

Educating girls in the 21st century

by Paula Burgess, Headmistress
Bramley School and Nursery

For those of us who have had the 'delight' of seeing our daughter settled on their homework task or coursework ably surfing the web whilst listening to music and texting friends, we may take some comfort from the fact that at least our girls multi-task. We can, however, consider more deeply the fact that girls are by their nature, social beings gaining much of their self-esteem through communication with an intimate set of friends, making sense of their world and sharing experiences through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Girls are masters of social technology and knowledgeably weave social media into their lives as a medium to conduct their social relationships.

Like it or not, it is a feature of twenty-first century communication and therefore a central tool for our girls both academically and socially. The good news is we do not need to despair but instead accept and embrace the fact that our girls, with this expertise, are ripe to become the most agile and expert learners in the twenty-first century. The challenge for every school and every teacher is to plan and deliver a curriculum to support the twenty-first century learner.

As a Headteacher of a girl's preparatory school and mother of teenage girls, my experience of learning, and my own points of view, span the ages of three to sixteen. To put our mission into perspective, girls who are currently in our Nursery classes will become adults in 2026, may well have a family by 2036 and will be retired by 2076. It is difficult enough to imagine what the world will look like in five years time but to plan and deliver a curriculum to meet the girls' needs and prepare them for life in the twenty-first century is the responsibility that schools are charged with.

Twenty-first century learning is no longer characterised purely by the memorisation of discreet facts and the assessment solely by examination. Rather, twenty-first century learning is focused on particular skills and the application of these skills now and in the future. Success in this century depends on what students know and

what they can do even after all the details are forgotten. Skills include critical thinking, problem solving, accessing and analysing information, collaborating with others and communicating effectively both orally and in written form. A twenty-first century classroom therefore encourages curiosity, imagination and initiative. It is through the learning of these skills and how to apply them to new situations that each child will create understanding for themselves and new knowledge. Teachers are therefore no longer dispensers of information but facilitators of learning, helping girls turn information into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom.

In addition, the twenty-first century curriculum should support worldwide issues. Project-based work which is engaging and linked to local, national and global issues will empower our children to become our future scientists, politicians, doctors, educationalists, homemakers and child rearsers.

Girls are digital learners - mobile phones, computer devices, laptops, hand-held games consoles, TVs and personal organisers are becoming central to their daily lives and learning for a large proportion of children. We should, however, remain aware of the fact that there are some pupils who do not have access to communication resources due

(continued on page 56)



Bramley School & Nursery

A leading independent prep day school
for girls aged 3-11
www.bramleyschool.co.uk
office@bramleyschool.co.uk



OPEN MORNINGS
Friday 14th October 2011
Saturday 15th October 2011
10am - 12noon

Dedicated to your daughter

Walton-on-the-Hill, Tadworth, Surrey, KT20 7ST
01737 812004

(continued from page 55)

to reasons beyond their control. It is essential that the classroom provides these children with the opportunity to access such resources allowing them to develop skills in line with the majority.

An estimated six hours per day is spent by boys and girls on electronic media. Although when children are using this media for themselves, they are often using it primarily for entertainment. It is the school's responsibility to make children truly media literate by providing them with the skills and facilities to learn collaboratively, in a research based environment, giving them the opportunity to use their multiple intelligences and higher order thinking skills. Digital learning is active, bold, creative and exciting and this interactive environment serves girls very well.

We should also never underplay the importance of the need for the twenty-first century

classroom to provide protection for children against the real vulnerabilities inherent in Internet communications. Parents need to become involved in protecting their children from the dangers as many may have limited experience of the power of media communication tools. Parents should take stock and become Internet aware and cyber smart.

Should you ever question the motives of your daughter next time you see her with her school books out texting, tweeting or surfing the net, remember that girls, through their social nature, are 'makers of meaning'. They live in exciting times with exciting technology. They thrive when they learn collaboratively with others rather than competitively against others. We should embrace this twenty-first century way, teach them to use it to extend their knowledge, build their awareness, address worldwide issues and help them make the world a better place.