



BC Student Voice

Learning in the 21st Century

Students in grades ten to twelve
answer the question

“What will learning be like in the 21st century?”

Thanks to ...

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Mathematics department head in Burnaby)
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analyzed the students' work and wrote the report.



quality leadership in education

Learning in the 21st Century

At the Spring Student Voice provincial meeting, students, from the 15 regions in the province, in grades ten to twelve were asked the question “What will learning be like in the 21st century?” Students were placed into seven groups and each group worked independently to brainstorm ideas and responses to the question. They organized their work onto chart paper and then each group presented their thinking to the whole group. Responses were recorded and used as the source for this document.

All of the groups expressed a firm commitment to the idea that technology would play an even greater part in their education than has previously been the case. The role of the teacher would change dramatically, as would the viability of schools as learning structures. Education would be student driven and individually catered to each person. There was also a desire to see high quality hands-on learning. Because of technological advances, the global community would feature prominently as a resource for future learning.

While technology has been developing at an astonishing rate, students have been at the forefront of exploring the uses and benefits of several new electronic devices. They see technology, not as something special, but as something critical to their existence. For them, the use of technology in education would be a seamless extension of what they are already doing. All of the work groups made the natural assumption that technology would feature prominently in their futures.

There was unanimous agreement about the elimination of textbooks and a move towards a paperless environment. They envisioned electronic libraries, I Pad devices and lessons that could be downloaded. On a practical note, students felt that the need for school lockers would diminish with the move towards digital textbooks and resources. Students would no longer be carrying notebooks, textbooks or binders.

The role of the teacher would change as well. Students saw the teacher more as a mentor and less as a giver of knowledge. The internet holds the information that students want, and the teacher would serve as a guide to unlock the process of finding the required resources. Several of the groups thought that there might be robotic versions of the traditional teacher. The artificial intelligence could present lectures where student response or input was not desired. There was also a future need for online tutors that

students could access when experiencing difficulties.

Students had concerns about the structure of schools in general. If teachers become mentors, and all information can be found by anyone, anytime; what would our schools look like in the future? Students saw the need for education to become less rigid. All people should have access to education regardless of age. The concept of students as a homogeneous group sitting in classrooms listening to a teacher present material is outdated to them. There was an interesting contradiction in the students' work with regard to social interaction. They did not seem to value the school building as a social structure. In fact, if all students had access to technology at home, students thought that the need for the building itself was quite diminished.

On the other hand, students felt that they would benefit greatly from being exposed to the global community in a virtual

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or electronic scenario. With the advent of instantaneous translators, all students would have immediate access to the latest research regardless of its country of origin. There would be no language barriers. It would also be possible and in fact desirable to be in contact with the greatest, most famous, most talented, most controversial individuals on our planet. In many ways, future schools might serve as a hub for coordinators and facilitators to build connections between students and experts. Perhaps future schools would be more like town centers or even

shopping malls where people of all ages and interests gather to share or exchange knowledge.

All of the groups expressed a desire that students have individual learning plans where some students start at a younger age and finish earlier. Learning would be more specialized as well. If a student is interested in a particular topic, that course of study would be made available. The concept of a mandatory curriculum at present is perceived by students to contain a great deal of irrelevant material. There is a shift away from students as receivers of an education towards a more empowered concept of students as educational consumers seeking what they want, not learning what they are told to learn. Many of the students felt that their education could

be much more productive and efficient if it were tailored towards their interests and skill level.

Students wanted a more real educational experience in the twenty first century. Rather than learning about Canada from a textbook and teacher, students saw travel as a meaningful way to gain true knowledge of their country. There would be an emphasis on hands on learning rather than theoretical learning. Students felt that learning should be done on site rather than in a classroom. Although the students did not specifically suggest an apprenticeship model of learning in so many words, they did stress the need to be “actually doing something” rather than just learning about it.

Student response to the question “What will learning be like in the 21st century?” embraced a positive and enriching future for our next generation of learners. Technology would enable students to gain a wider and richer experience of the world around them and beyond them into the greater global community. Their desire to be better and to do more with their lives came through in all of their work. Their vision of a school, with or without walls, that accepts all learners regardless of age or background exemplifies the solid character of these students as they work to make their world a better place. 