

Promoting 21st Century Skills In English Classrooms

Zulhumor Mirzayeva

EFL teacher

Namangan State University

Abstract: Promoting 21st century skills is one of the professional practices for teachers in teaching which involves developing an awareness of and proficiency in critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and communication, creativity and imagination, citizenship, digital literacy, student leadership, personal development social, working and learning skills and sub-skills in English classrooms. It includes selecting appropriate methodologies and resources for introducing, developing and evaluating learners' skills in the above areas and demonstrating the value and importance of 21st century skills to and for learners. It also involves reflecting on teacher's strengths and weaknesses in relation to his/her own proficiency in 21st century skills and ability to develop learners' proficiency in these areas.

Key words and phrases: 21st century skills, critical thinking skills, working skills, problem-solving skills.

As we are living in an era of information technology, so today we are being drowned in the deluge of information. A gale of changes is blowing into all spheres of our current life. The proliferation of technology in our everyday lives has drastically changed how we function in society. While all educators want to help students be successful in the future, the world is shrinking quickly, and our society is becoming more global in nature. Reading, writing, mathematics and knowledge of the other core subject areas will remain an important component of each person's education. However, *21st century skills* or we can call *life skills*, *soft skills* which are increasingly important skills that our students should understand and use these skills, along with their educational qualifications, will be better placed to take

advantage of educational and employment opportunities. Teaching these skills effectively in the classroom has been a topic of discussion among educators for many years. Macmillan Life-skills handbook [1] provides a list of 21st skills which education should prepare our students for the future, whether that involves going on to further study, joining the world of work or becoming an engaged member of society.

Education is a process that enables students to take their place in society as effective learners, as effective professionals and as effective citizens. And English language education enables our students to do it in English.

Thinking skills

Creativity/imagination

Problem solving

Decision making

Self knowledge

Critical thinking

Accessing and analysing information

Working skills

Communication/collaboration/

Cooperation

People Management

Time management

Organisation

Negotiating

Leading by influence

Social skills

Citizenship

Social responsibility

Learning skills

ICT

Agility and adaptability

Receiving and giving feedback

Handling criticism

Innovation/exploration

Learner autonomy

Cultural awareness

Social development

Respecting diversity

Networking

More recently, the discussion has included teaching these skills effectively to English learners, who, while learning the content being presented along with these important skills, also have the challenge of learning English. In this series, we will explore teaching a few of them to English learners, examining areas of difficulty as well as instructional techniques to help incorporate these skills into instruction and learning. The skills of *critical thinking and problem solving* include using knowledge, facts and data to solve problems. When applying critical thinking and problem solving, students must be able to make appropriate decisions and judgments using what they have learned or read, use inductive and deductive reasoning as appropriate to the situation, and analyze complex systems and determine how parts of a whole interact with each other. The ability to think critically is not dictated by an ability to speak any given language. While this statement is obvious, teaching students to think critically and articulate their thoughts in a language they do not speak well is a challenge. Watson & Young, [2] in a seminal research study in 1986 found that teachers ask approximately 50,000 questions over the course of a school year. John Hattie, [3] in 2006, found that teachers may ask as many as 300-400 questions per day. In each study, however, few of these questions included higher-level thinking. Besides developing higher-order thinking and problem-solving questions and activities, teachers must consider the language that will need to be explicitly taught and shared so that English learners can be successful on the task. It is clear that comprehension questions are important, as we need to check for understanding while teaching. These questions are easily thought up and asked during the course of instruction and many teachers plan interesting and engaging questions as part of their checks for understanding. Many teachers are aware that some adjustments to questions may need to be made based on the proficiency levels of the students they are

working with. In order to incorporate higher-order thinking questions and activities, preplanning is essential. Building lesson objectives into instruction has become increasingly common over the past several years. In addition to sharing learning objectives related to the content, teachers working with English learners also incorporate communication or language objectives. Communication objectives include how the students will be practicing and developing academic language skills. These objectives may include developing students' recognition and use of general academic and domain-specific vocabulary, specific reading and writing skills, clarifying complex grammatical structures, and more. When planning to increase critical thinking and problem solving, these skills can and should be built into the lesson objectives to make students aware of the purpose of the lesson. To develop of good listening and reinforce critical thinking skills, we need deal with authentic listening texts, such as YouTube videos, clips from the BBC as well as short films from www.filmenglish.com

A useful and ready-to-go format to use in the classroom in order to reinforce critical thinking skills is the *KWL format*, [4] namely: *know / want to know / learnt*. This exercise can be used countless times but requires clear instruction, clarification and modeling the first time it is used. So, how is it used?

Name _____ K.W.L Chart Date _____

Topic _____

What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Have Learned

www.timvandevall.com | Copyright © 2014 Dutch Renaissance Press LLC.

The teacher draws on the whiteboard three columns and labels them as above. **In the first column** the learners need to come up with what they already know about

the topic - great for activating their schemata and it doubles up as a gist prediction task. If the text is a video on skateboarding in the US, then in this column would go things such as:

- I know skateboarding is a popular sport in the US
- Tony Hawk is a famous skateboarder
- It is predominantly popular among young people

In the second column, the learners come up with what they would like to know i.e. what they would like to find out from the recording. For example:

- How popular is skateboarding?
- What are the figures on the number of skateboarders in the US?
- Is it considered dangerous by others?
- Is it a growing or a declining sport?
- Why is it popular usually only among young people?

The first time the class listens to the recording, the task is to listen out for the general gist and to correctly identify whether what is written in their “know” column is in fact present in the listening. For the second listening - the detailed listening - the learners should listen carefully for answers to what is written in their “Want to know” column. Due to the fact the text is authentic; it might be a good idea to allow them to listen to the recording twice during this stage. The third and final column - the learnt column - gives the learner and opportunity to verbalise what they have gotten out of the listening, be it an answer to a query or something additional they did not know before listening. Each of the stages above lend themselves to individual or group work; alternatively, they might be completed as a group activity, with groups of learners deciding together what they already know, what they want to know and what they have learnt. The most important thing is to keep each stage as interactive and communicative as feasibly possible. It is difficult to weave in critical thinking and problem solving into a lesson without

also incorporating some aspects of communication. Similarly, collaboration is an effective practice in problem solving as students work together to share differing perspectives or ideas. This collaboration may include creative ways to solve problems.

References:

1. Macmillan Life Skills handbook www.macmillanenglish.com/life-skills
2. Watson & Young (1986) Asking right questions
3. Hattie, J. (2006) Visible learning
4. www.criticalthinking.org
5. An Introduction to Critical Thinking (by Steven D. Schaferman)
<http://www.freeinquiry.com/critical-thinking.html>