

21st Century Competency Skills – Part 2

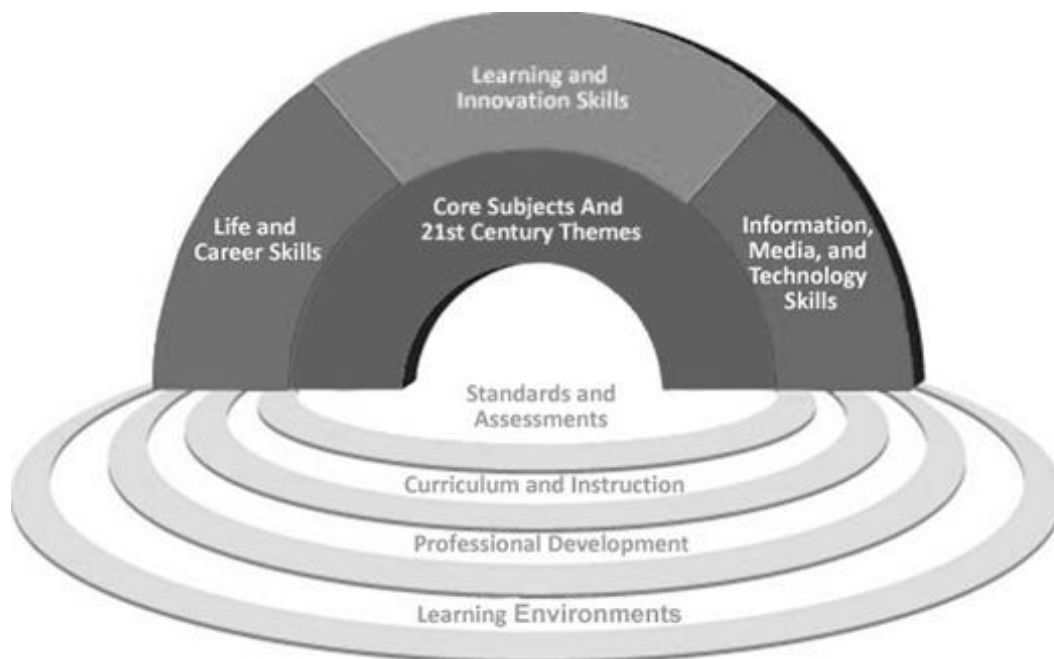
It's Fun to Collaborate!

~ Sujata C



The phrase, *21st century competency skills* has become well-known in education circles all across the world. It is a positive step as it enables us to question our system's readiness for the future. For the first time 'competency' is gradually taking precedence over curriculum. Discussions are going on for developing a set of courses based on these skills.

Underlying these deliberations is the tacit admission of the fact that the process of teaching needs to be more innovative to match the requirements of the 21st century learners. Being in the throes of a digital revolution, we must overcome all the new challenges and progress. In our previous issue, we had discussed *critical thinking*. Here we will talk about *collaboration*.



P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning

The term, *collaboration* means the act of forming groups and working together. One might ask why is it being considered as a 21st century skill when the word has been there in the English vocabulary since mid-19th century and the concept is timeless for the human civilization would not have progressed without *collaboration*. This is because the importance of collaborative work today has become more important due to the challenges we are facing, like global warming, climate change, outbreak of new disease, pollution, increasing psychological disorders, etc. A combined effort is a prerequisite for overcoming this enormous challenge.



So far, most of the curricula aggressively focussed on each child as an individual. Sometimes a few external factors, such as parental pressure and expectation by teachers to be the best in everything, tend to affect the students' morale. As a result, some of them become self-centred (always thinking about *my abilities*, *my success*, etc.) and start indulging in an unhealthy competition with everyone around. Children who consider their classmates as mere rivals to the path of glory eventually grow up to be egoist and lonely individuals. We must teach our children that competition is good but not the most important thing in life. They should be exposed to collaborative ways of living where everybody plays a part, and responsibilities are shared. We should teach them to compete as a social being, not as mere individuals. In this way, they will not only strive for personal excellence, but also work for the betterment of the society they belong to. True success does not come from individual achievement. What eventually matters is how one is contributing to make this world a better place to live in. That is why we have seen arch rivals



from the world of sports like Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal coming together to support the cause of differently abled children¹. In 2004, Sony Corp. entered into a joint venture (JV) with its fierce competitor, Samsung Electronics to develop and produce LCD panels for flat-screen TVs. By collaborating with the competitor, Sony was able to launch a new product popularly known as *Bravia* while Samsung developed *Bordeaux*. Teaming up with their rivals they produced newer innovations, toppled other competitors from their positions, and more than doubled their combined market shares². You can think of many more such instances.

