Simcoe County
District School Board

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TLF Reflections from Staff and Students

Grade 8 Teacher

It is so liberating that our school board is excited about the idea that "learning is messy." What I have come away with is that I am as much a learner as my students... I am not the final say – we are learning together for an authentic purpose! We are all engaged – teacher and student! My learning is, given a problem to solve, kids will engage and learn curriculum as they go (kind of like sneaking vegetables into muffins), and my job is to extrapolate and articulate what they have been learning… I am reactive rather than prescriptive. It was fun, curriculum was covered, 21st century skills were sharpened in the process... it was kindergarten for big kids! It felt unnatural to be responsive rather than have a definite plan at the outset, and this is a process for me.

Grade 8 Teacher

This experience allowed both teachers and students to engage in a genuine collaborative experience that combined technology and inquiry. Throughout the project, there were at least three failures for every success, but students were determined to improve upon their designs, and were taught to value process over product. This experience allowed (another teacher) and myself to step outside of our comfort zone by integrating math, science, language, and geography into one project, and provide students with an opportunity to get messy, make many mistakes, test, tinker, create, and innovate to the best of their ability. Moving forward, I plan on applying my learning from this project in future assignments and projects by focusing on the inquiry process, rather than front loading students with information, in order to provide students with genuine problem solving opportunities.

Grade 8 Teacher

This has been a great process to get "Inquiry based learning" going in my class; it has also sparked a great deal of interest in my school amongst colleagues. The project helped me realize the importance of the design process and not just the product. One of the biggest observations I have made is how these projects lend themselves to the 6 C's of Learning. I also was extremely impressed with how my students were able to use technology to research, communicate their learning and to document their process.

One of the reasons I feel the project was successful in our class, was the support I had from colleagues and Administration. Our school schedule made it difficult to fit in this project. The 'messiness' of the build sessions required a lot of patience on behalf of our custodians, and other colleagues who shared our build space. Administration was supportive with helping us to gather resources and pay for them!

Another great benefit was the collaborative work that was done between the two classes through the Google Classroom and Google Hangouts. This will definitely be a part of my teaching next year. I am so glad that SCDSB is supporting teachers with these kinds of projects.

Grade 7 Teacher

This process has allowed me to let students take the lead in their learning. We provide them with the tools so they are able to teach themselves, their peers and even me! This facilitator role isn't within my usual comfort zone but I have seen the benefits to my students' creativity, engagement and confidence. I think the inquiry based approach nicely matches with the 6 Cs approach of evaluations and the students agree. Overall, I have and will continue to incorporate this approach (especially the collaborative piece with another class with google classroom & hangouts) in the future as I believe in its benefit to academics and to learning skills development.

I hope that our board continues with this initiative with more PD, training and funding in the following years so that teachers have time to become more comfortable and dig deeper with this in their classrooms.

Grade 8 Teacher

I think the biggest benefit to our 20-Time period this year was allowing the students that normally do not get recognition and have a lot of success did. The hands on passion projects the students were able to do, showed me that learning happens in many different ways and for the first time students could take risks without worrying about marks.

(One student) is a social skills student who had huge behaviour issues and did not want to do any regular school work. He became a part of my program after he showed me during Science a computer game he liked playing. He was playing it instead of doing my work. I spent 10 minutes with him, while he taught me using Scratch, how to create a video game. He explained how he had to constantly problem solve when the game would not do what he wanted. He kept modifying the colours, sounds and animation till it did what he wanted. At our Makerspace show he demonstrated the Scratch software and his game to the whole school. I have never seen a student prouder of his accomplishment.

Another IEP student was a very hard working student who had difficulty reading and writing. During our 20-Time period, he showed me he created a game with a software called Flowlab. It had sound, great graphics and students started playing his game because it was so fun. They gave him feedback every period they played. He was constantly making the game more challenging and making improvements that he felt (problem solve) would make it a better game.

Each week we did 20-Time it showed me how successful students could be. I had two students who usually are disengaged using a sculpting software to create objects that were very detailed using 123D sculpting and creating music using an app called crossfire. I had two other students who had difficulty in math but learned to measure and cook or bake food. Another student should have a film career in the future. This student spent many hours filming and editing to create a great movie. I had students that excelled at Art, creating crayon art and many other great art pieces by just watching YouTube videos.

This has definitely changed my approach to teaching. I am spending a lot of time developing the makerspace to further challenge and give my students the opportunity to explore next year. I will be having more inquiry work and expanding on my hands on projects to allow students to be more successful.

Student 1

This year I had the opportunity to be in a STEAM based classroom, my teacher said he signed up for a course and had to miss a day of school. When he came back the very next day he was telling us all about something called, STEAM. The day after that we spent the entire afternoon building chain reactions using all kinds of different fun and funky materials.

After Xmas he moved all the desks into the spare portable and we transformed our class into an open environment and open schedule, it was so much fun and so different from any other class I have been in. We were all really excited about the change.

Text book work comes really easy to me I would finish my work and go have to silent read until it was time to switch subjects. I find that I do well in school and this was all very new and fun to me, but challenging as well.

STEAM helped me with my problem solving skills and my growth mindset. I do well in school this didn't come to me as easy. I found that STEAM made problem solving fun because it let us solve different problems through our hands and gave us various challenges to solve as we were still doing curriculum related school work.

Student 2

This year I did something called STEAM. It is very exciting when we have a STEAM challenges. I got to go to the Push Conference and the Maker Fair, which are both STEAM events. I've only ever had the opportunity to represent my school at sports events and now I got to travel to Barrie to help my teacher present which was awesome. We even got to sit in on someone else's presentation about blogging. The Maker Fair was so much fun, I was there from 8 am to 9 pm and loved every minute of it.

I took STEAM in as a hands-on Genius Hour opportunity. I got the chance to let out all my ideas and bring them to life through design, building while still meeting curriculum expectations. This was very cool, and something very new to me. Now I see STEAM as everyday work. I hope that I will have STEAM in the grades to come. I excel at STEAM because it includes science, technology, engineering, art and math.