?**  
Contact Doris Kerec at LEARN:  
1-888-622-2212  
or < [dkerec@learnquebec.ca](mailto:dkerec@learnquebec.ca) >.

## Want to add a GOAL component to your classroom teaching?

Take a few minutes to browse the POP Index and get to know this great source of career-awareness activities.

Even though the POP Index was created by MELs to support the career exploration process of students in the Personal Orientation Project (POP), Exploration

of Vocational Training (EXPLO) and Entrepreneurship (EN) courses, any high school student, teacher or guidance counsellor would find it useful.

**POP INDEX**  
[www.repertoireppo.qc.ca/en](http://www.repertoireppo.qc.ca/en)

Experimentation  
Key People  
Testimonies  
Virtual Visits

Originally intended for individual use, this online catalogue of career exploration resources also works with a class of students. For example, math teachers faced with the perennial question “Why are we learning this?” could use the short videos contained in “Hands on Math” <http://repertoireppo.qc.ca/en/outils/fiche/hands-math-353.html?p=ppo&id=21> to show students how pastry chefs, jewellery makers and skateboard designers all depend on math. If you have budding surgeons in your science class, you could refer them to the “Virtual Heart Surgery” experiential tool.

[ Any student, teacher or counsellor would find it useful. ]

The material contained in the POP Index exposes us to many different fields of interest. Students can take virtual tours of work sites, listen in as real people describe their jobs, or try out actual work tasks.

Among the resources listed are more than 30 tool kits that are standard issue in most POP classrooms. These tool kits deal with occupations as diverse as dentistry, professional sports, flooring, law and fashion design. They often include materials-of-the-trade for hands-on exploration. (You’ll find a complete list at [http://learnquebec.ca/en/content/curriculum/career\\_dev/pop/tool\\_kits.html](http://learnquebec.ca/en/content/curriculum/career_dev/pop/tool_kits.html)) The POP Index lets you download the activity guide for each tool kit. Then, if you like what you see, you can arrange with your school’s POP teacher or your GOAL consultant to borrow the actual tool kit.

The POP Index takes students on virtual tours and lets them try out actual work tasks.

**Nathalie Morin**  
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport  
Education Specialist  
(514) 873-3339, ext. 3695  
(418) 266-3117, ext. 3695  
nmorin@mels.gouv.qc.ca

**Central Québec School Board**  
Diane Labbé, Director of Student Services  
labbed@cqsbc.qc.ca

**Commission scolaire du Littoral**  
Charles Lasnier, Guidance Counsellor  
clasnier@cscdulittoral.qc.ca

**Cree School Board**  
Benoit Strasbourg, POP, Vocational Training & GOAL  
bstrasbourg@cscree.qc.ca

**Eastern Shores School Board**  
Daniel Gallagher, Principal  
daniel.gallagher@essb.qc.ca

**Eastern Townships School Board**  
Chris Colley, Career Development Consultant  
colleyc@ped.etsb.qc.ca

**English Montréal School Board**  
Travis Hall, Pedagogical Consultant, Career Development  
THall@emsb.qc.ca

**First Nations Education Council**  
Treena Metallic, Pedagogical Consultant  
tmetallic@cepn-fnec.com

**Lester B. Pearson School Board**  
Nancy Battet, Community and Partnership Liaison  
nbattet@lbpsb.qc.ca

Antoinette Scarano, Work-Placement Coordinator  
ascarano@lbpsb.qc.ca

**New Frontiers School Board**  
Chantal Bergevin, GOAL/Entrepreneurship/Work Study  
chbergevin@nfsb.qc.ca

Tom Muirhead, GOAL/Entrepreneurship/Work Study  
tmuirhead@nfsb.qc.ca

**Riverside School Board**  
Malcolm MacPhee, Career Education Consultant  
mmacphee@rsb.qc.ca

**Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board**  
Steven Scallion, Career Development Consultant  
sscallion@swlauriersb.qc.ca

