



The Conference Board
of Canada

CASE STUDY 25

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Name of Program
*The Personal
Employment
& Academic
Competencies Initiative*

Skills Developed

- Academic
- Personal
Management
- Teamwork

Developing employability skills in the College and in the community

TEACHING AND LEARNING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS TO DEVELOP THE WHOLE PERSON AT BOW VALLEY COLLEGE

The Personal Employment & Academic Competencies Initiative

BY KURTIS KITAGAWA

August 1999

Bow Valley College is developing teaching and learning modules around the academic, personal management and teamwork skills identified in the Conference Board of Canada's *Employability Skills Profile* to reach a broad spectrum of adult learners.

Overview

Bow Valley College prides itself on its reputation for being "responsive, innovative and flexible" as an institution dedicated to meeting the needs of adult learners. The qualities that help distinguish Bow Valley College are also employability skills. To impart these skills to their adult learner clientele, the College is developing teaching and learning modules around the academic, personal management and teamwork skills identified in the Conference Board of Canada's *Employability Skills Profile* to reach a broad spectrum of adult learners.

The College recognizes that personal management and teamwork skills complement and enhance its academic curriculum. It offers a course in *Personal Employment & Academic Competencies*

(PEAC) to full- and part-time adult learners to help them acquire and strengthen academic skills they need to succeed as adult students and the personal employability skills they need to prepare them for the world of work. Bow Valley College is also using portions of its original PEAC course in its *Production Worker* and *Work Experience* Programs. Further, the College is integrating PEAC learning objectives into its *Construction* Program at a lower reading level and is offering workshops to other students who have identified particular challenges in different academic, personal management and teamwork skill areas.

Bow Valley College has also partnered with private businesses like Motive Action and the Skill Factory to develop the employability skills of at-risk youth. Motive Action combines training in-car repair with academic, personal management and teamwork skills development. Students spend half of their day doing classroom based work relating to automotives and employability skills. In the afternoon they work in an automotive shop under the supervision of a trained mechanic.

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We help business and education leaders work collaboratively to promote the development of a learning society that will prepare Canada's young people for a changing world.

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Bow Valley's Personal Employability and Academic Competencies include:

Managing Change

1. Continuous learning
2. Ability to adapt

Personal Management

3. Personal wellness
4. Social wellness

Working With Others

5. Teamwork
6. Interpersonal communication
7. Conflict resolution
8. Cross-cultural awareness

Critical Thinking

9. Problem solving
10. Decision making
11. Finding information
12. Creativity and innovation

Career Management

13. Preparing for a career
14. Finding and maintaining work

The College has developed teaching and learning modules keyed to all 14 Personal Employability and Academic Competencies. These modules are currently under revision at Bow Valley College. In essence the key theme areas will be broken down into more specific topics. *New topics will also be added.* Once this project is complete, approximately fifty-three (53) modules (total) will constitute the PEAC curriculum. Thirty-one (31) student modules with accompanying *Instructor Guides* have been completed to date.

Groups served

- Adult students
- At-risk youth

Objectives

To help adult learners:

- Acquire and strengthen the academic skills they need to succeed as students
- Develop employability skills to prepare them for the world of work

- Learn about themselves and their skill strengths and challenges

Activities

Personal Employability and Academic Competencies

Bow Valley College offers instruction in PEAC to both full and part time students. Full time students can take PEAC as a third course, receiving instruction in 6 to 8 PEAC modules over the course of a semester. Instruction in PEAC takes 7 hours a week, so the workload in PEAC is comparable to that in a regular academic subject. Part time students can take PEAC as 1 of their 2 courses. Students may elect to take a second PEAC course to receive instruction in the modules they did not receive instruction in during their first PEAC course.

The first 5 to 10 classes in a full time PEAC course are devoted to self-assessment. Adult learners self-assess their academic, personal management and teamwork skills by asking themselves questions like "Do you blow up in difficult situations?" to generate their own individual learning profile, identify their challenges and select appropriate remedial modules.

PEAC self-assessment and modules encourage students to build their awareness of their employability skills and to develop their skills through a process of doing assigned activities and reflecting on what they are doing in a reflective journal or learning log several times as they progress through each course module. Assigned activities relate to textbook readings, which show students the connection between having employability skills and succeeding in school. PEAC instructors help students make the link to the workplace. PEAC instructors encourage students to be more intentional about reflecting on their own abilities and making decisions related to improving their employability skills.

PEAC students work through their modules in learning teams reflecting

The Employability Skills Forum Mission

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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gender and ethnicity/culture diversity, assessed learning challenges, different abilities in the English language and interests related to individual topics. Learning teams ensure that students develop their employability skills while applying them in peer learning situations. PEAC instructors also encourage students to apply their PEAC skills in other courses and others settings.