¹ https://www.fundacionrafa Nadal.org/en/eventos_1_united-for-childhood

² <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/4jgt8rLc9TPNb5FMpza3MK/Collaborating-with-your-direct-business-competitors.html>

The dire need of the hour is to inculcate a spirit of collaboration amongst children during classroom learning. Otherwise they will get sucked into the selfish rat-race of life where winning every challenge seems like a necessity and a single loss makes them deeply depressed from inside. To avoid such consequences, we should



teach our students to accept failures gracefully and keep learning from them as they gradually move towards perfection. In this way, they will be able to compete in a friendly manner and help each other overcome shortcomings. We should tell them that the 21st century leaders do not race ahead of others; they show the way from the front and take

everyone along. Students should also be encouraged to know about the lives of people like Steve Jobs (former chief executive officer as well as co-founder of Apple Inc.), Sundar Pichai (present CEO of Google), etc., and learn how they changed the concept of leadership through collaboration.

Students should be encouraged to interact with each other before assembly and during lunch break. They should be encouraged to talk about their families or share food during lunch hours. In a world where something as basic as food is becoming the contention of divide within our classrooms, such practices are the need of the hour. Teachers will have to keep in mind possible threats like bullying, fights and other kinds of violence, while still encouraging children to bond with each other. Many of the 21st century learners are single child from nuclear families. For them, school is perhaps the only place where they get the chance to interact with others and taste the joy of community effort.

It might be a good idea to give students assignments where they have to collaborate with each other. For example, they can be asked to plant saplings in the school garden and nurture them. Responsibilities and duties for any upcoming programme/event in school can be divided among students and teachers, where both have to work in groups. Cultural competitions such as quizzes and debates can be organized where children have to take part as teams. Games like cricket, football, hockey and athletic activities like relay races also help to develop the spirit of collaboration.



Teachers must demonstrate the benefits of cooperation and collaboration in the classroom with suitable examples and make students realise the importance. The role of the parents is also critical. If they are doing the opposite of what the school wants to achieve, it will nullify the efforts of the teachers. So it is important for schools to organise regular parent-teacher meetings and make it a collaborative approach from their part too.

There is a famous quote, *the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts*, often attributed to Aristotle, the Greek philosopher. It signifies that the spirit of collaboration is one of the primary features of education. A person cannot be good at doing everything. That is why each student likes different subjects and chooses distinct professions in future, and contributes in their own way in the progress of humanity. Collaboration is one of the most crucial skills of the 21st century because without it the challenges ahead cannot be surmounted. As teachers we have to bring about a paradigm shift in the learning and growing up approach as we are directly influencing the future of tomorrow.

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Lesson Plan: It's Fun to Collaborate

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Most schools have children assigned to different houses. Each house has prefects who lead the members of the house during various activities. These houses can become groups that can be galvanised into action as a team to tackle any real or hypothetical situation. Schools can arrange regular mock drills to get the team going and let them work shoulder to shoulder by collaborating with each other to fulfil a common goal. Teachers can intervene to smoothen out the ruffled feathers during any disagreement and play the role of mentors for the teams. All groups should be balanced as per the merits of different students so that a single team does not get added advantage. Here are some examples of how teachers can help students to collaborate.



Teach your students the art of managing space: The learning environment is as important as the lesson itself. One way of implementing collaborative learning practices is by rearranging the classroom. In fact the first lesson in collaborative learning can be the reorganising of the room itself. Rows of desks, one behind the other, may encourage students to divide themselves as *frontbenchers* and *backbenchers*. To avoid



this, a teacher can involve the class and brainstorm on how the space can be rearranged to make it organised and group-friendly. Instead of individual desks for students, a group of children can be made to sit together. Such an arrangement will give them the scope to communicate and get to know each other. Group discussions also become easier if 3-4 students sit together.

Read stories on collaboration: There are many stories in our folklore that



illustrate the power of cooperation. A few examples are *The Hunter and the Quails* (from **Jataka Tales**), and *The Ass and the Mule*, *Donkey's Shadow*, *Bundle of Sticks*, and *Lion and the Boar* (all from **Aesop's Fables**). The bridge

building episode from *The Ramayana* is considered as an epic example of collaborative effort.

