



What is a 21st Century Learner?

A 21st century learner is part of a generation that has never known a world without the Internet, without computers, without video games and without cell phones. They are digital natives who have grown up with information technology.

To these students, life without digital technologies seems alien. Their aptitudes, attitudes, expectations and learning styles reflect the stimulating environment in which they were raised. For most, instant messaging has surpassed the telephone and e-mail as the primary form of communication. Control, alt, delete is as basic to them as learning their ABCs and 123s.

Twenty-first century learners are always on, always connected. They are comfortable multitasking. They sit at the computer, working on their homework while listening to an iPod. At the same time, they may have 10 different chat windows open, be playing a video game or surfing the Web while a TV blares in the background. To them, technology is only a tool that they can customize to access information and communicate.

Twenty-first century learners are multimedia oriented. Their world is Web-based. They want instant gratification. They are impatient, creative, expressive and social. They are risk-takers who thrive in less structured environments.

Constant exposure to digital media has changed not only how these students process information and learn but how they use information. Children today are fundamentally different from previous generations in the way they think, access and absorb information, and communicate in a modern world.

To cross the digital divide and reach these students, teachers must change not only what they teach, but how they teach. To do so, educators must acknowledge this digital world and educate themselves about it. To truly understand them, educators must immerse themselves in the digital landscape where the 21st century learner lives.

West Virginia's Global21 plan takes into account how students in the 21st century learn. Extensive professional development is a key element to help teachers alter their teaching techniques to better reach today's Wii generation. By changing how we teach from preschool to high school, students will be better prepared for the world that awaits them.