



## Who Needs 21st-Century Skills Anyway?

So what if the information in my textbook might be a bit outdated—Pluto was a planet at one point, wasn't it?

**What's all this talk these** days about teachers needing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills? What's wrong with the way I, you or our parents learned, anyway? What is wrong with putting students in rows and opening up a big textbook to learn, anyway?

There is nothing like the sound of a textbook opening for the first time. The flipping of paper and the beautiful graphics are so engaging. I know what you are thinking; a digital textbook has that and so much more. So what if the information in my textbook might be a bit outdated—Pluto was a planet at one point, wasn't it? The pictures are the same in the text as they are online aren't they? I know, you can copy, save and paste pictures, text and much more into a project from your digital text but, hey! I can do that with a photocopy machine, glue and scissors anyway. Yeah, it may be messy and it may take a bit longer—but think



CREDIT: European Southern Observatory

of the great projects my students can share with each other.

Okay, so don't tell me, you can do the same projects digitally—but add more pizzazz. What? You can add video, audio, motion and much more to your projects? Hmm, that's interesting. What is that, you can put it online and share it with others worldwide? Others can rate the project and comment on it? They can work on it collaboratively from anywhere and at any time? Hmm, okay. But can yours be hung

on a wall for others to see when you are all done? It *can*? Hmm.

Well, how about *pen pals*?

Why do I need 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for collaboration?

What's wrong with students picking up a piece of paper, sitting down and writing a good, old-fashioned letter and mailing it off to someone else around the world?

What's that?

You can do that instantly and get back feedback on the letter all within an hour or day's time? You can talk with

someone

halfway

around the world *live*—and *face to face*? Hmm.

Well, hey—how about field trips? What do I need 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills for in order for my students to take a field trip? All I have to do is load them up on a bus and we can be anywhere within a hundred or so miles within a

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day. I do not need 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills for that. I know it can be expensive and hard to get okays to leave the state—but it's worth it. Oh, c'mon! Don't tell me you can be anywhere in the world today



CREDIT: Skype

on your field trip using your 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. What do you mean your students took a field trip to see the Great Barrier Reef live this year? How did you do that? Isn't it under water? Yeah, and you still went? Hmm.

Okay, but we can act out scenes in our class and create

plays and share with others in the school all without using 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. What is that you say? You do that and more? What do you mean you can create movies and share them online with the world?

Yeah, our class has a boob tube. What do you mean you have YouTube? You can share all kinds of video with everyone worldwide? You can record your play and post it online? Others can comment on it and rate it? It can be downloaded and added to other people presentations? Hmm.

Yeah, but in this day of test taking and data, why would I need 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills for that? I'm good with data and a calculator. Yes, it takes a bit of time to gather that data and organize it so that it is meaningful, but I am eventually able to use some of it to help mold my teaching and drive my instruction. Don't tell me: You can do all

of that instantly and changes in your teaching happen frequently? Hmm.

I have a white board, pointer, over head projector, camera and plenty of books. What else do I need? What do you mean, you have a computer, document camera, video camera, interactive white board laser pointers, student response systems and you say you haven't even touched the tip of what is available for you to use? Wow! What's that you say? Your students are engaged? They're presenting, sharing, collaborating, and using higher order thinking? That does sound fun.

Yes, I could survive and supply my students with a worthwhile education but, wow! I think yours sounds more engaging. Can I join your class? I guess I do need 21st-century skills. I want to know what this blogging thing is, what are web 2.0

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tools, how do you Skype? I want to collaborate and share without leaving my classroom. I want to analyze, create, evaluate, apply,

where I am. I am a teacher with tools available to me. I want to know how to use them. I am a continuous learner myself. I can learn these 21st-century skills. My students need them, and so don't I.



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understand and remember. I want that for my students, too. I don't want them to feel like they are powering down when they enter my classroom. I want to meet them where they are and not expect them to meet me