



Belinda Drabble moved to The Hague from the UK. She has been an expat for many years but her husband has only recently joined Shell. As an expat in Norway, Belinda co-authored *LIVING IN NORWAY* a reference guide to living and working in Norway. More recently she did a distance –learning law conversion course (while living in Paris), to enable her to qualify as a solicitor in England. Belinda is Dutch and her husband is British. They have two daughters: Adeline (18) is studying engineering at Cambridge University and Joss (16) is doing A levels at Oakham School in England.

PDP AND GOLD

BELINDA DRABBLE

As the spouse of a new Shell employee, but an expat for over 16 years, I was overwhelmed by the help on offer to us upon our arrival in The Hague. I was interested to hear about the PDP (Partner Development Program) and that it wasn't purely for hard-core educational courses, but for a variety of development, professional and re-education options. Liesbeth van der Wouden, who told me about the PDP, also told me that she was using it to train to become a goldsmith. And I knew then exactly what I would be doing with mine.

I have a deeply ingrained love of all things small, beautiful and expensive...so that automatically includes jewellery. I rang the college just in the nick of time for enrolments, and within ten days I was sitting at my workbench in Schoonhoven, wearing my immaculate white dustcoat.

The course is part-time and will take four years to complete. In the third year we will be working in an established business to gain on-the-job practical experience. At the end of the course we sit a timed practical exam and those of us that succeed will obtain a recognised certificate. And then on to our own endeavours.... if we dare. There are 16 of us in the workshop, the youngest men, in their early 20s, are working as a chef and IT consultant respectively. There is also a fitness instructor from the police force, a nurse, accountant, window dresser, carers, an architect, a graphic designer, administrators, a relocation consultant and me.

We have a list of assignments to complete, which involve making things - these are marked and then displayed for comment and the ooohs and aaahs of admiration and envy from our classmates. We get a report every trimester, and so far I have managed to get satisfactory grades. Each time I am just relieved that I have made it over the next hurdle.

We started by learning how to saw through copper and alpaca in straight and wiggly lines. It was a bit uneconomical to let us loose on silver, considering how expensive it is at the moment. We have progressed to being able to make rings and brooches to within 0,1 mm of the required dimensions.

You have no idea how much satisfaction you can get from soldering a seam and finding that your creation is still in one piece and that the heat of the intense gas flame has not damaged your work. I have, however, managed to scorch the workbench in more than one place and nearly singed the eyebrows off my neighbour. My next assignment is to design and make a simple round box with an embellished lid. Sound easy? It probably won't be!

The study in our new home has been turned into a multi-purpose room. My workbench will be moving there shortly, but at the moment, my husband is putting the finishing touches to a 5m wooden sea kayak that he has made from scratch and will soon be launching into the Vliet from our balcony. I realise now that maybe we should've just moved into a warehouse, a bed in the corner, a primus stove and lots of space to indulge our hobbies.

I have begun the journey of equipping myself with a portable career, one that I can take with me wherever I go and that allows me to indulge my creative streak. My dustcoat is no longer immaculate and has shrunk in the wash, but I'm having a great time and would never have thought of doing this had it not been for the PDP.

TEACHING IN DOHA

BETTHILDE KEIJ-OLDENHUIS



Doha last July - very hot temperatures and high humidity levels. Most of the expats had escaped but we had just arrived. Evening walks along the coast, afternoon swimming pool parties, and just taking it easy made for a smooth transition. The local people's friendliness and the help of a very welcoming Outpost team added to a good start to a new adventure. But would I be able to pursue my studies in teaching in Doha?

Our first posting in Paris had felt like an extended honeymoon and I enjoyed learning French and setting up Outpost Paris, however, as a rural sociologist I could not get a job and I decided to study for a second degree, this time in primary education – called Pabo in Dutch. The discipline of studying again and finding places to do my internships required a lot of perseverance especially as my first child was born in Paris, but all went well. During our next six months in London I found myself student teaching at two further schools before being asked to relocate to Doha - in one of the hottest months of the year.

With my studies nearly complete I wanted to find a place to finish my internships and was welcomed by the Compass International School. With students from all over the world, great colleagues and an inspired head teacher, the school is a wonderful experience. It offers the International Primary Curriculum which focuses on academic and personal development and on global awareness.

So far I have really enjoyed teaching in Doha. Working in my internship right away has made expat life more interesting and fulfilling and has helped me feel at home. Getting to know the children and their parents, and sharing experiences about our new lives, helped the settling down process. Getting used to the city of Doha and to Qatar in general with its new culture, climate and pace of life, is an adjustment.

The school schedule was something to get used to; starting at 7.20am and ending the day at 1.30 means an early start and getting out of school at the hottest time of day with temperatures rising sometimes above 50 Celsius. From the school policy of 'Rain, no play' in London we now have the 'No hat no play' policy and it is amazing to see how well children cope with these temperatures. Even more amazing is how well they get used to a new school system in, for most of them, a completely different language as they all come from different nationalities and cultures. These children teach me something every day; they just get along and as they are learning about host and home countries they make the connections and understand and respect the differences, I too have learned to settle in a place like Doha with an open mind.

My degree in education is just a few more internship days away. But at the moment I am taking it easy as we have another new challenge - our second child, Loura - has just been born.

