Chapter XXIX
Lifelong Learning in the 21ˢᵗ Century

Kathleen P. King
Fordham University, USA

Sharon R. Sanquist
Caldwell College, USA

Seamus King
University of Georgia, USA

ABSTRACT

Learning in the 21ˢᵗ century no longer ends with K-12 and college preparation. Instead, for those adults who will succeed in negotiating the demands of the 21ˢᵗ century, it must continue across their lifetime. More than merely a focus on lifelong learning, however, this chapter illuminates the specific needs and skills of lifelong learning integrated with life and work in the 21ˢᵗ century. The discussion of modern skills includes scope, definitions, issues and trends, current and emerging practices, recommended strategies, and a glimpse of the future. The cornerstones of this discussion include approaches to learning such as lifelong learning, self-directed learning, 21ˢᵗ learning skills, information literacy, collaborative, situated, and problem based learning.

INTRODUCTION

Occasionally we attend trend-setting lectures and training seminars which herald a new order of teamwork, learning through collaboration, and/ or information literacy. However, as a whole, the message has truly missed the mark: both the gen-

eral public and workplace communities have not fully comprehended the fact that all of us need to communicate, work, and learn in different ways in order to succeed in the 21ˢᵗ century (Enriquez, 2001). The old order of the world has changed, and we have a great opportunity to be part of the new wave and all its possibilities. Consider the following examples.

For thousands of years when one wanted to access information, one went to a library. In modern days prior to 1990, one used a wooden card catalog, and sorted through index card like records to navigate the resources held within these institutions. In fact, if one needed a detailed data search, a librarian would conduct a database search for the visitor. Fast forward to today, and a vast storehouse of library data (e.g., public library websites, university library sites), publication databases searches (e.g., EBSCO and ProQuest), article databases, full-text search, Google Books, and digital media are available instantly on-line, changing very nature of everyday access to information, research, and "literacy skills." Concomitantly our expectations for the availability of specific, relevant information has escalated in our professional and personal domains.

Consequently, people need to master information literacy skills and strategies to continue to learn new technology related skills. Therein emerges the critical need for 21st century lifelong learning skills as core tools for success. Consider, for example, the need to separate fact from fiction and apply critical analysis to findings regardless of sources. As Tapscott and Williams (2006) say, we are "The New Alexandrians;" (p. 151) instead of needing to physically trek to the archetypical library of ancient Alexandria, the new library is *ubiquitous—global—*and *collaborative.*

Very critically, *instantly accessible global information* makes it essential for 21st century adults to be skilled in the critical analysis and use of information. Furthermore, they need to be knowledgeable of issues of liability, responsibility and confidentiality regarding information and technology access (Enriquez, 2001; King & Gura, 2009; King & Sanquist, 2009). 21st century life is dominated by technology-mediated processes (e.g., email, videoconferencing, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP), online learning, e-commerce, and web-based databases, production management, etc.); therefore all adults need effective strategies to use technology for collaboration, communication, problem solving, and rapidly *learning new technologies.*

This chapter confronts several areas, which impact life and learning in the 21st century, and yet have emerged and/or dramatically changed. Specifically, areas addressed include problem solving, information literacy, collaboration, team playing, and lifelong learning skills. Traditional training and educational approaches do not always address the rapid changes and urgent needs of our global, technology-driven world. The insights, approaches, and tools provided in this chapter can assist all individuals, and career and technical educators (CTE) and organizations build greater skill, confidence and unity of communication and action in today's and tomorrow's revolution of life and work.

BACKGROUND

The dominant theme of the 21st century is rapid technological developments and unexpected changes. 21st century lifelong learning skills provide successful, dynamic strategies to navigate this environment and culture (King & Sanquist, 2009; The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2004). Foundational to this perspective are the literatures, theories and models from fields such as adult learning, human resource development, neuropsychology, instructional technology, educational psychology, and distance learning. This collective model builds upon major theories, affording a robust foundation with a comprehensive, interdisciplinary perspective.

For example, constructivism, experientialism, learner-centered classrooms, critical pedagogy, and situated learning all provide significant constructs for this approach (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Dewey, 1938; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Matthews, 2003). These seemingly disparate theories complement and inform one another to provide vision and strategies for contextual learning. Indeed, when considering the many contexts of

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