

21st century learning comes to North Hastings

By Sarah Sobanski

Some North Hastings students are exploring a new educational practice that encourages them to temporarily trade in their textbooks and pursue curriculum they care about.

20Time curriculum draws from a Google workplace initiative where employees dedicate 20 per cent of their time to self-motivated project. U.S. based high school teacher Kevin Brookhouser transformed the idea and brought it to the classroom.

From there the idea of giving students open projects to develop ideas they're passionate about spread internationally. North Hastings High School teacher Amber Clarke first heard about it at an education summit partnered with Google for Education last summer.

"I was super excited about it, and then I started talking to teacher-friends who were also super excited about it," said Clarke at an event for the project initiative at North Hastings High School Jan. 11.

Classes from York River Public School, Centre Hastings Secondary School and NHHS who had students participate in 20Time projects came together at the high school to show off their work and review others' projects peer-to-peer.

"The students have had so much more enthusiasm and engagement towards this project than we could have expected," said Clarke, noting fellow NHHS teacher Kate Apperley, CHHS teacher Michlyn Gaylord and YRPS teacher Leigh-Anna Plumpton who also introduced their students to 20Time. "They choose projects that were interesting to them" instead of what we thought they should look into. They gained technological skills, some of them taught themselves new languages "the things that they came up with just blew our minds."

Students created video games, systems that taught beginners how to code or write computer programs and Instagram accounts to support self-love, share kid-friendly recipes and to help others develop hockey skills.

Others sought causes to champion: a group of young women created art installations individually to pool into an art show for Home Again in May as well as a young man started a readathon to raise money for his school's breakfast program.

Some experimented as YouTube personalities. Some developed guides for travelling, some survival guides.

Bancroft This Week talked to a handful of students who presented their 20Time projects as keynote speakers at the symposium. Each suggested they were inspired by the project and enjoyed the freedom it gave them. Each said they planned to continue their project or had plans for them come summertime.

Plumpton explained 21st century teaching was preparing young minds for jobs that haven't been invented yet. Teachers have to avoid having their students invest time in material that'll be obsolete in 10 years.

"When you and I went to school we were taught the material. We memorized it. We wrote it back out. That was school," she said.

"As much as that helps us learn, we are not necessarily learning the skills that are important for us in life or finding out what it is that we're going to be doing in life."

"The push now for 21st century learning is that we need to be teaching these kids skills "not necessarily the material, the content but the skills that they're going to need later on" If I can teach them to be innovative, to be creative, to take responsibility for their own learning "that stuff is never going to be useless. Those are life skills for them."