

**The Home/School Connection:
Collaborating to Promote Best Practice in World Language Education, K-8
Issue 17
21st Century Skills**

The most critical challenge before schools in this century will be giving students both the skills and the ethical dispositions to invent a future that enhances human well-being in an age of globalization.

-Fernando Reimer (Preparing Students for the Flat World)

Dear Parents,

“Twenty first century skills” is another term heard more and more in education and business. You may wonder what they are and if your child is developing these skills in school. In this issue of Home/School Connection we will explore this term and discuss how twenty first century skills are related to learning other languages.

21st Century Skills

In *Teaching for the 21st Century: Leading for Global Competency*, Fernando Reimer says that “the purpose of schooling is to prepare students for life in the real world in their communities and societies, both in the present while students are in school and in the future after they leave school behind.” Many people are beginning to recognize that the children of today will need a different set of skills to be successful in the working world of the 21st century and those skills are often referred to as “21st century skills”.

An active leader in the twenty first century skills movement is the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. This organization’s mission is to “serve as a catalyst to position 21st century skills at the center of US K-12 education by building collaborative partnerships among education, business, community and government leaders.” It has members such as Lego, Ford, National Education Association, Hewlett Packard, the Walt Disney Company, and Apple.

The Partnership has grouped the 21st century skills into 3 areas: 1) learning and innovation skills; 2) information, media and technology skills; and 3) life and career skills. Within those groups, there are several skills that are developed through the study of other languages. Those skills include:

- Respect cultural differences and work effectively with people from a range of social and cultural backgrounds.
- Respond open-mindedly to different ideas and values.
- Leverage social and cultural differences to create new ideas and increase both innovation and quality of work.
- Be open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives; incorporate group input and feedback into the work.
- Demonstrate ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams.
- Understand, negotiate and balance diverse views and beliefs to reach workable solutions, particularly in multi-cultural environments.
- Communicate effectively in diverse environments (including multi-lingual)
- Understand and effectively utilize the most appropriate expressions and interpretations in diverse, multi-cultural environments

Global Awareness

The Committee for Economic Development published a report (2006) on “Education for Global Leadership” that stated:

To confront the twenty-first century challenges to our economy and national security, our education system must be strengthened to increase the foreign language skills and cultural awareness of our students. America's continued global leadership will depend on our students' abilities to interact with the world community both inside and outside our borders.

The Partnership also recognizes the importance of global awareness. It is one of four 21st century themes identified by the Partnership. The theme includes:

- Using 21st century skills to understand and address global issues.
- Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts.
- Understanding other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages.

In his article *Preparing Students for the Flat World*, Reimer states that “(g)lobal competency requires not only knowledge of the world, but also skills that can put that knowledge to use. Equally important are attitudinal and ethical dispositions, which make it possible to interact peacefully, respectfully, and productively with fellow human beings from diverse geographies in addressing global problems.”

Conclusion

Currently only about one-half of American high school students study a world language and the

majority of these students never progress beyond the introductory level (Asia Society). Children in the United States cannot develop the 21st century skills, knowledge and expertise needed to compete in an increasingly more connected world if they are not afforded the opportunity to study world languages beyond English. In order to develop communicative competence in another language, students must begin language study in elementary school and continue an uninterrupted sequence through college.

Reimers, F. (2008, October). “Preparing Students for the Flat World” Peace Corps Coverdall World Wise Schools. 21 Oct 2009. <http://www.peacecorps.gov>

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“Education for Global Leadership: The importance of International Studies and Foreign Language education for US Economic and National Security”. 2006. Committee for Economic Development. 22 October 2009 <http://www.ced.org>

“Framework for 21st Century Learning”. 2009 Partnership for 21st Century Skills. 10 October 2009 <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php>

“National Initiatives”. 2009. Asia Society. 14 Dec 2009. <http://www.asiasociety.org>

 NELL can assist teachers, parents and administrators with learning and advocacy efforts. Contact your State Representative today. We would love to hear from you!

This issue of Home/School Connection was written by Tammy Dann. It is full of tips and resources that can be found at www.nnell.org. Teachers may reproduce it and send it home in their students' backpacks. Send suggestions/comments to Tammy Dann, NELL's Early Language Advocate: trdann@q.com