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Name of Program
Comprehensive Strategy

Skills Developed
• Academic
• Personal Management
• Teamwork

Supporting every step of the career education learning process

DUFFERIN-PEEL CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD'S STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS:

The Power of Building on Learners' Strengths

BY KURTIS KITAGAWA

August 1999

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is employing a comprehensive strategy to support every step of the career education learning process for secondary students, students at risk of dropping out, employment insurance recipients and other adults.

Overview

When Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board talks about building the employability skills of youth—whether in school or out—they positively radiate passion and commitment. They have also learned the secret of motivating students to explore careers, maintaining their interest and building the skills they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world of work. Motivation is the key step in attaching youth—or anyone else for that matter—to their interests in developing the skills they need to get, keep and progress in a job. Business, education and government leaders alike have long recognized that identifying skills gaps—whether in individuals or in the economy at large—without any other encouragement is insufficient to get people thinking about

the skills they need and the various ways they can add to, and package, their skills.

Different individuals have different immediate reasons for growing their skills. Some need to cultivate their skills to get a job; others to keep their jobs; still others to progress in their jobs. These different starting points make a difference because learners are at different places in their understanding of the importance of skills, in the information they have with which to make skill building choices and in the factors that are decisive in motivating them to actually grow their skills.

Dufferin-Peel uses its strengths in sound pedagogical practice to motivate its secondary students to build their employability skills. Secondary school students typically move quickly from *who* they are to the urgency of *where* they are going. The skills they have are not as important to them in the first instance as the direction in which they are headed. The world of work requires individuals to demonstrate their skills as a precondition of getting, keeping and progressing in a job. Motivating youth to focus on their skills starts with starting them in a path and then letting them assess the skill implications of the path they are on

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that, at first glance, is suited to their skills and interests.

Dufferin-Peel emphasizes the value in starting with students and youth by recognizing what they *can* do and are really good at as opposed to underlining their deficiencies and focusing on remediation. Therefore, recognition first. Such a pedagogy strives to emphasize the positive, celebrating students' strong points and helping them address challenges by building on their own strengths. They start by focusing on what students and youth are really good at and then show them how to apply qualities in every area. The Dufferin-Peel approach is to show our students how to play their strengths to the end of the world rather than focus on what they can't do or are not very good at.

Starting with that as a first principle, Dufferin-Peel can then draw on a battery of pedagogical techniques, including modeling, mentoring, peer learning and self-directed learning, to accomplish its main goal: educating the whole person, seeing and supporting the functionality of a human being at the heart of all its teaching and learning practice.

Once that objective has been achieved, it makes sense to help students to make the connection between themselves as potential contributors to economy and society and the best match(es) they can make between their skills and competencies and jobs and career paths in the world of work.

While Dufferin-Peel therefore acknowledges the important link between education and work, it bases its career education programming on the observation that the ripening of the human faculties is a relatively slow process by comparison with the rolling out of a strategic plan, which is the model on which business operates. Dufferin-Peel knows their students are destined for the world of work, but regard job readiness as part and parcel of a total education that succeeds because it motivates students

and attaches them to their interests—including the centrality of being prepared for employment—as they learn. Their students get to employment readiness not through an analysis of their skill gaps, but through a process of being supported as they rise to the challenge of exploring careers and developing their skills. Dufferin-Peel provides an environment conducive to continuous improvement rather than specific career building.

Groups served

Secondary students
Students at risk of dropping out

Objectives

To enable students to explore careers
To develop employability and science literacy for the world of work skills
To educate the whole person

Activities

Dufferin-Peel's career education strategy is adapted to the learning cycle of secondary students. Board programs support every stage of the continuous learning cycle, from formal learning, to knowing, to thinking (planning) and doing. At every stage, Dufferin-Peel focuses on what students can do and do well rather than on all the things they have not yet accomplished. In this way students are led to capitalize on their strengths and to zoom in on employability skills, which are immediate. Once they can see themselves in a career, they have an interest in finding their way.

Formal Learning

In terms of formal learning, Dufferin-Peel is mandated to implement the new Ontario curriculum, which requires every student to have an annual education plan and every teacher to be a teacher-advisor.

Knowing

Knowing is an ongoing activity that learners do on their own through sports and extracurricular activities, or with friends and in their families. Dufferin-

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We are committed to improving the productivity and quality of life for individuals, organizations and society by enhancing the employability skills of the current and future workforce of Canada.

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Peel helps students learn about themselves by providing them with Career.MAX, a self-assessment tool that helps students identify their skill strengths and explore career options related to those strengths.

Dufferin-Peel realizes that helping students get to know about themselves and possible career directions for themselves needs to take place within a supported learning environment. Teachers and parents can help students explore careers and consider the implications for themselves as potential workers of not having certain skills in certain situations. Students can see, for example, how impatience can cause difficulties in the workplace but may be a positive attribute in an entrepreneur.

Thinking (Planning)

In relation to career education, Dufferin-Peel supports students' thinking process by providing students with timely information about job forecasts, what is involved in a career, e.g., salary, skills and working conditions and the courses they need to take and the planning they need to do around that. In the thinking/planning stage of career education, students explore the practicalities of how much it will cost to pursue education and training towards certain careers, where they will need to go to acquire those skills and the marks they will need to get there. This ensures that students leave secondary school with a sense of where they are going and a plan to get there.

