

DEVELOPING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract. Nowadays, teachers are faced with the challenge of equipping students with a long list of skills. How can we provide answers to this challenge? We suggest a couple of project-based activities that will provide learners with the opportunity to develop key 21st century skills in the foreign language learning.

We live in a complex society with quick access to information, rapidly changing digital tools, and the ability to collaborate on a global scale. To learn effectively and live productively in the 21st century, it is essential for today's students to develop the following sets of skills:

Learning Skills: critical thinking, creative thinking, collaborating, communicating

Literacy Skills: information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy

Life Skills: flexibility, initiative, social skills, productivity, leadership

These skills have always been important for students, though they are particularly important in our information-based economy. To hold information-age jobs students need to think deeply about issues, solve problems creatively, work in teams, communicate clearly in many media, learn ever-changing technologies, and deal with a flood of information. The rapid changes in our world require students to be flexible, to take the initiative and lead when necessary, and to produce something new and useful.

How do we, as educators, prepare and equip our students with the skills which will be required of them in their futures? What are the best educational environments for teaching and learning these skills?

At *Minsk College of Radioengineering* we believe that project-based learning can help students develop their 4Cs of Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Creativity which are often described as the vital 'new basics'.

Here are 12 of our favourite ways of making that happen:

Communication – *sharing thoughts, ideas, questions and solutions in powerful ways.*

1. Ask students to show their understanding of a concept or idea on the topic. (For example, *Art*).

2. Have students express the feelings while visiting a virtual exhibition of art objects, choose their favourite one and write the description of the object. (Links to virtual exhibitions: <https://metmuseum.org> <https://www.europeana.eu>).

3. Encourage students to provide constructive feedback to help other students improve their description.

Collaboration – *achieving shared goals with others. Thinking together and harnessing the ideas, skills and expertise of the group.*

4. Provide opportunities for students to work on collaborative projects where each student takes responsibility for an aspect of a larger group project. (e.g., To create a video in which students describe the art object to their peers and suggest new ways of using the object nowadays.)

5. Provide opportunities for students to work collaboratively on solving real-world problems. (In this example the students worked together to prepare the video script and create the video clip. There is a wide variety of tools for creating videos. Among them, we would like to suggest Screencastify, which is a very good tool to create and share videos easily.)

6. Set up design challenges where students work together. (We've seen some great challenges where each student adds a new element to the clip. The video is 'passed around' until the end result has been contributed to by everyone in the group.)

Critical Thinking – *looking at problems in new ways, making smart decisions and making connections to other subjects and ideas.*

7. Present students with real-world scenarios and ask them to identify possible issues or problems. By positioning students as problem seekers and problem finders we are encouraging them to think critically when they are identifying needs and opportunities.

8. Develop a class question wall with student-generated questions to guide their thinking when they are designing. (e.g., Is there a better way to...? How might I make this more attractive?)

9. Support students to develop criteria for success for their projects and use these to evaluate and improve the projects.

Creativity – *generating and testing new ideas. Being innovative, inventive and enterprising.*

10. Provide open-ended design challenges to encourage creativity. (e.g. Design a better way to present the art object).

11. Add constraints to project challenges to encourage students to come up with new ideas and alternative ways to solve problems. (e.g., Students create their own art object/artifact, bring it to the classroom and prepare a short description of it for an Art Auction which will be held in the classroom.)

12. Encourage students to come up with as many ideas as they can before selecting an idea for a solution. Can they come up with 100 ideas in 10 minutes? What is the craziest idea they can think of? What if they had all the money in the world...?

Conclusion. Developing 21st century skills can be integrated into foreign language learning through project-based learning. To prepare for tomorrow's success, today's students need to be able to solve real-world problems. This video project has enabled students to increase their competences as effective communicators with digital technologies and these skills are and will be essential in their lives. Students struggled at the beginning, but it is well worth it in the end as they are better able to communicate interpersonally as well as present information to a group of their peers.

References

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