



21st Century Learning

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Almost all students have the same complaint about school: it's boring. Many students spend their classes daydreaming instead of learning. It's easy to study something you find interesting but it's hard to concentrate when you're learning about things such as logarithmic identities. Let's face it, the name even sounds boring. I think that if students were interested in what they were learning they would have a better understanding of what was being taught and as a result have better grades. The school system needs to change with the times. If I had the opportunity to improve the overall academic program of my high school I would focus on making learning more relevant to the students' interests and lives.

For the past four years I have been taking all of my academic high school courses online through the Red Mountain Academies in Rossland, British Columbia. Taking courses online has given me the freedom to spend my days outside skiing instead of in the classroom. I really loved the experiences I had throughout high school travelling to different places and skiing without compromising my education. This October I spent 6 weeks in France skiing at a glacier, how many other teenagers can say they did that without falling way behind in school? This allowed me to take more courses than the average student and still spend half of the school year away from school. In the classroom we were learning at a pace much slower than my own so although my peers spent twice as much time in school I completed more courses than most people with better grades than most people. This is why I think that it is important to make learning more flexible, everyone is different but our schools treat everyone the same.

In an ideal situation, the class would move forward at a certain pace but still give students who want to move ahead faster the ability to do so. If all of the courses were online but also had regularly scheduled class time with a teacher, students would have the ability to do so. This gives students the freedom to miss school without falling behind but still gives them the support of a traditional classroom if they need it. Flexibility is the key to learning in the 21st Century. Teachers in the 21st Century have to take on a different role than they have in the past. Teachers are no longer going to be the source of information but rather someone to help guide students to the information. They will have to start teaching students how to learn rather than teaching students facts. When students can go at their own pace they aren't being held behind by a pace that is too slow or being pushed forward before they can understand what they were learning before.

In a so-called "blended" classroom students would also be able to tailor the course to their interests more so than in a traditional classroom. If a student comes to an assignment and they think they have a better way of meeting the criteria of the assignment they could talk to the teacher and perhaps make a power-point presentation or a movie instead of writing an essay. Students could tailor the curriculum to their interests through research projects that have been approved by the teacher. For example, if a student likes basketball he could learn about the physics involved in dribbling a ball or making a free-throw. Suddenly these concepts, which were previously dull, have meaning to the

student. Students often don't realize how relevant to their lives the knowledge they gain in school can be.

Everyone has different interests; what one person finds incredibly fascinating another person may find incredibly dull. Giving students the flexibility to tailor their learning to their interests and curiosities making the same concepts take on a personal relevance. Technology has changed the face of many industries while schools have hardly changed. If we've recognized that no two people are exactly the same then why do we teach all of our students as if they are exactly the same? We have the resources to make learning more relevant to students' lives so why not use them?

