

Key Challenges in Swiss Private Secondary Education in the 21st Century.

*By: Josefina Bengoechea
Professor of Finance*

EU Business School, Online

Reforming national curriculums by raising conventional standards will not meet the challenges students now face or the ones they will meet in their near future. Some education systems have been resistant to change because education is so important to experiment with. There is another way to look at this: in a rapidly changing world, education is too important to be left behind. Around the world there is a growing global movement towards achieving the vision of 21st century education.

Beyond national curriculum constraints, the challenge is not simply figuring out which specific activities contribute to fostering 21st century student's skills, but also finding out how to integrate those activities into the regular work of schools, how to align them with existing curriculum, teaching methods, and students and teacher assessments. In this respect two core challenges have been identified: The learning engagement and the implementation of the 21st century skills.

Challenge 1: Learning Engagement

Beyond the English and French national curriculums, at the most fundamental level, the focus of education has to be on creating the conditions in which students will want and be able to learn best-- skills that foster positive learning experiences which support positive human relationships for effective learning. Everything else must be arranged on that basis. With this in mind, the school leadership team may develop

a 21st Century learning environment business plan that may consider the following points:

- Define, assess, and create learning practices, policies, human and technological support and physical environment, that will support the teaching and learning of 21st century skills outcomes.
- Support and encourage professional learning communities that will enable teachers to collaborate, share best practices, and integrate 21st century skills into classroom practice (collaborative leadership; i.e. workshops, study groups, etc).
- Enable students to learn their national curriculums in a relevant real world 21st century context, providing them with different teaching methodologies (project-based, design-based or problem-based learning), and with real working experiences.
- Allow equitable access to quality learning tools, technologies, and resources that will enhance the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve and develop 21st teacher and student assessments

Next, if the purpose of education is to enable current students to understand the world around them, and the talents within them, so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens, the role of 21st teachers is crucial to facilitate students' learning towards those goals. The role of teachers can no longer be to impart knowledge but to guide, discuss and, of course, measure the progress of students so that they know when more support is needed.

To improve student engagement, teachers should continue to develop

BY EU FACULTY

their expertise in encouraging their students to excel. Therefore, the school leadership team should inspire, develop and encourage further professional development opportunities based on teacher's appraisal that will enhance the quality of teaching as well as student engagement and achievement. By doing so, the school leadership team will create the conditions in which the relationship between students and teachers can flourish.

Challenge 2: Implementation of 21st Century Skills

Beyond teaching the national curriculum, and the time constraints to implement it yearly, schools today need to continue the efforts to develop an integrated approach towards developing 21st century learning and teaching skills. There are certain core competencies that are supported in each of the 21st century skill sets. These core competencies are: Collaboration and teamwork; Creativity; Imagination; Critical thinking; and Problem solving. It is easy to see how these can easily interact with one another. Creativity and imagination goes hand-in-hand with critical thinking and problem solving; one might even say to separate these categories is redundant. Collaboration and teamwork is highlighted in many areas of education, not only in 21st century skills literature.

Moreover, other skills are: Flexibility and Adaptability; Global and Cultural Awareness; Information Literacy; Leadership; Civic Literacy and Citizenship; Oral and Written Communication Skills; Social Responsibility and Ethics; Technology Literacy and Initiative. Though some of these skills have already been incorporated in school programmes, the school leadership team should continue laying the foundations for their development by giving them the place

they deserve in their general education project.

Another reason why classrooms typically lack 21st century learning and teaching skills is because high-stakes tests do not assess these competencies. State testing and accountability is aimed at schools, not individual student learning. Assessments and tests focus on measuring students' fluency in various abstract, routine skills, but typically do not assess their strategies for expert decision making when no standard approach seems applicable. In order to overcome this challenge, the school leadership team should move towards design assessments to measure them. The school leadership team might take into consideration to integrate the national curriculum subject instructed assessment together with multiple measures of students' abilities that include 21st century skills in their grade report.

This assessment for learning feedback could also be available in real-time to teachers and parents, who can also easily identify student strengths and weaknesses and offer support to students, so they can enhance their performance. This continuous and just-in-time feedback is critical in supplying the information that helps 21st Century students become self-directed learners.

Finally, building a culture of continuous improvement towards the 21st century skills will ensure that the best possible teachers are impacting students every day. Internal appraisal models for teachers should use different types of effective teaching measurement, such as classroom observation, student-parents opinion surveys, and progress in personalized student achievement. Considering student overall results is a promising approach for two reasons: first, it moves the discussion about

BY EU FACULTY

teacher quality towards student learning as the primary goal of teaching; second, it introduces a quantitative and seemingly objective measurement of teacher performance.

In conclusion, 21st century students require an education that will enable them to understand the world around them and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens. In that sense, the school leadership team should continue their efforts toward enhancing the implementation of 21st century skills within the appropriate learning environment.