

Adaptations to address the needs of Semiskilled students: Educational Modules

PDIG Final Report

1. Project Description:

Describe/show to what degree the project was carried out as planned. Include what went well and what proved to be a challenge. Include a synthesis of your journal entries.

We began our PDIG by re-examining our goals and why we were focused on creating a different delivery model for the academic portion of the Semiskilled program. We were trying to solve a problem that we found with a majority of the Semiskilled students at our school, motivation and specifically, absenteeism. We felt that there was a lack of connectivity to the academic portion of the program and we hoped to develop a model that might meet their needs and help with this problem. We also felt that a different model might help because of the structure of the program (work placements interspersed through the year). Our first day was spent discussing our aims and goals of the project and then research and discussion around different alternative models of delivery such as Modules, the flipped classroom, etc. We examined different positives and negatives of this model of classroom and the availability of technology, the time to create individual lesson banks, and non-independent learning styles.

We then discussed different ways to approach the cycle essentials. Both Math and English would be quite different. Progressions of Learning, cycle learning outcomes and development of preparatory skills for Cycle 2 (Grade 9) were discussed. As we discussed and examined what the potential content would be and how we would go about the creation of the material/lessons/videos etc., we began to realize that it would be a very time consuming process. We also felt that it would be a very individualized approach as some teachers would choose certain “essentials” over others and would want to flavor lessons with their own creativity.

We revisited why we had directed our efforts towards a different delivery model and we began to examine the other possible underlying problems. We felt that many of the students did not have a clear idea about what the program was and how it could help them reach their goals. A different delivery model and teaching approach wouldn't matter if we could not get the students to our classes.

This began the shift in focus for our PDIG, as we felt that there was a lack of understanding about what the program is, can be and how it can support the individual goals of different students. Semiskilled students are very diverse learners and there are many different profiles of students who could be candidates for the program. We realized that there is likely a lack of understanding about the program not only by students but also by parents, the school community, other teachers and the outside community. If students understood what their goals were and how the Semiskilled program could support these, then it would be more clear where the academic portion fit in. This information would not only help the students but also help the teacher redefine the expectations of the academic portion.

This began a series of discussions and reflection on what could be some of the goals and what are the positive aspects of the program. We felt that it needed to be from a student perspective and thought

that current and former students could possibly give us some feedback. We then questioned what format this information was best presented in, brochure, website, etc.

Quite a bit of information about the formal structure of Semiskilled already exists in the form of websites (MEES, LEARN, and school boards). The WQSB has information on its' website and has created a pamphlet style information book. What was needed in our opinion was something that was targeted to a better understanding of the benefits of the program and how it could possibly support the individual student goals for their future.

We wanted something that could be more personalized so the student can see themselves in the program and see that there could be value in this experience. This led to a discussion about what kind of information do we want for the student, and from the student. The how and when of giving and getting this information became important also. We decided that as early as possible in the process of the student transitioning to the program was ideal. The purpose was to make certain aspects of the program clear and also get some important feedback from the student before the school year starts. We began the creation of a Get to Know you/ Accountability form that could be used in the early stages of introducing the student to the program. The intention is to show the student that we, as a school, are interested in their needs and interests and that their goals are important. It would also provide teachers with information about each individual students' views of the program and what they hope to achieve, either academically or in the work world. We also wanted to highlight the commitment of the school to support the student, make the expectations of the program clear, and also have the student commit to the trying their best within the program.

This discussion and reflection on the program made us think that maybe a re-branding was important. We felt that a new name might help as we wanted students, teachers and other community members to see this program in a new light. We decided on ACIS (Academic and Career Individualized Schooling).

We also felt that we had many important conversations and reflections on different concerns with either the Semiskilled program or the challenge of addressing the needs of the students. We wanted to somehow record and summarize some of our concerns and potential solutions. We felt that this would be helpful for other schools/teachers to reflect on improving or developing the best program possible.

We created a summary sheet with some of these concerns and some potential solutions.

This project was challenging because we were committed to creating an alternative model for the curriculum but it proved to be too large a task. We felt strongly about some sort of academic model that would make it easier for tracking student progress and allowing students to move forward at their own pace with their academics. It was challenging because we started in earnest to begin this work and then realized that this might be helpful for some students but maybe not really address the needs of ALL Semiskilled students. Amongst the varied profiles of students, some of them come motivated to learn and are anxious to make progress within an academic setting. Others are not and have different goals and interests. We came to realize that it would serve us better to identify these goals and create a better understanding about the program. This challenging decision though provided an opportunity to reframe what the Semiskilled program can be and will be at our school. This is a very positive outcome in our opinion.

