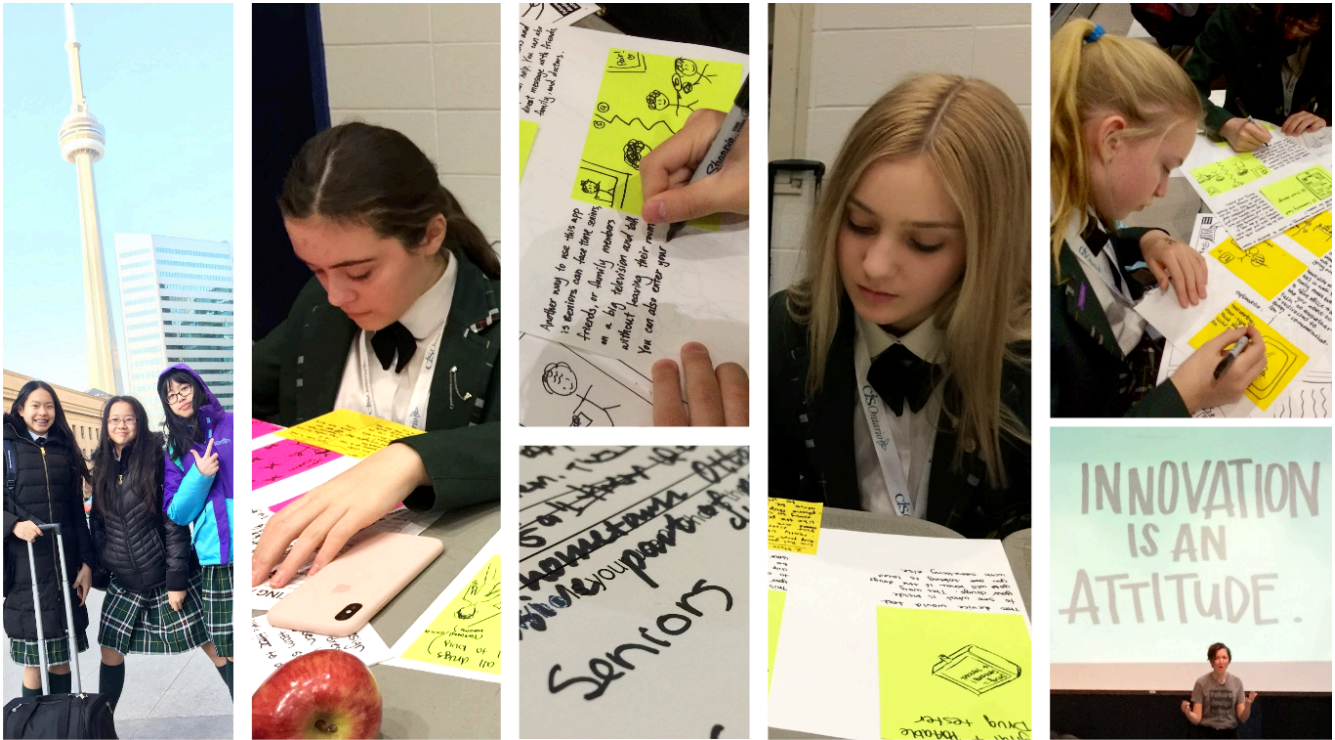


All Middle Schools Should be Like Elmwood's Middle School

Presentation by Grade 8 students Lauren Jane Hudson, Chloe Kwan and Charlotte McLaughlin



Imagine you're a **typical** middle school student at a **regular** school. You wake up, go to school, you go to Math and English. Your teacher is at the front of the class telling you what you need to know, class after class. You sit with your same friends at lunch, even though there is sometimes social drama. Finally, you arrive home, you do your homework, and you go to bed. Then the whole cycle repeats, day after day, month after month and year after year. This is a typical experience for most middle school students.

However, the reality for a middle school student here at Elmwood is very different. In addition to learning the basics like a normal middle school, we have the opportunity to learn in different ways, and we have access to special classes that our school has created **just for us!** These classes have given us the opportunity to explore different ways of thinking, learn how to better collaborate and communicate with others, and they allow us to attain the ability to problem search and problem solve.

Leadership and Learning is one of the courses that has had an important impact on us this year in middle school. It not only teaches us how to sustain a thoughtful relationship with each other, but also how to organize, learn, and manage time efficiently, with good quality of work and less amount of stress. What we have also learned is how important it is to try see things from another person's perspective and how practicing empathy and staying out of judgment can help us develop respectful and thoughtful communities and relationships. The skills taught in this course are **extremely useful**. They can be applied every day in our middle and senior school years, university, and even in our future careers. These lifelong skills also help us develop the mindset of a communicator, collaborator, and in general, a leader. I believe that we will all become successful leaders in our future life with the skill set that Leadership and Learning provides!

Design is a new and unique course that Elmwood has introduced to the middle school this year. Design has expanded our thinking skills, how to look at potential problems, how to solve them, and how to successfully develop a persuasive pitch. Design has taught us different techniques and strategies to **dig deeper** and look at problems that will help us in the future. One thing that has also been very effective and useful to our learning is our **Entrepreneurship** unit. We've been looking for "pain points," and finding solutions to them that we can turn into a **successful business plan**. In this course, we think, see, hear, and express our ideas like true entrepreneurs.

As a middle school student, it is great to have a choice regarding what we want to learn. **Enrichment** is a series of different programs which immerse middle school students in courses that touch on various themes and skill sets. Each day of the week has a different theme of learning. For example, on Thursday, we focus on STEAM skills. Students can attend a Mini Med-lab, Raspberry Pi prototyping, the Artistry of Mathematics or our favourite, Photography. Every class, we get a different 'topic' and the photos **we take must reflect on this**. We also learn how to properly critique a photo while using correct terminology. Something that we truly love about enrichment is the diverse choices that are offered. Thanks to this new program, we are now exposed to skills that we will use in the future.

In early February, a group of us had the opportunity to attend a "Design-thinking Contest"—a culmination of all the new skills we've been learning this year. We were given a "**how might we**" **statement** which was something we had learned and used previously in Leadership and Learning and Design class. "How might we use innovative technology to solve a problem in our local community?" This is what we set out to solve. One of our groups looked into Senior Isolation and the other group dug deeper into the frightening amount of deaths caused by Fentanyl overdoses. We felt very confident and prepared, knowing we had been able to develop the design thinking mindset and the communication and collaboration skills needed to proudly represent our school. We blew away the judges and moved into the finals where we pitched our ideas against **35 other schools** from across Ontario. It was so much fun, and a great opportunity for our growth.

We've learned this year that part of pitching your ideas is to "**show utopia**," to convince the people you're pitching to, that your idea could have a lasting and positive impact. So, here's our pitch to you. All middle schools should be like Elmwood's middle school.

Imagine you are an Elmwood middle school student. You wake up **excited** go to school, you go to Math and English. Your teachers work with you to find **real world** problems, you ideate ways to solve them, you're excited for your next class when you'll be pitching your ideas. There isn't much social drama because you empathize with your peers, you've worked hard to **really understand them**, and you've become an expert collaborator. Finally, you arrive home, you do your homework, and you go to bed. You wake up the next morning and can't wait to get to school because you're building a prototype and you're **excited** to test it. This is a typical experience for most middle school students at Elmwood.

The changes to the middle school at Elmwood this year have had a **significant** impact on us. Without a doubt, we feel that they have developed our middle school community, and they have prepared us **for our future**.