



ELMWOOD SCHOOL



How Girls Learn

GIRLS LEARN WHEN THEY ARE INTERESTED

There is often a special vibe to the classroom when girls are engaged in learning. Their passion or determination to learn is apparent as they move through a variety of activities designed to help them make sense of the information before them. Girls learn when they are interested and cognitively engaged with the topic, motivated to learn, or are emotionally connected to the subject and find the material relevant or worth learning.

GIRLS LEARN THROUGH QUESTIONS

Teachers at Elmwood know the value of using a question to create a natural curiosity about a topic. For example, in our Grade Five classroom a discussion began by posing the following question, “Do you know your brain is like a muscle?” Through this analogy, the girls explored the idea that their brain can be developed and become stronger and more powerful. Alternatively, piquing learners’ interest by having students pose questions about a topic creates in them an intrinsic desire to delve into the material. In the Junior School, units of inquiry employ students’ questions as an integral part of the learning process and expand opportunities for students to relate to the topic.

GIRLS LEARN WHEN THEY ARE PERSONALLY INVESTED

Offering girls a choice of topic to study will create a personal buy-in with the subject matter. For example, the final activity of the Grade One unit “Welcome to the Neighbourhood,” was to design a neighbourhood to demonstrate their understanding that communities are made up of many people, each one playing an important role. For six weeks, students learned about the roles of different people in the community, services provided, and the physical layout of a community. For the creation of their neighbourhood, each student chose an individual in the community and researched the role they had. They went on to design a building, which was then constructed out of cardboard using the laser cutter in the Fab Lab.

GIRLS LEARN WHEN THEIR TEACHERS ARE PASSIONATE

Elmwood teachers are not only knowledgeable about their subjects; they are also passionate about the topics they teach and about developing each student’s understanding of the material. A student’s love for a subject is often sparked through a teacher’s own passion for a topic. A teacher’s passion comes out in their tone of voice and their enthusiasm to share their knowledge.



GIRLS LEARN THROUGH CO-CURRICULARS

Co-curriculars give girls an opportunity to choose which activities to participate in. Girls often choose subjects they enjoy or subjects where they are actively trying to improve their ability. One such example of commitment to skill improvement at Elmwood is the Mental Math Club. This co-curricular lunchtime activity helps girls improve their agility with mental mathematics and fosters a positive sense of self-esteem in members of the club.

GIRLS LEARN THROUGH A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

Teachers can generate interest through novelty with the presentation of either new material or asking students to consider the material through a unique lens or perspective. Our Grade 11 biology students, learn about blood types in their genetics unit, by testing and analyzing (simulated) blood from a victim, the suspects, and the crime scene to solve a mock crime. Initial engagement with material activates the working memory system and promotes the recall of prior knowledge, thereby increasing the likelihood that further learning will occur. If a student buys in to a classroom activity, she is more likely to engage in critical thinking and take academic risks.



GIRLS LEARN BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

Winterim, a two-day intensive, faculty-led experience, is an opportunity for students to participate in an enriching, small-group activity that goes beyond the boundaries of the regular curriculum and allows them to explore their creative, intellectual or leadership potential. The selection of workshops for Winterim is varied, but the offerings by teachers often come from the subjects that teachers love

and are passionate about. Research on 21st century learning has shown that engaging in experiential activities enhances a student's intellectual capacity. Elmwood's Winterim programme also encourages closer faculty-student relationships, as the girls and their teachers participate in focused learning opportunities through a shared interest.

GIRLS LEARN WHEN THEY ARE ENGAGED

Behavioural engagement refers to the amount of interest, attention and time a student dedicates to a given topic or task. This type of engagement is measured by the length of students' attention spans and the degree to which they feel an assignment is relevant or worth participating in. Teachers often use their understanding of attention span to offer a variety of opportunities for students to engage in material. Grade Nine geography students are engaged when they're asked to consider how the climate in Vancouver, Halifax and Ottawa differ from each other. The geography lesson starts with a group discussion about the environmental factors that influence the weather in an area. Students then chat with a partner and use white boards to write a response to the prompt: How does rain form within a cloud? Next, partners present their ideas to another group. The continued change in activity increases the length of time a topic will keep students' attention, helping cement the subject matter into long-term memory.

**WANT TO
LEARN MORE?**

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