2. Project Goals:

Describe/show to what degree the goals of the approved project were met. If the goals were only partially met or not met at all, describe the reasons for this.

The specific goal of this project was not met in relation to the creation of educational modules for Secondary Cycle One Math and English. The intention and goal was to provide an alternative delivery model for the Semiskilled curriculum. The reason we felt this was necessary was that we were concerned about a large number of students who were not motivated and were not attending the academic portion of the program. We felt that if we provided a classroom that looked and felt different, it would address some of these needs. We also felt that it was a model that lent itself to the structure of the program where students come and go to work placements through the school year. After deeply examining different module styles and alternative classroom delivery models, we determined that it would not be possible to complete such a huge task. We would need to first determine how and what would be included in an abridged curriculum, and then create materials and modules for two years in the Cycle. This would need to be done for two different subjects, for students who have many different gaps in learning that may span both years in the cycle. We also came to the realization that no delivery model or altered curriculum delivery model will help with the real underlying issues. If the student does not attend school or does attend but is not motivated to work on academics, then no alternative or creative model will work. It is still very important for teachers to be creative and attentive to the needs of these struggling students who need differentiation. There are many different profiles of Semiskilled students and with them come different goals and interests. The direction of this project then led us down a slightly different path. This was a focus on helping the student understand what the program is and possibly how their goals can be supported and met by it. We felt that this would address the real goal of this project: To provide a program that students feel will meet their needs and is specific to their goals and therefore create more motivated, goal oriented students, who want to attend school.

3. Project Outcomes:

Describe/show the gains that the participating teachers achieved through this project.

This project will now shape the Semiskilled program at the participating teachers school. During this process they approached the administration and discussed the implementation of the Expectations, Goals and Accountability form and also the possibility of their involvement in any student transition meeting regarding Semiskilled. This was accepted and welcomed and will now be part of the process regarding transition into Semiskilled. The timing was also key as it was an important opportunity to rebrand Semiskilled and move in a more positive direction. This school year, the school had not offered Semiskilled and there has been a renewed commitment for next year. Both teachers have established themselves as leaders at the school, regarding the Semiskilled program, and the many rich discussions and reflections that occurred during the project have helped shape a new vision for the program. This will help other teachers, who may be new to the program, better understand the goals and intentions of this different pathway of education. The project was initiated primarily out of a concern about student attendance, motivation and lack of understanding about the program. This project shifted a view by these teachers that the classroom content and delivery model was necessary to change this. They began to see that it is may be more important to recognize that there are different goals from different profiles of students and be better to focus on differentiating the classroom structure and delivery to meet the needs of these different profiles/ academic goals. Their focus shifted to requesting feedback from the student and making clear how the goals of the program could satisfy different student goals.

4. Reinvestment:

Clearly describe how the resources created and/or the learning achieved by the participants can be of benefit to the educational community at large. If applicable, comment on whether or not this project should be carried out by other teams and if so, how it could be improved.

This PDIG provided an opportunity to closely examine some of the underlying concerns and issues we had about how the Semiskilled program was structured at our school and our concerns about student motivation, attendance and their understanding of the goals of the program. It is very likely that some of these concerns and issues are similar in other English school boards and hopefully the short summary "Concerns/Potential Solutions" may spark discussion and a closer examination in other boards. We had many important conversations and reflections regarding different concerns with either the Semiskilled program or the challenge of addressing the needs of the students. We wanted to somehow record and summarize some of our concerns and potential solutions. We felt that this would be helpful for other schools/teachers to reflect on improving or developing the best program possible.

The other resource created in this PDIG, the Expectations, Goals and Accountability form, could also be of benefit to other schools. It could easily be altered to fit the specific school and potentially be expanded as more of a detailed feedback sheet for information for teachers and work place supervisors. It is meant to provide teachers with information about each individual students' views of the program

and what they hope to achieve, either academically or in the work world. We also wanted to highlight the commitment of the school to support the student, make the expectations of the program clear, and also have the student commit to trying their best within the program. These are most likely common issues and can only help in improving a better understanding of the program on many fronts. More importantly it opens up a dialogue concerning the goals and interests of the student and hopefully directs the teachers and school to continue to support and meet these needs.