

# **The Daily Gleaner**

## **Children need to learn more outside class - expert**

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Children should spend less time in the classroom and more time learning from, and interacting with, the community, says the president of the 21st Century Learning Initiative.

John Abbott conveyed this message to Education Minister Kelly Lamrock at a meeting Monday.

Abbott has been studying how children learn and he said his findings are prompting people to rethink the way education is delivered.

He said he hopes his ideas will be helpful to Lamrock, who is working on an education plan that's set to be released in the spring.

"I share (Abbott's) view that we need to really change how we do education, and we need a sense of urgency about it," Lamrock said.

"How children learn, getting the community more involved in education and making it more interactive and hands on is the stuff I want people focused on in the education system."

The 21st Century Learning Initiative's advocates new approaches to learning that draw on a range of insights into the brain, the functioning of society and learning as a community-wide activity.

Abbott said a tremendous amount has been discovered about the way children learn over the last 10 years.

He said the conventional idea was that some children are born more intelligent than others, but that's only partially correct.

"What really helps a child grow - helps their brain to grow - is the richness of the environment they are in," Abbott said. "Their intelligence grows as a result of the atmosphere they're living in."

As a result of that knowledge, Abbott said, the education of a child cannot be solely the responsibility of the education system.

He said parents, entrepreneurs and other community members must play a part.

"Western society has been so busy over the last few years it seems there isn't room in a fast-moving society for children to be around," Abbott said.

But this way of thinking is not working, according to Heather MacTaggart of Classroom Connections, who is helping Abbott with this initiative.

She said society must consider restructuring the education system.

"There's lots of evidence out there that the way we've been doing things the last 100 years isn't really working all that well," MacTaggart said.

"It doesn't match up to what we now understand about learning, brain development and the stages of a child's life."

She said students shouldn't be crammed into classrooms and expected to rewrite the teacher's lecture on a test.

MacTaggart said research shows children learn better by hands-on examples.

"It takes an entire-society approach because if we say it's more important for kids to spend time with their parents, then we have to work out economically and socially how we're going to make that happen," MacTaggart said.

"And if we say adolescents learn better in the community ... we have to look at how the community is going to make that possible."

Lamrock said he agrees with Abbott and MacTaggart about the community approach to learning.

He said the discussion with Abbott on Monday has given him a lot to think about.

"This has been really good to get our heads around," Lamrock said.

"Involving the whole community in providing interactive learning experiences for kids (is) going to be a big part of our education plan."