



Adapting Education for the 21st Century

By Kristin Bunyan, Langley Fine Arts School, SD 35 Langley

In a world of continuously advancing technology it is sometimes difficult to determine what skills taught in schools will be applicable for generations to come, or which concepts along with old technology will become obsolete. I can say that as a student of the BC education system, I know that a lot of the time the curriculum taught in schools today, along with the methods used to instruct, can feel irrelevant for 21st century life in a digital age. The students who are coming up in the education system have lived most of their lives with the Internet and computers. It is incredibly easy to research for projects when you have the entire world's information listed under "Google," or "Wikipedia," but is finding everything you need on a search engine as fast as lightning truly comprehensive? I do not think so. I believe that schools should address the learning needs of students today by emphasizing new age literacies such as computer sciences and media skills, promoting effective communication and the idea of being a "global citizen," and finally by encouraging creativity and inventiveness.

Literacy has moved away from being simply a term to describe reading abilities. In today's world literacy includes computer skills and the ability to navigate the Internet effectively by both using and creating websites. In a society that is virtually run by a system of computers it is essential that we start creating courses or learning opportunities that highlight how to use these resources efficiently. Websites that are successful are constantly sending various messages to the hundreds of thousands of people who are on them. If we can harness this and get students to begin creating websites that promote global issues or school initiatives, it could be an incredibly operative tool, as well as an extremely valuable skill for students to acquire and use in the future in the work place. Social media sites such as "twitter," or "facebook," could also be used in this way, as an effective means of communication between students, and also as a tool to connect them with other students around the world.

Communication is changing rapidly along with the media. The majority of today's students communicate through a computer screen, and not face to face. This can be useful but also hurtful in this society, because in order to succeed you need to be able to have both skill sets. The bright side to the online communication is that it has made nearly the entire world and its students accessible with just the click of a button. The concept of global citizenship is more prominent now than ever. I believe that schools should be nurturing this idea by connecting schools with other schools across the globe using resources such as "Skype," a website that lets you video chat with anyone, anywhere for free. Through online connection students can discuss issues from various points of view and get a more accurate perspective of what the real issues of today are. They can also share cultures, traditions, and arts in this way, which would be very beneficial to the creative aspects of learning.

Creativity and inventiveness is more important now than ever. In a society full of impressive ideas students need to be able to utilize their creative brains to set them apart from others in the future. The skills that you acquire in school only get you so far; it is the ability to adapt and invent that truly makes someone an impressive candidate for a career. Inventiveness is the very force that is advancing all the world's technology. Creative design is a very useful tool to have in a world that is constantly trying to outdo itself.

Schools should create team projects where students can work together to design and create an item that can be useful for everyday life. Not only would this strengthen teamwork and leadership skills but it would also inspire students to get imaginative with their work by using different concepts of learning that aren't simply based out of a textbook. Integrating a variety of disciplines, critical thinking, and problem solving would allow students to practice those skills required in the 21st century work force.

21st Century learning should be at the forefront of education, and I can see it slowly being integrated into the curriculum of extra-curricular programs, specialized courses, and volunteer projects, but not into the core subjects themselves. In order to fully prepare students for life after high school, the core curriculum should hone in on the three notions of 21st century literacy, communication, and creativity. In this way students can learn and be instructed in ways that fit the age globalization, but also keep the foundations of education consistent.