More info about Pabo-by distance (Digipabo: www.inholland.nl)



COMPUTERS: THE HEALTH RISKS FOR CHILDREN

Perhaps one of the reasons why home computers were invented was to help people do tasks more quickly and efficiently. I like to think that at least part of the idea behind their invention was to provide a tool that might free up our time to pursue other interests like socialising or playing sports. However, the fact is that more people are spending more time doing more tasks with computers – and not just at home, but also at work, at school, and on holiday. The use of computers comes with potential health risks and in the case of children special precautions are recommended.

CHILDREN AND COMPUTER USE

Children today are growing up in an environment where computers are increasingly becoming part of their world.

Research on the benefits and harmful effects has been extensive with many contentious results and limited conclusive evidence. Many studies seem to indicate that effects are related to the amount of time spent on the computer, type of activity and quality of content. Obesity, problems with eyesight, wrists, curvature of the spine, increased incidence of seizures, loneliness and depression, have all been linked with sitting for too long in front of the screen. Promotion of harmful behaviours has been associated with access to inappropriate games and websites. There are also concerns about excessive use of these technologies by children at the expense of other activities and family interaction, about cyber bullying and stranger danger.

Some experts say that it may be not a case for a cause-effect association but more for a correlation between the positive and negative effects of using a computer and individual factors in the child. In other words, it may be not only “what the computer brings to the child”, but also “what the child brings to the computer” in terms of developmental stage, child’s own strengths and weaknesses, parental and teacher involvement.

The above point of view is shared in the Byron Review - an independent review, commissioned by the UK government, looking into the risks to children from exposure to potentially harmful or inappropriate material on internet and video games published in March this year (www.dfes.gov.uk/byronreview). This report stresses the need to educate children and parents on how to be safe in the digital world, and highlights that the benefits depend on the skills of the users and the way computers are used: “...there are vast individual differences that will impact on a child’s

experience when gaming or online, especially the wider context in which they have developed and in which they experience the technology. Also from this review: “As in the case of games, it is clear that the educational benefits of the internet are not automatic or guaranteed. In relation to schools, the educational value of the medium depends very much on the classroom strategies that teachers employ; while in the home, the role of parental support is crucial.”

To help children minimise the risks to their overall development, having the right equipment and encouraging good computer posture is important.

A recommended body posture to work at the computer shows:

- Body directly facing the keyboard and monitor
- Back straight
- Feet flat on the floor
- Eyes aligned at or slightly below the top of the screen
- Thighs, forearms, wrists, and hands roughly parallel to the floor

The typical office chair isn’t designed for users under 150 cm tall, so do adjust the chair by lowering the arm rests, raising the seat pan, and pushing the lumbar support forward. If your chair doesn’t have these adjustments, you can place a pillow under your child’s bottom and behind his/her lower back. If your child’s feet dangle in this position, put a footrest (or box) under his or her feet for support. The child’s eyes should be level with or just slightly above the top of the monitor, about 60 cm away. Their arms should lie close to their body (not outstretched or reaching to the side), their elbows should be at a 90-degree or greater angle and their wrists at about the same level as their forearm.

DEFINE CHILDREN'S COMPUTER TIME

Parents are advised to clearly set agreed limits on children's time spent with computers, video games, and other media.

- Rigid guidelines are not available: some experts in child development will recommend 20-30 minutes a day for a pre-school child, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting total screen time in front of a TV or computer to no more than one to two hours a day for children older than two years. Others do not see any advantage in computers for children younger than three.
- An alarm clock or timer can help you keep track of time. A break should be taken every 20 minutes.
- Make sure the use of computer is balanced with hobbies, sports, creative playing, time for homework and to spend with family and friends. In teenagers ensure that late-night chatting and surfing does not reduce their sleep time.

RAISING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS AROUND E-SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS

- Make sure that you know what your children are doing when at the computer, be interested in their online activities, get them to show you the basics of the game they are playing and talk regularly about what they do on the computer.
- Learn about computers (very often children have higher skills than their parents, but they lack maturity and awareness to be safe

online, for example) and about what you can do to limit the content of what they can access – such as setting up parental control software.

- Avoid keeping computers in children bedrooms, instead set up the computer in a public area of the house where parents can monitor activities.
- Instruct children on what they can do to protect themselves (eg. by not providing personal information, including pictures, addresses or telephone numbers to others over the internet).
- Liaise with school to ensure curriculum and school practices address e-safety in detail.

“CHILDREN WILL BE CHILDREN – PUSHING BOUNDARIES AND TAKING RISKS. AT A PUBLIC SWIMMING POOL WE HAVE GATES, PUT UP SIGNS, HAVE LIFEGUARDS AND SHALLOW ENDS, BUT WE ALSO TEACH CHILDREN HOW TO SWIM.”

Dr Tanya Byron, Clinical Psychologist

Mark Johnson, Director of the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development at the University of London suggests that one very interesting way to think about how to support children with the management of 'harmful' material online and in video games is to look at the development of their frontal cortex. This part of the brain enables us to plan and organize, to control our thoughts, feelings and behaviour and to choose between good and bad, fantasy and reality.

The frontal cortex develops throughout childhood and into early adulthood. Therefore children with immature and developing frontal cortex are