Doing

Dufferin-Peel supports the doing part of career education by enabling students to try out careers in a safe, supportive environment through a variety of self-assessment and development opportunities, including: Maxi Taxi, Earn and Learn, Career.MAX, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), Pathfinder, Career Contractor, Way To Go, Career Assessment Centre, Let It Be, Eden Project and Journey to the Max.

Maxi Taxi

This was developed for Grade 7 and 8 students, and possibly for Grade 9 students as well. Students will receive concrete assistance in developing their annual education plan through this engaging online program.

Earn and Learn

Secondary students combine school-work with exposure to the world of work. By taking required courses linked with plant tours and visits to industry, students get career education and see the relevance of curriculum to the world of work. By taking electronics, for example, they gain exposure to advanced manufacturing. By taking computer science they are exposed to telecommunications. And by taking geography they gain exposure to transportation and tourism. Students extend their classroom experience in their part time summer jobs in these career areas and can further combine education and work in OYAP and co-op programs.

Career.MAX

Career.Max is a self-assessment tool that underlines what 15–18 year olds are good at in relation to the Conference Board of Canada's *Employability Skills Profile* and shows them possible careers they might like to explore that incorporate skill areas in which they are strong. Career.MAX provides an occupation list and general information about beginning opportunities. Secondary students need to start their career education by seeing themselves in a particular job, and by seeing where they are going by taking stock in the first instance of the skills they have accumulated and the skills they need to work on. They need to be supported through a developmental process that shows them how a particular behaviour manifests itself, and how they can change a behaviour or learn new skills.

OYAP

Dufferin-Peel will be implementing OYAP in two areas in the Fall of 1999:

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cable installation and construction (bricklaying and stone masonry).

Pathfinder

Pathfinder is the same assessment tool as Career.MAX but reports on a broader range of traits and explains the career implications of high and low scores in a trait or a constellation of traits. Pathfinder helps learners draw a career map for themselves and links them with Human Resources Development Canada's (HRDC) *Essential Skills* job profiles. It also links these job profiles with training options.

Career Contractor

This program gives 16–19 year olds who have dropped out of school and feel like they are going nowhere career education support in the form of a CD designed to help youth see that life is a do-it-yourself project and emphasize the fact that personal self-improvement is in their hands. The CD features themselves and their "Uncle Charlie", a small contractor, with whom they must partner to build a bookstore. By working through this scenario, youth develop a fresh start action plan and prepare a business case for HRDC training dollars for themselves.

Way To Go

Business industry facilitators connect kids and teachers in schools with likeminded business and industry people to match high potential kids with high potential opportunities.

Career Assessment Centre

The Career Assessment Centre uses Career.MAX and Pathfinder to help employment insurance recipients as well as adults and youth chart their way into the workforce and build the skills necessary for their chosen paths.

Let It Be

This program identifies Canadian youth who are having trouble getting jobs (e.g., female visible minorities) and gives them international experience. To date, pro-

grams have been organized in global hospitality and interior design. This program builds students' sense of independence and helps their career prospects.

Eden Project

This project is involved in making Dufferin-Peel's electronic career education resources. They also offer a full suite of online credit courses and a teacher education program in computer access.

Journey to the Max

This program ties the part time job experience of students who are at risk of dropping out of school with school credit. It allows youth who seem to hate school but who tend to perform well in their paid employment to do co-op year round. Youth take their 30 hour co-op pre-employment piece online on their own time, having regular contact with teachers instead of spending the first three weeks of the school year taking a formal classroom based co-op orientation.

Achievements/Outcomes

- Extending the benefits of skill building to wider community audiences, including dropouts, adults, social assistance recipients
- Linking National Occupational Classification (NOC) profiles into skill development

Benefits**Students**

- Recognize what they are good at
- See themselves in a career
- Become motivated to develop their skills

Educators

- Have their insights into how youth learn recognized
- Support students as they explore career options

Innovation

Dufferin-Peel's innovation lies in actively working to give students a reason

to want to take action to explore careers, make decisions and search out experience. Encouraging students by recognizing what they are good at instead of focusing on their skills gaps builds confidence and prepares the way for students to explore possible careers. Then, when students see the qualities of successful tool and die makers, to cite but one example, and recognize that they share a lot in common with tool and die makers, they become interested in going to a plant, meeting a tool and die maker and looking seriously at the skills they will need and how they will go about acquiring them.

The secret of this motivational strategy lies in providing career curriculum in a structured environment with no strings attached, which empowers students to produce their own development path to work.

Dufferin-Peel is also innovative in making all of its self-assessment and development opportunities available to adults in the community as well as to its students whom it is mandated to serve.

Keys to Success

- Focusing on building students' skills
- Getting apprenticeship programs into every school because apprenticeship focuses on skills
- Realizing that an assessment tool is necessary to assess students' strengths

instead of focusing on improving their weaknesses

- Opening a dialogue on skills to take advantage of best practices in developing skills going on in different locations
- Put educational dreamers and visionaries together with likeminded people in business to secure political support
- Putting vision before reality— if you wait until things are proven, you will miss your opportunity—always putting the cart before the horse
- Remembering that as long as you are a learner what you do for students will help you
- Combining teachers' sensitivity to students' needs and strengths in motivating students with the practicality and prudence of letting teachers teach
- Linking vision with practicalities
- Understanding that employers are in the same business as educators: their organizations are learning organizations
- Appreciating that the timelines of business and education are different

Greatest challenge

To encourage business to empower employees by making available to them a no strings attached path to education as part of their commitment to lifelong learning and being employers of choice.