

What is a 21st century teacher?

By Karen on July 30, 2015
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The notion of 21st Century teaching is tossed around quite freely these days. Big question of course is, what do we mean by this?

At Teacher Solutions we think a 'good teacher' or a 21st Century teacher would have, or be working toward, the following characteristics:

Personalising and connecting learning

More and more we hear that the new paradigm is relational. Whether this be in terms of social media, marketing, learning, or any other aspect of our lives, humans are looking for greater personal connection with others.

In our teaching, the importance of building on from 'where students are at' (including knowledge, attitudinal, dispositional and aspirational starting points) cannot be emphasised enough.

We should also appreciate the huge importance that a social context for learning plays with our students. Connecting learning with peers increases student engagement. Doing this in ways that 'make a difference' will add meaning to students lives and prepare them for future service.

Relational and personalised approaches should lead to effective differentiation, higher levels of engagement, appropriate scaffolding of learning and improved learning outcomes.

Democratic relationships

Shared ownership, co-construction, student voice, common agreements ... we use a range of different terminology to describe the process of teachers sharing power in the classroom with students.

Increasingly teachers are recognising the importance of consulting students, as the key stakeholders in classrooms, in relation to the aspects of school life that most concern them.

At Teacher Solutions, we believe that this direction is an absolutely crucial one, and that in fact, democratic relationships should be intrinsic to all that we do in our teaching practice. Students should have a voice in decision making, be consulted about classroom norms, processes and routines, should be engaged in problem solving and solution finding, have leadership opportunities and should have access to additional roles in and out of the classroom.

Develop expert learners

Expert learners need to be seen in staffroom and classrooms. As teachers, we need to be aware of how we best learn and how effective we are. Students too, need explicit knowledge about how learning, thinking and memory work, their strengths and needs as learners and a range of tools and strategies to access in different contexts.

With billions of teachers accessible on the mobile device that most of us have in our pockets, critical thinking skills, the ability to synthesise and analyse, creativity, questioning strategies and reflection skills are all tools that staff and students require more than ever before.

Rigor / High standards

Since the mid 20th Century, research has conclusively demonstrated the impact of teacher expectations on student learning outcomes. More recently, neuroscience challenges us to think about the fine line between challenge and threat, but it is clear that high standards, clear expectations and a firm belief that all students can learn are key dispositions for effective teachers.

Use of formative assessment practices

Assessment of, for and as learning are key aspects of effective classrooms. Teachers working with students to establish clear expectations (such as: assessment criteria and marking rubrics) and shared understanding of criteria and quality are essential in today's classrooms. Even better still, classrooms that routinely involve students in creating the criteria for effective learning and teacher self and peer assessment processes, meet many of the previous criteria.

And of course all of these characteristics should be infused with technological applications that provide students with new and innovative opportunities. We are enthusiastic about the opportunities students can have to be connected, citizens, curators and creators. Examples of each include:

Connected

Students have opportunities to be connected in collaborative learning spaces, to work in synchronistic and asynchronistic ways with peers in their classroom, across the school or district and in global contexts. These connections provide opportunities for extensive research, contact with experts and authentic audiences.

Citizens

There are great opportunities for students to be a part of global learning communities. We have a responsibility to support them to be safe on-line and to learn the skills of responsible digital citizenship so that they can access these opportunities.

Curators

We now have billions of teachers (information sources) in our pocket. Our internet enabled mobile devices give us opportunities to access unlimited amounts of information. Our students need research skills, critical thinking skills and ways to organise (curate) this information to make it useful

to them.

Creators

The latest New Media Consortium Report (@NMCorg (<https://www.twitter.com/@NMCorg>)) suggests that future employers will be looking for content creators in most fields. Using the information curated to produce new content requires high order thinking, creativity and innovation skills. Our students will be more willing creators of content with authentic audiences for their efforts.

So, a 21st Century teacher needs new knowledge, skills and dispositions to be successful. Sign up with Teacher Solutions to receive updates about this intersection between pedagogy and technology practices.

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