



The Conference Board
of Canada

CASE STUDY 8

*A core product of the
Employability Skills
Forum, National
Business and
Education Centre*

Program

*Business–education–
government
partnership*

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1993

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Name of Program

*New Brunswick
Department of
Education's Hampton
High School and Irving
Pulp & Paper
Partnership in
Education*

Skills Developed

- Academic
- Personal
Management
- Teamwork

Developing secondary school students' employability skills

HAMPTON HIGH SCHOOL AND IRVING PULP & PAPER PARTNERSHIP IN EDUCATION

The Benefits of Teaching and Learning Employability Skills

BY KURTIS KITAGAWA

August 1998

Hampton High School and Irving are co-operating to make secondary school technical education programming more relevant by using it as a vehicle to enhance secondary students' generic employability skills.

Overview

In 1993, Hampton High School and Irving Pulp & Paper developed an innovative new partnership to build on their mutual interests in developing the employability skills of youth.

The Irving pulp mill was then undergoing a \$200 million modernization and making environmental improvements to its systems. At the same time, Hampton High School was endeavoring to make its technical education program more relevant to students. Their joint mission was to enrich the students' learning experience by connecting the high school's curriculum more closely with the world of work and developing students' employability skills.

The partnership sprang out of an earlier regional initiative to refocus

education at the school in order to meet students' employment needs. Recognizing that fully 70 per cent of students enter the workplace directly after graduating from secondary school, while comparatively few attend community colleges, private institutions or university, the board of education in School District 6, Rothesay, New Brunswick, had set up an ad hoc committee to study the issue in more detail. After conducting surveys in its own schools, School District 6 established an Industrial-Technical Education Committee (ITEC) composed of educators, employers and parents, to raise awareness of the importance of technical education in rapidly changing workplace environments and promote its technical education program.

Specifically, against the background of assisting the educational community to market education programs as a career enhancement product, ITEC's purpose was (1) to create an awareness of the needs of industry into the 21st century; (2) to create a profile of the kind of worker that can meet these needs; (3) to create an awareness within the local school system, among parents and in the public at large

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NBEC Mission

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.

both of the long-term needs of industry and the type of employees they will need; and (4) to co-operate with each other to develop innovative new business–education partnerships in the Saint John area.

Participating in ITEC resulted in a shift in consciousness on the part of both business and education. For its part, Irving Pulp & Paper adopted the Conference Board's Employability Skills Profile, incorporating it into its five-year vision to encourage the growth and well-being of its employees. It also took the message out to local middle and secondary schools, encouraging students to consciously strive to develop their employability skills. Irving regarded it as good for its workers' development to get involved in educating young people and saw itself as adding value to middle and secondary students' education.

For his part, Ken Kincade, Head of the Technical Program at Hampton High School in School District 6, believed that students would benefit greatly from seeing real life applications of the skills they were learning in their technical courses. His mission was also social: starting three or four years ago, tremendous changes had been occurring in the workplace—workers (in many cases his students' own parents) were being laid off or retrained and families were under a good deal of stress. Kincade felt that by exposing his students to employees coping with the challenges of sitting behind computers for the first time, by speaking frankly with them about what they do on a day-to-day basis and what it means to them, and by showing them the link between what they learn in the classroom and real life applications in the workplace, his students would become sensitized to the demands of the modern workplace and redouble their efforts the classroom.

Context

Hampton's heightened awareness of the new realities of the workplace and the changing nature of the classroom was the culmination of a long soul-searching process that began in 1991, when the Canadian School Boards' Association (CSBA) criticized provincial departments of education for playing down the human resources development role of elementary–secondary programs and curricula.¹ The CSBA observed that the education community has generally seen itself as completely separate from the work world and that its programs and curricula have had a distinct university bias, focusing on the desirability of professional careers over jobs in the trades.²

Program Goals

- Raise students' awareness of the practical applications of their technical education courses.
- Raise the profile of career opportunities in the local pulp and paper industry.
- Develop, in the context of a technical education course, generic employability skills that can be transferred to a modern industrial workplace setting.
- Underline modern industry's commitment to promoting lifelong learning—a crucial generic employability skill in Canada's rapidly changing economy—and to continuously developing technical job skills.
- Encourage students to choose technical postsecondary training to prepare themselves to work in a modern industrial workplace experiencing shortages of skilled workers.

Groups Served

- Students, employers, parents, schools, community.

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¹ *Towards a Level Playing Field* (Ottawa: Canadian School Boards' Association, 1991).

² For a university perception of its role in developing students' employability skills, see Case Study 6, *University of Alberta Faculty of Arts Employability Skills Initiative*.

