

PDIG 2020-2021 Website Reconfiguration

Final Report

Project Description

This year, we were able to work on optimizing what began several years ago as an after hours project to create a universal design for learning (UDL) website to help our grade 4 students strengthen their reading comprehension and writing skills in their second language (French). The premise of this website is to provide meaningful homework that serves a purpose: to consolidate skills that are learned in class and apply them in weekly reinforcing reading and writing activities. To get to our completed website, we first had to find and curate reading comprehension texts at various levels to meet the needs of our students who are at different levels in their second-language acquisition journey.

Although we had several texts from our original website to choose from, the levels that we had previously placed them at and language that was used was not often right for our second language learners. As many of these *compréhension de lectures* were intended to be completed by francophone students, modifications had to be made to texts. We edited many texts, added infographics, definitions, text boxes with explanations to challenging vocabulary and wrote some texts ourselves. We also had to make sure to include the original source material and all references used in obtaining these texts.

Ultimately, due to the hard work of our team, the project was carried out as planned. We were successfully able to edit, create and curate texts at four levels of literacy (from a very modified/below grade-level to an advanced/above grade-level). We created enough content that the students would be able to choose a different text at their level that would change every two months and would not force them to exhaust the list. We made sure to provide more texts than weeks of homework per two-month span as the goal of this website is to have students be engaged in their learning, which starts with them enjoying the topic they are reading and writing about.

Our team was also able to create writing prompts with a colour-coded self-correction guide. Each month, we made sure to differentiate the type of writing the students were asked to produce. This not only follows the QEP's Progressions of Learning, but also allows the students to explore writing based on different visual prompts, scenarios, express their opinions and develop their thoughts on various topics.

In order to complete all of this, we had some members focus on the editing of the texts and creation of content, while others learned how to create a Google Sites that could fully accommodate the structure of this UDL homework plan. This was a similarly time-consuming

task as the formatting and beautification of the site as well as the process of linking hundreds of images of texts to the PDF files did take a significant amount of time.

In terms of challenges, we had anticipated that certain tasks would take less time than they ended up taking, but due to the pandemic and us not being able to work together in the same physical space, bandwidth and internet connectivity issues interfered with some of our group teleconference discussions and planning. We successfully completed the most daunting task of ensuring the reading comprehension texts were completed and accessible via the website. We created the content for the writing prompts, however those are not yet live on the site. We simply did not have the time to format and include all 10 months worth of prompts. The content exists and will be added to the website before the start of the next school year. That being said, we were able to create a page on the website with writing tools and links to resources to help guide our students through their writing process.

Project Goals

Although initially our goal was to create a curriculum map of concepts to be taught each month for French as a Second Language throughout cycle 2, due to time constraints of editing texts, creating content for the website and formatting the website, we did not have time to do this for grade 3 (Cycle 2, Year 1). In creating the content for the reading and writing QEP competencies for grade 4 (Cycle 2, Year 2), we did end up mapping the curriculum from the beginning of the year to the end, which served as a guide for the reading comprehension texts and writing activities that we curated for our students on the website. Having teachers on this PDIG who work in Cycle 1, 2 and 3 allowed us to ensure that the curriculum map we had set out was properly scaffolding off of what was previously taught and led into the following cycle's objectives.

Besides the creation of the UDL website, another one of our goals was to revise the students' self-editing checklists for writing. We came to realise that what we had previously established in our original homework website was still in line with our newly mapped curriculum, so not much modification had to be done there.

Additionally, we intended to build off of a previous PDIG (Uniformisation de l'enseignement et de l'évaluation en écriture (PD-5152) where we created writing rubrics that guided our pedagogy and assessments in grades 1-3. The goal was to build off of these rubrics for the grade 4 program so that a cohesive progression in guided written pedagogy could be followed. However, we did not end up doing this as the MEQ created a set of grade and cycle-specific writing rubrics created for second-language French learners. We were so impressed with these rubrics, that we did not feel it necessary to go ahead with our plan to create these ourselves. This worked in our favour as we were able to devote more time to the creation of content for our website.

Ultimately, nearly all our goals were achieved, with the exception of getting the writing prompts on display on the website and continuing our curriculum mapping to extend in-depth to Cycle 2, Year 1.

Project Outcomes

By collaborating on this project, we were able to really increase our technological aptitude and optimize our homework system in a technological way. We believe that this will be perfectly in line with a post-pandemic educational setting and will prepare our cycle 2 students for cycle 3 expectations.

Each one of the participating teachers was able to play a key role in the creation of content, the mapping of curriculum and the optimizing/digitizing of a homework program. All of these aspects have truly allowed us to feel connected to each part of this project and we have gained skills necessary to assist our colleagues in future educational technology pursuits.

Reinvestment

Our plan to reinvest this project within our greater Montreal Anglophone community will begin with our direct colleagues at Westpark Elementary School. Our intention will be to share this website with our cycle 2 teachers for them to use yearly and to establish a baseline homework program that has scaffolded off of previously established prioritized goals (reading comprehension and writing in French as a second language). The ultimate goal would be to present this to our entire staff and hopefully inspire teachers in other grades to follow a similar homework program that emphasizes reinforcing concepts taught in class, and not rote “busy-work”. We are seeking to inspire our colleagues to encourage their students to read and write at higher levels given their extreme levels of engagement with the content. Identifying this true meaning of homework will truly serve the community of our school.

Due to the restricted copyrights and sharing permissions of the reading comprehension texts we purchased, we will not be able to make this website accessible to the public. We purchased the documents that we curated and ultimately edited under the name of our specific school, and therefore will only be allowed to share this with the Westpark community. That being said, the rationale and process we followed is intended to be shared with our colleagues throughout the school board. If time permits before the end of this scholastic year, we will perhaps seek to discuss with our principal what professional development opportunities may exist during the end-of-year pedagogical days to share with our immediate colleagues. Depending on this, we will either propose continuing to share this with our colleagues at our sister schools in the neighbourhood and within our school board next school year, or, we will begin this sharing process entirely next Fall.

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