The 8 Skills Students Must Have For the Future

By Michael Sledd on April 2, 2015

Education has traditionally focused on the basic "3Rs" of reading, writing and arithmetic. However, as the ever increasing pace of technological innovation drives changes in the world, educators must re-evaluate whether the skills they teach truly provide their students with the best opportunities to succeed in school, the workforce, and in life overall.

This naturally leads to the question of what those skills are or will be, and while there are other excellent suggestions out there, Pearson's "The Learning Curve" report lists the 8 skills below as those most necessary to succeed in the 21st century.

Beyond the 3Rs - the new skills the world is looking for.

Leadership · Digital literacy · Communication · Emotional intelligence · Entrepreneurship · Global citizenship · Problem solving · Team-working

Leadership

People have discussed leadership for centuries, and generated a wide array of different definitions and theories about what it means. While anyone interested in the field should of course explore further on their own, one good place to start working towards a basic understanding of current ideas about any topic is a contemporary review of the subject by scholars in the field.

Perhaps even more importantly for educators than dogmatically fixating on a specific concept of leadership though, is to effectively teach it to students. Similar to above, there are many proposed methods for teaching leadership, and while sometimes expensive, once again it is often helpful to consult a comprehensive [reference on the subject written by experts in the field](#).

Overall, one common theme runs through most modern theories, which is that leadership is no longer necessarily about powerful individuals directing others. Rather, it is about fostering collaboration, working towards common goals, and acting as a leader in any role assumed, regardless of whether it meets the classical definition of a leader.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is the ability to use digital technology to locate, review, utilize and create new information. Unlike teaching leadership skills, which can be abstruse and subjective in nature, improving students' digital literacy is generally a much more concrete process, with a wide variety of tools readily available, including an [online Digital Literacy portal funded by the U.S. Federal government](#).

In fact, for many educators, the difficulty in teaching some of these skills may stem from a lack of knowledge by the educators themselves relative to their pupils. Because of this, it is not only vital for instructors to ensure they incorporate digital literacy into their lessons in order to connect with their students, but that they keep up to speed and engage in [lifelong learning](#) themselves as well.

Going along with this, creatively incorporating digital learning into lesson plans and maintaining student interest is also highly important. Strategies could include things that many educators may have never considered, such as utilizing [Skype](#), [texting](#), [Twitter](#), or possibly even [games](#).

Communication

Fundamentally, regardless of language or medium, truly effective communication is about openly and honestly sharing information in a way that creates mutual understanding between all parties involved about the others' thoughts, intentions and ideas, whether they agree or not.

There are various barriers to effective communication, and teaching students techniques to overcome them will be more difficult for some of these barriers than others. Oftentimes, it helps to reflect on strategies you yourself can use to improve your own communication skills, and incorporate those into your less plans.

Overcoming a physical impediment, including geographic and technological ones, is fairly simple and typically will require little instruction beyond the use of basic technology, although there may be monetary costs involved. Likewise, organizational barriers are often as easy to solve as asking around to determine who the best person is to approach concerning the issue.

While significantly more complex than the above, helping students overcome [language barriers](#)and even communication problems facing [students with certain disabilities](#) can sometimes also be fairly straight-forward assuming those are the only issues involved and the necessary tools are available.

The most difficult barriers to overcome though are going to be cultural, and even more so, psychological/attitudinal. In these cases, active listening is probably the most fundamental skill to develop for dealing with these type of communication issues, and will help greatly with most of the others as well.

While a great deal of time is spent in education practicing information output, and static input such as reading or listening to lectures, less is spent engaging in open dialogue where students have to practice listening and engaging in discussions of ideas with one another or simply practice listening to what each other are saying non-judgmentally.

The closest many students will come to this is playing "telephone" in elementary school, after which this skill will largely go un-nurtured. Some might point to debate activities, but these are geared towards winning an argument, which while developing other valuable skills, by its nature will never be a truly open dialogue. Teachers who can successfully devise activities that educate their students on active listening techniques will provide those students with a useful skill throughout life.

Emotional Intelligence

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management defines **emotional intelligence** (EI) as "a type of social competence involving the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions." (Source)

Many educators already implement strategies to promote emotional intelligence, with "Social Emotional Learning" or SEL being perhaps the best regarded.

Overall, emotional intelligence provides a strong support to a well-balanced student. Educators would be remiss to neglect this aspect of growth and development, particularly given the wealth of scholarly research and guidance readily available on the internet regarding the topic. Together with communication, emotional intelligence is essential in building and maintaining relationships in both the classroom and the workplace.

Entrepreneurship

Most people are familiar with the concept of entrepreneurship as it relates to business, and in fact, Merriam defines it as **"a person who starts a business and is willing to risk loss in order to make money."**

That said, fundamentals of entrepreneurship such as creativity, drive, innovation, and passion, can apply to any venture, whether it is in the business or entertainment worlds, or the non-profit and public sectors. Some would say that at its real core, entrepreneurial spirit is about people having a unique vision for their place in the world and sacrificing and striving towards making it a reality, regardless of whether a financial profit is involved.

Regardless of the specifics of the definition, instilling or cultivating this sort of active, motivated mindset in students regarding education is guaranteed to lead to improved success rates. There are many ideas out there concerning entrepreneurship classroom activities that could be adopted, modified or simply used as springboards for ideas by teachers to suit their specific needs.

Global Citizenship

With digital connectivity and modern transportation shrinking the figurative distances between people more and more, and global economies binding different nations closer and closer together, it is increasingly difficult for even the most resistant to ignore or not accept that we are all citizens of the same planet and must work together to ensure its continuance as a livable place.

As part of this, it is essential to begin educating students about this fact at a young age so that they can understand their place in the world around them. One way to get started in creating a globalized classroom is to look around at other teachers' experiences, as detailed in this Edudemic article we published earlier this year.
For a more in-depth, academic look at the issue, it is also useful to explore journal publications specifically on the subject of global citizenship education.

Problem-solving and Team-working

Of all the skills discussed, problem solving and team-working are the most closely aligned with traditional educational methods? This does not however mean that there are not innovative methods of involving problem solving and team-work in curricula. Perhaps most importantly, rather than seeking out problem solving projects that are exceptionally difficult in one way or another, or where team-work is simply a method for educating a larger group more efficiently, look to create projects where the solution will require a the use of all the skills mentioned, with problem solving and team-working skills being improved organically while acting as a nexus for the entire classroom to develop.

Editor's note: This is a revised version of an article written by Katie Lepi that originally appeared on June 7th, 2014. We believe this information is still highly relevant, but we wanted to update it with the latest thinking. To do that, we invited writer Michael Sledd to take the reins.