

21st Century Learning
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The learning sciences forward a “theory of learning ... that leads to very different approaches to the design of curriculum, teaching, and assessment than those often found in schools today” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, p.3).

Classroom structures, curricula and practices that we take for granted are relatively recent human inventions. They were developed in the early 20th century in order to meet the needs of a society transformed by technology.

And they did it well. Within a generation, the children of migrants from radically diverse backgrounds were transformed first into students and then into workers with remarkable efficiency.

So when we describe the transformations required in today’s classrooms, once again changed by global conditions and technology we can acknowledge two things: (1) As a society, we have been in this place before; and (2) no one is to blame for the current need to change. The world, once again, has changed.

We can also make one sure claim: from within school and classroom structures designed to meet the needs of the industrial past, educators have to invent new learning environments to address the findings from the learning sciences and that encompass the digital world emerging around us.

More than ever, the sheer magnitude of human knowledge renders its coverage by education an impossibility; rather, the goal of education is better conceived as helping students develop the intellectual tools and learning strategies needed to acquire the knowledge that allows people to think productively about history, science and technology, social phenomena, mathematics and the arts. (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, p.5, 8).

New ideas about learning, which we call 21st century learning, come from the Learning Sciences. They are concerned with developing:

- understanding, which requires that students’ initial understandings are engaged in order to grasp new concepts and information.
- competence in an area of inquiry.
- “metacognitive” approaches to help students learn to take control of their own learning by defining learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving them.

(Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, pp.14-19)

21st century learning introduces knowledge building into the learning landscape. No longer is it enough to make the cultural capital of a society available to successive generations. 21st century learning requires the production and continual improvement of ideas (Scardamalia & Bereiter).

In short, 21st century learning is the type of learning students need in order to thrive and grow in and contribute to today’s world and beyond.