**Western Québec School Board**  
Johanna Mulder, Guidance Counsellor  
jmulder@wqsb.qc.ca

**Work-Oriented Training Path**  
Ingrid Hove Gust, Project Development Officer  
ihove@swlauriersb.qc.ca

**MELS (Anglophone sector)**  
Ivana Colatriano, Supporting Montréal Schools  
colatriano.i@cscdm.qc.ca

Marsha Gouett, Education Specialist  
marsha.gouett@mels.gouv.qc.ca

Cheryl Pratt, POP, Explo & EN  
cpratt@lbpsb.qc.ca

**MELS (Francophone sector)**  
Johanne LaFrance, Orientation  
johanne.lafrance@mels.gouv.qc.ca

Gino Reeves, Entrepreneuriat  
gino.reeves@mels.gouv.qc.ca

## Entrepreneurial students leave a legacy to their school

**Westmount High School's bike co-op, student-run fitness centre and other entrepreneurial activities encourage kids to take responsibility and practise life skills.**

When **Andrew Robinson** began his career as a history, English and geography teacher a few years ago, he found students had little outlet for what he calls "hands-on, tied-to-the-outside-world learning." That "huge learning gap" sent him in a new direction. While continuing to teach in the day, he enrolled in an evening Cabinet Making program at the English Montréal School Board's **Rosemount Technology Centre**. Now at **Westmount High School**, Andrew teaches Exploration of Vocational Training, as well as the wood shop segment of the Secondary Cycle Two Science and Technology curriculum.



These young men display cutting boards, tea boxes and other objects crafted for the "Wood Shop Shop" – an extra-curricular activity for students who have learned the basics in class and want to advance their skills. Items are sold at school events and proceeds are reinvested in tools and materials for the shop.

### Part of an elective course

Andrew also worked with his students to set up a bike cooperative. The project started as an extra-curricular activity and was entered in the 2011 **Québec Entrepreneurship Contest (QEC)** and won the EMSB prize. Now in its third year, the student-run service provides a place where kids can learn to maintain and repair a bike. As a measure of the co-op's success, bike maintenance will be integrated into the curriculum next year as part of an elective course called "Ecological Choices, Health and the Outdoors."

In 2012, Andrew's students won a regional first prize in the QEC for creating an in-school fitness centre that they reclaimed from a former storage area. With help from staff members, students plastered, painted and

sourced equipment donations. The centre is open before and after school and at lunch for personal and team training, and it is supervised by students in the school's leadership program.

### Passing on their life skills

"Senior students like the idea of leaving a legacy," says Andrew, "and staff are able to pass on their life skills—maybe even spark a possible career interest." Andrew believes experiences like these also break down barriers between staff and students: "When the principal shows up in his jeans and workboots, students realize he is really an approachable person."

April 17, 2013

## Get ready for the first annual "Talk with Our Kids about Money Day"



The **Canadian Foundation for Economic Education** believes any time is a good time to talk to kids about money. But to get the discussion started, it is designating the third Wednesday in April as "**Talk to Our Kids about Money Day.**"

Its new Web site, <http://talkwithourkidsaboutmoney.com>, has many ready-to-use resources to support teachers' efforts to integrate financial education into their curriculum. For example, history teachers will find material for using the North American fur trade as a context for distin-

guishing between a "need" and a "want." Similar resources, addressing fundamental economic concepts, have been created for these areas: language and media literacy, math, geography, arts, health and technology.

While the program is aimed at Secondary I students, the Web site also includes a section devoted to activities parents can do with children of various ages.

Teachers are encouraged to register online to obtain a complete printed teaching kit. However, anyone can preview the material and download information, articles and activities from the site, which will be active all year long.

The GOAL Post is also available in PDF format on the GOAL Web site at [www.learnquebec.ca/goal](http://www.learnquebec.ca/goal)

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