

## TREND 1: 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

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One of the largest trends in education worldwide is the recognition that education needs to serve an increasingly digital world. Classrooms that exist as ‘technology free zones’ are increasingly falling behind in preparing students for the jobs of the future. As a result, schools are changing focus from traditional teaching, with its focus on facts and information, to teaching the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, with an emphasis on digital literacy. These 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills have a focus on problem-solving, creativity, and communication. In the classroom of the future, students will need to know how to find, evaluate, and process information from a wide variety of sources. This week, we will explore the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and find ways to incorporate them in our classrooms.

This focus on digital skills should play a strong role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century English language classroom as well. Although it is hard to estimate accurately, around 50% of all the material on the Internet is in English (Pimienta, Prado, & Blanco, 2009). As English teachers, we can help our students access and understand this digital world. To better help our students prepare for the digital world and the digital jobs of the future, we should also consider how to make our classrooms 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms.

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY THEMES

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The 21<sup>st</sup> century themes are not subjects for direct classroom instruction. Instead, they are ideas that teachers can integrate into their classroom instruction. These ideas include:

**Global Awareness** – teachers should use classroom activities to promote global understanding in students. This can include classroom organization, such as having

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students from different cultures and backgrounds work together on class projects to promote cultural understanding and awareness, or, for monolingual/monocultural classrooms, having students read English language materials that are focused on non-English speaking areas of the world. An example of this is creating classroom activities around Google's [Beyond the Map](#) project, which gives viewers an interactive tour of Rio de Janeiro, or using the international news stories and radio broadcasts of [Voice of America](#) in the classroom. For more ideas on using global affairs in your classroom, check out the [March 2016 Teacher's Corner](#) or the [American English Webinar Series](#).

**Creativity and Innovation** – The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills have a strong focus on students creating and innovating with the information they have in the classroom. This requires teachers to move from more traditional assessments, such as quizzes and tests, to more open-ended assessment approaches, such as student portfolios. The goal in using portfolios is to encourage students to use the target language in context, rather than by testing knowledge of just grammar or vocabulary. This can include asking students to create videos, write journals, [create podcasts](#), or [stage classroom plays in English](#) for classroom assignments. For more on using portfolios in the classroom, check out the [January 2004 issue](#) of *English Teaching Forum* magazine.

**Information and Media Literacy** – The world has shifted from an industrial economy to an *information age economy*. The old industrial economy focused on the building and making of products. The information age economy is focused on creating and accessing information through computers. In the information age economy, it is important for students to understand how to access information and evaluate that information. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills educational model encourages the use of *transmedia literacy*. Transmedia

literacy is the ability to understand information from a variety of sources and make connections between them. For example, in the English classroom, students can read an English-language news story, then watch a video on the same subject matter. Teachers can then quiz the students on not only the content of each story but also the differences and similarities between each story. This encourages students to think across different types of media and understand the strengths and weaknesses of each. For more on media literacy, check out our Massive Open Online Course on [English for Media Literacy](#).

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills model fits well inside the English language classroom as this approach encourages students to engage with a globalized world. We can help our students prepare for this globalized world by incorporating more interactive activities into our classrooms. Activities that require students to make videos, audio journals, or web-based writing not only allow them to practice their language, but also to learn technology skills along the way.

Want to learn more? Check out these resources:

[21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills – Resources for Educators](#)

[Communicative Curriculum Design for the 21st Century](#)

[Digital Stories: A 21st-Century Communication Tool for the English Language Classroom](#)

#### References

Pimienta, D., Prado, D., & Blanco, Á. (2009). *Twelve years of measuring linguistic diversity in the Internet: balance and perspectives*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.