

Career Education at Samuel Hearne Secondary School Inuvik, Northwest Territories

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Career Focusing™ (High School Program)

Student Engagement

Prior to my receiving training in Career Focusing™ our high school students received one module in grade 11 that dealt mostly with resume writing and a spattering of career information that may or may not have been strongly connected to their specific career interests and goals. We took an *'outside-in approach'* providing students with a great deal of general career information, but it was hit and miss as to how effective we were, and certainly there was very little specific product that was generated by the end of the module. As well, parent participation in career education in grade 11 was non-existent. Now with Career Focusing™ we are student-centered (taking an *'inside-out approach'*) and parent participation is central to the program.

Now there is a purpose for every assignment that a student completes and it's directly related to his/her life focus and passions. We all have a specific *intrinsic motivator or Focus* - that one thing that connects us to our world, that makes us light up and want to do over and over again. Career Focusing™ starts by helping students identify their intrinsic motivator and then provides them with a step-by-step process to find different kinds of work that are a best fit – again working from the in-side out. Once students realize that they can find work that fits, they will realize that their goals and dreams can come true - there are many areas of work available to them that meet the criterion of work that fits. Students will know that they are doing work that fits when they are:

1. Doing they love.
2. Doing it in a way that suits them.
3. Doing it in a way that reflects their realities.

The other critical component to the Career Focusing™ program is that it provides students with a focused view of their formative high school years and their plan after high school graduation. Many of our students in the past were disappointed to find out that they had to spend an extra year or more 'upgrading' because they either did not have the right courses to enter the program of their choice or their grades were too low for direct entry into a post-secondary program. We're moving this program down from grade 11 to grade 10 so that students can better prepare their high school program plans to more closely align with their potential career goals.

The Career Focusing™ process is simple and direct: identify your focus statement, learn how to research in a variety of ways and record on your Work Wheel best work matches. Then prepare a plan to move toward some possible career paths, review the plan regularly and make adjustments accordingly. One area that will require continual updating and review will be their high school course selections for each semester. This includes keeping this record up to date with credits earned, course marks and future

mapping of required courses and pre-requisites with everything connected back to their focus statement and work wheel to ensure that their plans are following along a path toward a clear end result/goal.

One of the most important factors for teachers to keep in mind is that every plan a student makes in their workbook is a 'draft'. Once students are comfortable that it's only a 'draft' they are more likely to move forward through the program and take more risks. Students really need to think outside the box and take some risks in order to really go deep inside their inner self to discover what truly makes them happy and what clearly aligns with their values and passions.

Once students identify their possible career paths in grade 10, it provides a wonderful tool to use when planning course selections in grade 10, 11 and 12. Because they truly believe that the paths they have chosen really fit them, they are more likely to do the work required to get there. This also assists a student to choose a work experience in high school that aligns with a possible future career path.

Parent Involvement

Career Focusing™ also provides us with a strong link to the home and community in that one of our greatest challenges and criticisms in high school is that we have traditionally provided poor career education. Through Career Focusing™ parents and the community are invited to know students' career plans and to share in assisting students to reach their goals. This includes parents meeting with students at the end of the course to hear their student's detailed career plans and to celebrate with the student his/her future goals. Parents also are brought into the students' future course selection planning for subsequent years of high school and parents can assist students to research additional post-secondary programs which might include a family trip to a university or college or trades school. Parents and the community will also be more apt to assist students with work experience opportunities when students produce their final projects as evidence of their interest in particular careers.

Career Focusing™ is the single most powerful tool that exists in our school today to provide students with direction and focus for all of their high school course selections and future planning toward their career path after grade 12.

Smart Focusing™ (Junior High School Program)

In the past, Grade 8 students dreaded the question, “what are you going to do after high school?” I would receive groans and moans and the inevitable rolling of the eyes. Of course only 10% of the students would offer to provide a response and most would just shrug their shoulders and say, “I don’t know.”

Most of our students would generally not consider career education as an important course. They would comply with our activities and complete the Career Cruising assignments and activities but again with an unclear or vague understanding of any concrete end result and purpose to the activities. The results were usually ineffective. Students would go onto Career Cruising and do just that, cruise through the site with little or no focus. Now, through Smart Focusing™ and specifically focusing in on their Smarts, students start to explore potential career paths using Career Cruising as a tool for research.

Smart Focusing™ takes a different approach and provides a fun and non-threatening introduction to career education. In this step-by-step process students work through simple yet challenging tasks to identify their Smarts. *They learn how to define being smart in a very particular and compelling way that gives each student something powerful to build on.*

Then they learn some basic skills they need to find different types of work that match with their identified Smarts. At this point they explore different ways they could prepare or qualify to do their Smart Work. At the end of the program they have a product that they will continue to build upon in the year 9 program and through Career Focusing™ in grade 10.

Again, I highly recommend that students again continue the practice of writing ‘draft’ on the top of each page as they work through the student booklet in order to keep all of their options open, and to know that at this point in their career explorations that there are no options that they are closing off.

Smart Focusing™ for grade 8 is an effective program for helping students to start the career exploration process through a fun and non-threatening approach to career education. Smart Focusing™ is a powerful tool to set the foundation in grade 8 for future career exploration.

Parent Involvement

As with Career Focusing™, Smart Focusing™ provides us with an opportunity to invite parents into the school for a post-program celebration in order to have students share their workbook materials with their parents and to use this information to inform each student’s future program planning in grade 9 and into high school.

For instance, the student who wants to possibly pursue an engineering career path might need to know that he/she needs to excel in mathematics and science courses in grade 8 and 9 to be prepared to be successful in grade 10 academic mathematics and science. This might also suggest that the student may need additional tutoring support to bring their marks up to a higher standard or that the student might consider some additional experience in this area such as a math and science summer camp™ experience.

There are huge implications for students and parents to know early on in their child's education some possible career paths in order to prepare a solid foundation to keep open as many career paths as possible. Smart Focusing™ helps students and parents understand the importance of career exploration in their grade 8 year in order to successfully support the student's formal education process for the next 5 years and beyond.