Screen films and television shows promoting collaboration:

Doordarshan's short film, *Ek, Anek Aur Ekta* stresses the theme of *unity is strength*. Cartoon series *Oswald* promotes altruistic acts and other fellow feelings which are important for collaboration. These will help young learners deal with negativity using a constructive outlook.

Encourage students to participate in different team games throughout the year. A cricket, hockey or football coach can occasionally be invited to speak about the importance of collaboration in the field and motivate the students to keep up the team spirit. Narrate stories from the history of Olympics and World Cups that enhance their morale.

Use drama to reinforce the idea of cooperation: It has proven to be extremely useful in reducing aggression and developing self-confidence in children. Make students role play different characters from the stories they read or from history. Also arrange inter-class drama competitions.



Share news of collaborative success with your students: The recent rescue of the Thai boys' football team from the caves is one such example (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/live/2018/jul/10/thai-cave-rescue-third-mission-planned-to-bring-out-remaining-boys-and-coach-live-updates>). Similarly students can be encouraged to curate stories where team effort has done miracles.

Introduce your class to the concept of community service: Identify issues in the locality surrounding the school and help students engage in some voluntary work in groups (for example, donating clothes to the needy ones,



spreading awareness of different diseases, etc.) during weekends or after school hours. Motivate students to engage in **plogging**, an activity where they have to pick up plastic while on a jog. There are many other ways of engaging students in community service.

Conduct creative writing sessions: Students can be asked to write essays on topics like *Playing for the sake of playing*, *Success vs Joy*, etc., and arrange a group discussion session on the same. These concepts amplify the idea of collaboration and help children understand it well.

Collaboration apps: There are a few apps that help to teach collaboration in class.

Padlet is a virtual bulletin board where teachers can create a wall for students to post their responses to a question or assignment. It can be text, a drawing, or a video.

Seesaw is student driven digital portfolio with simple parent communication platform. It allows teachers to understand each student's progress and give personalised instructions.

G Suite apps include Google Docs, Sheets, Slides, etc., where a file or folder can be shared with multiple Google Drive accounts. It becomes an effective tool for collaboration as different students can work together on a single project.

Google Classroom allows teachers to distribute, collect and grade assignments online.

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Conglomerate (noun, adjective and verb)



Pronunciation:

1. /kən'glɒm(ə)rət/ (**noun**)
2. /kən'glɒm(ə)rət/ (**adjective**)
3. /kən'glɒməreɪt/ (**verb**)

Meaning:

As a noun

1. A thing consisting of a number of different and distinct parts or items that are grouped together.
2. A large corporation formed by the merging of separate and diverse firms (can also be used as an adjective).
3. A coarse-grained sedimentary rock composed of rounded fragments embedded in a matrix of cementing material such as silica (*Geology*).

As a verb

1. Gather together into a compact mass

Origin and additional information: The word hails from the late Middle English vocabulary (as an adjective describing something gathered up into a rounded mass) from the Latin term *conglomeratus*, which is the past participle of *conglomerare* (*con* means *together* and *glomus* stands for *ball*). The word has been in use in the geological sense from the early 19th century; while the other noun senses are a much later development.

Use over time for: conglomerate



Word section: One of the earliest uses of the word is recorded in *Workes of Armorie* (1572) by John Bossewell: *Certain trees..bring forth fruit conglomerate with leaues*. Such usage of the word as past participle later became obsolete. *Conglomerate* also has connotations related to physiology (*Concerning the Liver..finding it to have Lobes and to be a Glandul of that kind, which by Anatomists are called Conglomerate*, from **Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, 1665-1752**) and pathology (*Mr Cæsar Hawkins described them..as conglomerate tumours*, from **Lectures on Surgical Pathology** by James Paget).

Usage:

1. **As a noun:** It's a conglomerate of all of my friends and I thrown together.
(Source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/conglomerate>)
2. **As a geological term:** The plateau is capped by Pennsylvanian sandstone and shale, and lesser amounts of siltstone, conglomerate, and coal.
(Source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/conglomerate>)
3. **As an adjective:** All the positive religions in the world..are alike conglomerate formations.
(Source: *Some Elements of Religion: Lent Lectures* (1870-1872) by Henry Parry Liddon)
4. **As a verb:** Across from his standpoint, a group of trees loomed tall and conglomerated in darkness.
(Source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/conglomerate>)