Integration of PEAC

Bow Valley's *Production Worker Program* is a 7 week program designed to prepare students for entry level employment in the manufacturing sector. Students spend 12 of the 125 hours of classroom instruction time developing their employability skills and receive further tuition in developing their personal management and teamwork skills in an additional 50 hours of *Job Search and Work Experience*. The classroom (instruction) component of *Job Search and Work Experience* features a strong focus on attentive listening, confidently talking about skills and competencies in interview situations, problem solving and decision making, being able to work independently with minimal supervision and working with others. This includes knowing how to ask assistance from peers and supervisors, knowing how to receive information, and cross cultural and gender awareness.

Linkage Project

Bow Valley College has extended its skills development work to Africa as well. In its Linkage Project in Zimbabwe, the College focuses on building woodworking skills, but integrates the building of these skills with the development of generic skills. This is a marked divergence from the pre-existing British model the Zimbabweans were used to. For example, under that model, all woodworking students would be given the same cutting list from their instructor. By contrast, under the Linkage project model, students prepare their own cutting lists for their own individual

projects. When they are made aware that wastage comes off their bottom line, as it does in a real business situation, they learn the numeracy skills they need to prepare their own cutting lists to minimize wastage.

Woodworking students also learn marketing skills like the value of visually appealing presentations when preparing brochures to advertise their products for sale. They also learn literacy skills when they write captions under the photographs in their brochures.

The instructors found this approach more challenging as well, as each student had different problems they had to help them with.

Resources required

Question: What does PEAC cost in terms of Pys and cash to develop and implement?

Achievements/Outcomes

- Teaching and learning employability skills through PEAC modules
- Integrating PEAC modules into career related programs, like the Construction Worker and Production Worker Programs
- Unbundling PEAC modules — identifying one or two modules that all adult learners at Bow Valley College will work through and attaching specific learning modules matched to that individual's specific learning challenges. If all adult learners at Bow Valley College were to have access to individual PEAC modules, some means of assessing specific employability skills related to PEAC competencies would need to be developed. All students would then be equipped with individualized employability skills development modules when they start at the college and carry these with them as they progress through their chosen programs.
- Rewriting PEAC to make it accessible to adult learners who have lower levels of literacy
- Making PEAC into a stand alone skill

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building package — i.e. not dependent on a textbook (*Becoming A Master Student*)

- Putting PEAC topics on WEB CT — developing interactive learning teams starting in September
- Integrating PEAC objectives/curriculum content into existing and emerging Bow Valley College academic and career programs

Benefits**Students**

- Find their place and identify their skill strengths and challenges and available training and support services
- Clarify their goals and gain awareness of the skills they can build to reach their education and employment potential
- Plan personal skills development activities
- Recognize and overcome barriers to growth
- Develop their employability skills
- Actualize themselves as individuals, achieve their personal goals and become more satisfied with their lives
- Have their needs as whole persons addressed — their academic and their personal development needs
- Find their life experience and learning valued
- See that their previous learning and experience is transferable to a variety of other situations
- Explore their own and others' viewpoints
- Learn about group dynamics in learning teams

Community

- Gains access to Bow Valley's skills development initiatives for adult learners
- Develops human capital infrastructure for economic development

Innovation

A central learning objective of PEAC instruction is applying employability skills to new situations. PEAC's emphasis

on transferring employability skills — even on transferring skills as an indicator of having successfully developed them — ensures that students:

- Are aware of their skills
- Know when they are using them
- Actively and continuously reflect on their skill strengths and challenges
- Recognize other situations in which they can apply their skills

A key component of the PEAC teaching and learning strategy lies in encouraging individual learners to make their own connections to ensure that their learning is relevant and to assume responsibility for keeping their learning alive by applying it wherever and whenever possible and continuously improving their skills. This mirrors the reality of both the classroom and the workplace.

Keys to Success

- Process
- Develop interactive learning materials for building employability skills
- Honour past experiences of adult learners
- Give learners a choice of learning activities that relate specifically to their own learning challenges
- Address a variety of learning styles so there is something for everyone
- Write materials with an adult learner slant that is neither patronizing nor too business specific
- Emphasize multifaceted aspect of PEAC — skills learned can be applied in a variety of situations, including the home
- Integrate and look at the whole person — which is important to adult learners who feel their lives are fragmented, divided between work and family and education with no clear connection between their different roles and activities
- Be multicultural friendly and give lots of room for people to come up with their own situations so they can make it specific to their needs
- Continually pilot new innovations and applications of program

People

- Characterize skills development as enhancement not remediation

Greatest challenge

- Some aspects of PEAC require a high school reading level. Bow Valley College is planning to modify PEAC materials to reflect a reading level more conducive to adult learners, who may have reading (speed and comprehension) challenges
- PEAC needs to be modified to have an

even stronger employment and community focus as opposed to an academic focus

- Make PEAC modules stand alone rather than depend on a textbook
- Come up with creative ways of maintaining a learning team concept when PEAC is offered on line — balancing face to face contact with the challenges of distance learning
- Find ways to incorporate a voice component into the online version of PEAC to preserve the human aspect