



Away from Pollution, Towards Solutions

Watching her son's class *engaging in the world while changing the world* compelled Amanda Keller, a grade 9 Science teacher with the Avon Maitland District School Board to get in on the deep learning action. She said, "I wanted to do something, not just talk about it."

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Although it was late in the school year, she knew she needed to shift her instructional plan immediately. So, she challenged her students' thinking about environmental sustainability by exposing them to a local group, Blue Bayfield, which had successfully reduced plastics within the community. The synergy was authentic and the students eagerly formed a partnership. They collaboratively decided to initiate a campaign "Eco-Exeter: Away from Pollution, Towards Solutions" which included branding, logo design and a social media presence. They wanted to replace commonly used single plastics and began to source and sell stainless steel straws, reusable produce bags and water bottles. The response was wild. The produce bags sold out three times within the first two weeks.

Then, the students invited in the mayor to present their research and to discuss their plans for raising awareness in their community. He was floored. He said, "You have done remarkable work. You are the future leaders." Students then presented to the local council and county council meetings.

Said one councillor, "This is the future generation--there is a student in this room who is going to come up with a solution that has not been thought of yet!" News of the student work quickly spread to other media outlets and sales picked up.

Even though the end of the school year was approaching, the students remained steadfast. They then turned to research sustainability practices of businesses. As a response to the Eco-Exeter campaign, a local grocer reached out to the students to create a partnership; he would provide free space to sell their reusable bags. This as well, made the news. In June they connected with Tim Horton's coffee chain, "If you bring the mug, we will buy the coffee." The Blue Bayfield partner reflected, "The students expected ripples, they got a tsunami."



Today the students are in a new grade and enjoying other courses. Eco-Exeter has shifted to a school-

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wide commitment and is supporting the school cafeteria as it reduces single use plastics. While Eco-Exeter's next problem may be how to sustain their sustainability campaign, the students have learned that there are supportive partners all

around them ready to get involved. More importantly, they have learned that they don't have to wait for others to lead. As one community partner said, "What you have done to inspire them and help them develop a level of self confidence beyond their years is in itself inspiring for those of us watching their conduct."

Amanda Keller's professional learning was profound as well. She said, "This was a very different approach to my previous teaching—I like to have boxes checked—I was concerned that we wouldn't get through all the content and am surprised at how few of my previous lesson plans I used—so much of the unit was covered through the Eco-Exeter initiative." This example also reminds us that we need to stop waiting for perfect conditions in order to take a step toward deep learning. Deep Learning: the teachers love it, the students crave it and the world needs it now.

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