

# 21st-Century Skills

## Topic 1: Being a teacher

A hundred years ago, a young man or woman leaving school may have gone to work in a factory that assembled machinery or consumer goods. Their job would be to carefully assemble a group of loose parts according to a given blueprint. These days, software engineers are designing artificial intelligence systems that enable machines to respond intelligently to any number of unknown scenarios. The driverless car is just one example of how technology has advanced beyond our wildest imaginations.

Connecting to the internet has become part of almost every aspect of our lives, and has changed the way we communicate, learn, play, shop, bank, socialise and more. This, coupled with rapid technological advances has made the world a very different place to the one it was a hundred, or even ten years ago. So how are we preparing young people to thrive in a world where the only constant is change?

## The evolution of education

It is our role as teachers to prepare young people to succeed in an uncertain and ever-changing world. One where their jobs will look very different to their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents; but also, where they must be equipped to adapt as required in order to thrive. The skills required by young people in today's world are very different to the skills that were required in the past, and the education system has had to play catch-up in order to equip young people with the skills they need.

The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) is a coalition between the business community, education leaders and policy-makers in the United States. And their mission is to ensure that learners are equipped with the skills they need to be successful in the 21st century. In addition to the key subject areas, P21 have highlighted four critical learning and innovation skills that we address below.

## From the three Rs to the four Cs

The three Rs - reading, (w)riting and (a)rithmetic are no longer sufficient, as the 21st-century worker and learner require higher-level skills. The four critical learning and innovation skills highlighted by P21 are critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity. Let's take a moment to see how these skills are learned in the classroom, as preparation for the modern workplace.

## Critical thinking

This refers to students' ability to analyse, interpret and evaluate information; and make decisions and solve problems based on this information. Previously, students may merely have been asked to interpret a graph displaying rainfall patterns in a particular area, but this activity is not sufficient to develop critical thinking skills. An activity that requires students to analyse raw data, present it in a format that makes sense, interpret the data, conduct additional research to support their findings, and make decisions and solve problems related to what they have learnt from their research may be more effective in exercising critical thinking skills.

## Communication

We live in a highly connected society and with all the different communication platforms used, communication in the 21st century is more important than ever before. At the same time, our society suffers from information overload, so although it's easier to get your message out there, it is harder to get people to take note of it. It does not matter how important or valuable a message is, if it is not communicated effectively, the message will not be received. It's important for learners to learn how to communicate clearly - not only in traditional written and verbal form but also in multimedia formats, using video, images, tweets etc. It's also important to know how best to communicate in different contexts. Where in the past an assignment may have been to write an essay on Colonisation, you might leave it up to the learner to use different forms of communication to get their message across more effectively, depending on the audience.

## Collaboration

Collaboration is a critical skill in today's world. Most jobs require employees to work as part of teams, towards common goals. Many complex problems also require multiple perspectives and so, more commonly, people are working in multi-disciplinary teams in order to solve complex challenges. Learners must learn to work together to be productive, respectful of diversity and share responsibility for outputs. Group assignments should nurture these skills among learners while encouraging them to become more self-aware with respect to their strengths and development areas.

## Creativity

Creativity is about coming up with ideas and then bringing them to life. In practice, this involves brainstorming ideas, refining these ideas, building on the ideas of others and communicating these ideas in a way that is tangible and useful to others. You should start to see that the four Cs are not separate, but rather, overlapping skills, of which creativity is at the centre. Learners should start to develop these skills from a young age so that they can come up with innovative inventions, ideas and solutions.

## What about my classroom?

You may be thinking, that in an ideal world, these concepts sound great. But in an overcrowded classroom with few resources and a tight curriculum, these things are not possible. You're not expected to completely change the way you teach. But at the very least, we would like you to think about how you can incorporate these skills in your classroom in small ways.

## References

Common Sense Education, (2016). *What are the 4Cs?*. [Video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrEEVZa3f98&t=2s> [Accessed 8 Apr. 2018].

Partnership for 21st century learning, (date unknown). *Our History*. [online] Available at: <http://www.p21.org/about-us/our-history> [Accessed 8 Apr. 2018].