

Peer tutoring to promote school success

Towards a student-friendly school environment



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Organisation: Secondary Vocational and Technical school "Filippo Bottazzi" in Casarano

Country: Italy

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Education

Type: Organisational Design

Launched in: 2012

Overall development time: 1 school year

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The procedure is based on cross-year small-group/dyadic tutoring: upper year students serve as tutors to younger at-risk students in one-on-one relationships or with a small group simultaneously. The tutors were chosen among the volunteers who showed high motivation for the program and were endowed with social skills as well as with special propensities toward sharing and kindness. Tutors attended a training course prior to giving tutorial assistance and their training mainly focused on advising and facilitating rather than directly addressing the curriculum content. The tutors are also provided with a user-friendly booklet and a smart leaflet about the school where the tutees can get any information they need about the school organisation, the curricula, etc.

This practice was applied not only during traditional lessons in the classrooms and lab classes, but also during orientation program days and during break-time activities, which is the innovative aspect of the program. On these occasions, it's easier for tutors to break the ice and establish a positive, open and supportive relationship with their tutees. Tutors get to know a lot about tutees' interests, likes and dislikes. Furthermore, they also get a general idea of what tutees are particularly worried about. Informal situations are a really good time to begin to create a trusting and respectful atmosphere that will prove conducive to learning.

Why the innovation was developed

Nearly 35% of the students attending "Filippo Bottazzi" Secondary Vocational School come from a disadvantaged socio-economic and cultural background. The drop-out rate is 30% on average. The mismatch of educational aspirations and attainment has serious consequences for young students, their families and local communities. Supplying opportunities to support students in developing a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment is the very first step towards reengaging students with learning. Experiencing innovative approaches to drop-out prevention is the key challenge educators need to face.

Objectives

Improve effectiveness, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction, Other

Main goal of the innovation:

- Reducing the number of pupils who drop-out during the first two years of secondary education due to learning difficulties, lack of motivation and emotional problems.

Objectives of the project:

- Increasing students' positive attitudes towards school and learning in general.
 - Creating a friendly, nurturing learning environment.
 - Improving self-esteem as a way of fostering cognitive development.
 - Strengthening basic life and communication skills.
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Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, Ethnic or racial minorities, High-risk populations, Low-income groups, Students, Young people

- 60 tutees (students attending the first two years of compulsory secondary education at risk of drop-out).
- 20 tutors (upper year students).

Results

Effectiveness

If compared to previous year data, the project proved successful in increasing the students' level of engagement in activities (+18%), self-confidence (+22%) and sense of well-being at school (+25%). There was widespread evidence of increased effectiveness across the whole ability range related to social and behavioural skills such as communicating (+ 18%), and sharing and cooperating (+21%). The drop-out rate has been considerably reduced (-8%).

Service quality

Responsiveness:

User satisfaction

As a result of the interviews and customer satisfaction questionnaires, there was a significantly increased rate of positive feedback, expressed by both students and parents.

High levels of satisfaction (+32% if compared to previous data) were also expressed by the teachers who considered it an effective practice in relation to the mission of the school.

Evaluation

Quantitative and qualitative methods have been employed in order to measure results and evaluate impacts: questionnaires, structured interviews, informal group discussions, participant observation and tutors' reports, learning achievements, social and behavioural benefits, levels of school attendance, customer satisfaction data (referring to both students and parents).

Data concerning school attendance and achievements were compared to previous year data in order to get trends.

<http://www.bottazzi.gov.it/pro7qc.asp>

Development

Design

- Self-Assessment Commission and Group for Improvement coordinated by the school Headmaster and supported by the quality manager.
- The teachers who identified the students at risk and the tutors.
- Consultants.

The Project was designed by the Group for Improvement according to the report supplied by the Self-Assessment Commission on the basis of customer satisfaction data. Actions were prioritised in response to the customers' requirements and the self-assessment process was carried out according to the criteria and sub-criteria of the Caf model, helping the school to clearly identify and address the very root of the problem: the high level of drop-out and early school leaving.

Design time: 1 month

Testing

- Output and outcome measures include pre and post-satisfaction questionnaires, structured interviews, informal group discussions, participant observation and tutoring reports.
- Examination of evidence, results and data was carried out by the teachers and the Group for Improvement supported by the school Headmaster.

Testing time: 8 months

Implementation

Tools used:

The most important tool used by the school is the Caf Model. This model has enabled the organisation to apply quality management techniques in order to improve performance in the field of result-oriented education services. It has introduced the administration into the culture of excellence and the principles of Total Quality Management and has guided the school to move from the plan-do sequence of activity to a full plan-do-check-act cycle.

The peer tutoring program required the employment of management approaches, which involved the school staff at different levels. The Quality Manager controlled the different actions that were carried out, so as to ensure effectiveness and supplied support: organisation of focus groups between the stakeholders, reporting to the middle and top management, carrying out measurements, etc.

Those responsible for the communication always kept the stakeholders informed about the actions going on and the results obtained.

On the basis of the priorities suggested in the Self-Assessment Report, the Improvement Group identified the different actions to be carried out for each step of the project.

The role of the Headmaster was mainly that of coordinating the activities, supplying resources, supporting both the school staff and the students in maintaining a positive and active environment in which everyone could become fully involved in realising the objectives and benefits of the program.

Resources used:

- About 60% of the teachers were involved in the project together with top management representatives.
 - EUR 5 000
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Challenges and solutions

Random allocation may be very dangerous. Tutors were allocated new students during the welcoming phase, so that tutors and tutees can make contact early in the induction period. For the sake of continuity, a tutee or a small group of tutees should have the same tutor throughout the school year. Requests for changes, originating from either party should always be met with full consideration of the potential negative impact of not reallocating. Tutoring materials should be highly structured so tutors were provided with smart guides and with formats on where to report facts, findings, ideas, suggestions, etc. Tutors require strong interpersonal skills, including relationship building, communication and team-building. The tutors were selected based on a set of personality attributes (determination, motivation, adaptability, communication abilities etc.), which affect how they interact with the tutees on one side and with teachers and school staff on the other. Furthermore, tutors were required to attend a training course.

Partnerships

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

Drop-outs are a challenge worldwide not only for schools but for society in general. Today, drop-outs are twice as likely to be unemployed and there has also proved to be a link between leaving school early and crime.

Developing new options and pathways to get drop-outs back on track to high school graduation is a priority but it can't be left to the individual efforts of some teachers. Holistic methods must be implemented and innovative approaches supported.

The peer tutoring model is sustainable because its costs are affordable, whereas its benefits on the youngsters are of high value. Tutees are often addressed one-on-one and they get help exactly when they need it (either because they ask for it or because the tutor understands when to supply it). Teachers also feel a sense of fulfillment when they realise they have succeeded in keeping students on track.

Scheduling the program could be quite difficult, but it's a key to success. Therefore it's important to plan exactly when and where the tutoring will take place and how long it will last.

Conditions for success

- It's important to involve task oriented groups and work by consensus.
 - A training course for tutors should be compulsory.
 - Tutors should be provided with smart guides and structured material.
 - Teachers should be highly motivated in coordinating and supporting both tutors and tutees.
 - Students' improvements (not only in the cognitive sphere but also on the emotional level) should be taken into full consideration when evaluating the students' achievements.
 - It's important to carry out the project according to a full PDCA cycle.
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Other information

Implementation includes the promotion of extracurricular education services for at-risk students and drop-outs: i.e. introducing peer tutoring in summer training programs. The method of reciprocal peer tutoring could prove successful in this area.