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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Activities

The Hampton–Irving partnership has engaged students in the following three major activities.

1. Original Mill Model

- Building a scale model of the exterior of the mill and constructing operational models of mill processes.
- Learning skills in important areas such as computer-aided design and manufacturing, and in electronics and programmable logistics control technology.
- Taking measurements of the mill's exterior and participating in problem-solving sessions with mill employees (including engineers, tradespeople and operators) about mill processes.
- Demonstrating mill processes using their model at community venues.

Making technical education more relevant stimulates cross-curricular improvement: students involved in designing the scale model realized they needed math skills to do scale conversions and physics and chemistry principles to develop operational models of mill processes.

2. Job Fest '97

- Participating in Job Fest '97, in which students learned about writing a résumé, completing an application and preparing for a job interview.

3. Digester Project

- Forming project management teams (consisting of project manager, accounting manager, human resources manager, services manager and operations manager) on the basis of an actual company-conducted selection process.
- Taking ownership of their work and developing the employability skills featured in the Conference Board's Employability Skills Profile.
- Preparing and presenting the digester proposal (including a budget and a timeline for its completion) to the mill manager and the school principal.
- Constructing scale models of the new mill digesters and other operational models.

Resources Required

Human Resources

- (Projet Entrepreneurialship Project) PEP Mount Allison University facilitator.
- Two person-years annually of Irving employees' time.
- One-half person-year annually of volunteered time from Hampton's technical, math and science teachers.

Material

- \$50,000 to date from Irving Pulp & Paper.
- PEP Mount Allison provided transportation for students to get from Hampton High across town to the Irving mill.
- Shop space, computers, drafting equipment, power tools.
- Model construction materials.

Achievements/Outcomes

- Enhanced the relevance of technical education and core curricula.
- Raised the profile of careers in the pulp and paper industry.
- Enhanced the attractiveness of technical postsecondary education.
- Developed Conference Board employability skills in students.
- Provided students with a job-seeking experience.

Benefits

The Hampton–Irving partnership benefits students, secondary schools, teachers, parents, employers and employees.

Students

- Develop their communications and problem-solving skills, self-confidence and time management and teamwork skills by building working models, consulting with mill employees and making presentations to mill and school personnel and to the public at large.
- Learn to assume responsibility by having it impressed upon them that their models are real products that represent real resource commitments not only by students but also by teachers and employers, who intend

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to use their models in their work with future generations of students.

- Learn the meaning of showing initiative—increasingly employees are expected to find their own direction and take initiative in delivering product.
- Enhance their job-seeking skills by being involved in a job selection process.
- Learn the virtue of adaptability by being immersed in a culture of lifelong learning.

Teachers

- Learn about the needs of a rapidly changing modern industrial workplace.
- Receive support from business to improve and promote technical education and develop students' employability skills.
- Reap cross-curricular benefits from increased attention focused on math and science courses.

Employers

- Cultivate new employees drawn from the local community by mentoring students.
- Improve relations with employees by enhancing recognition for their jobs.
- Enhance the employability skills of their employees by supporting their mentoring activities.

Innovation

The Hampton-Irving partnership encourages active student participation at every stage, from hiring and team building, through planning and consulting, to building and demonstrating their own

product. Students learn valuable employability skills by doing and explaining what they are doing, which reinforces the message about employability skills that they have learned at school.

Keys to Success

- Having fully committed supporters in the school and workplace who have clear expectations of what they hope to get out of the program and are genuinely interested in developing the employability skills of the students.
- Finding imaginative ways to refocus teenagers' energies. For example, one teacher accommodated the romantic interest of a student who was having trouble managing his time commitment to his project by inviting his girlfriend to assist with the project. In another example, the teacher built up the confidence and social acceptability of a socially backward Grade 10 outsider by encouraging him to join in with a largely Grade 12 project team.
- Standing back and letting the students take leadership roles on their own initiative and solve problems spontaneously, offering resource support only.

Greatest Challenge

The greatest challenge facing would-be developers of a partnership like this lies in ensuring that there is keen interest, energy and commitment at both ends; without it, an ambitious program like this cannot be sustained.

NBEC Publications Relating to Employability Skills Development and Assessment

Employability Skills Profile

Science Literacy for the World of Work

Best Practices in Assessing and Developing Employability Skills—20 Case Studies (Sept. 98)

The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace, 206-97 Report.

Enhancing Employability Skills: Innovative Partnerships, Projects and Programs, 118-94 Report.

Linking Teachers, Science, Technology and Research: Business and Education Collaborations That Work, 144-95 Report.

1998 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

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1996 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook