

“21st century skills. . .” “core subjects and 21st century interdisciplinary themes. . .” “global awareness. . .” “critical thinking and problem solving. . .” “self-directed learners. . .” “information literacy. . .” “life and career skills. . .” “**communication and collaboration. . .**” “social and cross-cultural skills. . .” “critical support systems to ensure student mastery. . .” “learning and innovation skills. . .” “a unified collective vision for learning. . .” “*Framework for 21st Century Learning. . .*” “21st century learners. . .”

21st Century Skills Are Crucial for All Students

BY SANDY CUTSHALL



ACTFL Creating Languages Skills Map with P21 Organization

You have likely heard the above phrases—or some combination of them—spoken in education circles by your school administrators, colleagues, or professional organization leaders in recent years, months—or just in the weeks since this school year began.

In the August 2010 issue of *The Language Educator*, we presented two articles about teaching languages to the Millennial Generation—the students in our classrooms today. Over the past year, we have also featured several teachers in the magazine who have shown particular expertise in using the latest technologies to bring language and culture to life for their students. From October 2009 through February 2010, in the four-part series “Getting Connected in the 21st Century,” we highlighted the methods used by Leslie Davison, Toni Theisen, Roberta Lavine,

and Laura Franklin—exemplary language educators teaching at all different levels—who have embraced the use of tech tools to enhance their students’ learning experiences.

While most people agree that use of and familiarity with new technologies is certainly an important aspect of what it means for today’s Millennial students to be considered true “21st century learners”—it is not the only factor.

In fact, the skills, knowledge and expertise that students must master to succeed in work and life in this new era can be summed up in six key elements of a 21st century education as described in the Framework for 21st Century Learning, developed by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (www.p21.org).

The Partnership, or P21, is a national organization advocating for 21st century readiness for every student. ACTFL is cur-

rently partnering with P21 to create a “21st Century Skills Map for World Languages,” which will provide educator-created examples of how subjects in world languages can be fused with skills to create engaging learning experiences that promote 21st century knowledge and skill acquisition. The languages skills map will be ready for a workshop review at a session at the ACTFL Annual Convention and World Languages Expo in Boston, MA, on **Saturday, November 20** (11:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m., Sheraton Hotel/Fairfax B). It will also be presented at the ACTFL Assembly of Delegates, as well as to the National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages and the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages, where further input will be sought. It is expected that the final version will be released in February 2011, in conjunction with *Discover Languages* Month.

Understanding the Framework

P21 has developed a unified, collective vision for 21st century learning meant to strengthen American education through their Framework for 21st Century Learning [for a visual representation, see sidebar]. The elements described as “21st century student outcomes” are what students need to achieve success in the 21st century.

First, these include: **Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes**. There are nine core subjects identified in the Framework—notably World Languages among them. Also included are English, Reading or Language Arts; Arts; Mathematics; Economics, Science; Geography; History; and Government and Civics.

Mastery of these core subjects with 21st century themes is essential, according to P21. Schools must move beyond a focus on basic competency in core subjects to promoting understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving 21st century interdisciplinary themes into the core subjects. Of great interest to language educators is the theme of Global Awareness, which focuses on:

- Using 21st century skills to understand and address global issues
- Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work, and community contexts
- Understanding other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages

Other interdisciplinary themes include Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy; Civic Literacy; Health Literacy; and Environmental Literacy.

Learning and Innovation Skills, another important element of the Framework, are what separate students who are prepared for increasingly complex life and work environments in the 21st century and those who are not. They include Creativity and Innovation; Critical Thinking and Problem Solving; and Communication and Collaboration.

We all recognize that people in the 21st century live in a technology and media-driven environment, marked by access to an abundance of information, rapid changes in

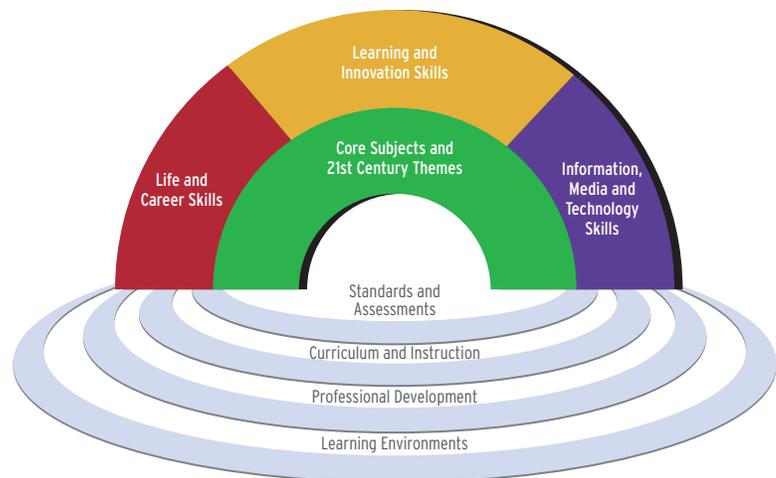
Framework for 21st Century Learning

The Framework, presented by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, presents a holistic view of 21st century teaching and learning that combines a discrete focus on 21st century student outcomes (a blending of specific skills, content knowledge, expertise, and literacies) with innovative support systems to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities required of them in the 21st century.

The key elements of 21st century learning are represented in the graphic and descriptions below. The graphic represents both 21st century skills student outcomes (as represented by the arches of the rainbow) and 21st century skills support systems (as represented by the pools at the bottom).

While the graphic represents each element distinctly for descriptive purposes, the Partnership views all the components as fully interconnected in the process of 21st century teaching and learning.

These elements are the critical systems necessary to ensure 21st century readiness for every student. Twenty-first century standards, assessments, curriculum, instruction, professional development and learning environments must be aligned to produce a support system that produces 21st century outcomes for today's students.



technology tools and the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions on an unprecedented scale. To be effective in the 21st century, according to the P21 Framework, citizens and workers must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking **Information, Media, and Technology Skills**, such as Information Literacy; Media Literacy; and ICT [Information, Communications, and Technology] Literacy.

Of course, today's life and work environments require far more than thinking skills and content knowledge. The ability to navigate the complex life and work environments in the globally competitive information age requires students to pay rigorous attention to developing adequate **Life and Career Skills**, such as: Flexibility and Adaptability; Initiative and Self-Direction; Productivity and Accountability; and Leadership and Responsibility.

Another of these, Social and Cross-Cultural Skills, is again of particular interest to language educators. It includes the ability to (1) interact effectively with others (i.e. know when it is appropriate to listen and when to speak, and conduct one's self in a respectable, professional manner) and (2) work effectively in diverse teams (i.e., respect cultural differences and work effectively with people from a range of social and cultural backgrounds; respond open-mindedly to different ideas and values; and leverage social and cultural differences to create new ideas and increase both innovation and quality of work).

There are now 15 “P21 Leadership States” where a 21st century skills perspective has been embraced in educational planning, including: Arizona, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

These states design new standards, assessments, and professional development programs that ensure 21st century readiness for every student. To become a P21 Leadership State, a state demonstrates commitment from the governor and chief state school officer, and submits an application to the Partnership that describes the state's plan to fuse the three Rs and four Cs (critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation) within standards, assessments, and professional development programs.

"We're working with states across the board on issues related to standards, assessment, curriculum, and instruction and looking from a state perspective at what are the most effective ways to support this kind of teaching and learning at the systemic level," says Valerie Greenhill, director for strategic initiatives for the Partnership. "That means taking a look at whether the state standards support 21st century skills, whether there is sufficient professional capacity to deliver this kind of instruction, what kinds of instructional models need to be supported at the district and school level, and what kinds of assessments should be supported at the state level."

Creating a Skills Map for Languages

While all these buzzwords and concepts sound exciting in theory, "one of the most common questions we get about 21st century skills from policymakers, educational leaders, and practitioners is: *What does this look like in the classroom?*" notes Greenhill.

The P21 Skills Maps, which have been completed in some subjects and are under construction in others—like world languages—are meant to focus on specific content areas and to provide a clear picture of what it looks like to integrate 21st century skills in a core academic subject classroom at three different levels (generally fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades).

Currently, the P21 website features completed skills maps in arts, geography, science, social studies, and English. [Greenhill points out that a skills map is not the same as a curriculum map—another phrase with which educators are familiar.] Each skills map is structured as a matrix, where along the left side is each specific 21st century skill (e.g., Productivity and Accountability) and a definition. Running down the center of the page are three vertical columns representing different

grade levels. What occupies the cells of this matrix are examples of outcome-based lessons that are designed to produce the skill in question. "It's a five or six sentence description of an activity that might occur in a fourth grade English or an eighth grade geography class that would be likely to produce or instill critical thinking skills or creativity skills in that student's experience," says Greenhill.

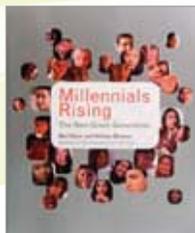
When the Partnership needed to create the skills map for the core subject of world languages, they turned to ACTFL to collaborate with them on the project. A committee of language education experts was formed, made up of Chair Toni Theisen, French teacher in Loveland, CO, and world languages coordinator for Thompson School District; Lynn Fulton-Archer, Spanish lead teacher at Richmond Drive Elementary School in Rock Hill, SC; Martin J. Smith, supervisor of world languages & ESL/BE at Edison High School, Edison, NJ; Thomas Sauer, world language specialist for Jefferson County Public Schools (KY); and Helen Small, specialist for foreign languages at the Virginia Department of Education. Direc-

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AT THE ACTFL ONLINE STORE

Books about the Millennial Generation by Neil Howe and William Strauss

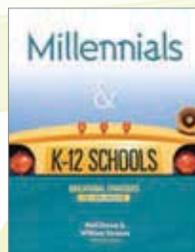


Millennials Rising

Nearly two decades ago, in *Generations*, Neil Howe and William Strauss predicted many of the youth trends America is seeing today. In *Millennials Rising*, the authors show how today's teens are recasting the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged. The authors also show

how Millennials are held to higher standards than adults apply to themselves and how they are a lot less violent, vulgar, and sexually charged than the teen culture older people are producing for them. Howe and Strauss make the compelling case that Millennials are recasting entirely what it means to be young and that, in time, they could emerge as the next great generation.

Neil Howe captivated language educators attending the Opening General Session at the 2008 ACTFL Convention in Orlando with his discussion of generations, and the Millennials in particular, based on this very popular book. Autographed copies of *Millennials Rising* are available in the ACTFL Online Store. Go to www.actfl.org, click on Membership → Online Store.



Millennials & K-12 Schools

The latest book by Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials & K-12 Schools*, is available through the Online Store on the ACTFL website at www.actfl.org. In it, the authors explain the generational shifts that are occurring among today's students, parents, and teachers, and offer hands-on strategies to help school leaders and personnel get the most from their students.

Howe and Strauss explain everything—from "helicopter parents" to the new focus on teamwork and protection, from the new research on small learning communities and more rigorous standards to the best way to get different generations to work together.

The ACTFL Online Store offers this book at a special savings for members and buying it there is also a great way to support your association. Order it today!

Garnering Support for Effort

The 21st Century Skills Map for World Languages is being sponsored by EF Education First, a leader in international education.

“Our company was founded to support language learning worldwide, and in partnering with ACTFL, we demonstrate our commitment to both 21st century skills and to foreign language educators who are so critical to preparing our kids for their future,” says Kate Berseth, executive director of EF Educational Tours. EF Education First is a strategic council member for P21 and shares the goal of being a catalyst for the advancement of 21st century skills, she says.

“We believe that ACTFL has the expertise within its leadership and membership to create a map of what teaching with a 21st century approach looks like in a language classroom,” says Berseth. “We wanted to support the effort. We don’t see our place being in the creation of the map itself but in making it possible and promoting it in partnership with ACTFL and P21. We want all the language teachers who work with us to have tools for inside and outside of their classrooms. This is a tool we are proud to share with educators.”

She continues: “We believe that most language educators have an innate desire to develop 21st century skills in their students, as well as an ability to fuse their content with 21st century skills and themes. There is a natural synergy between language educators and this movement. The skills map will help to highlight 21st century-focused objectives across various proficiency levels, and will highlight best practice suggestions for accomplishing the goal of engaging students. Isn’t that what learning is all about? I am sure that language teachers’ desires are the same as all great teachers, preparing students for success. The best way to go about this is by connecting the learning in the classroom with what is going on in the world that the students are living in.”

EF Education First (www.ef.com) has schools and offices in more than 50 countries and the EF family of subsidiaries includes educational tours, high school cultural exchange, language schools, and a one-year MBA program.

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tor of Education Marty Abbott serves as the ACTFL staff liaison with the committee.

The committee did not begin by meeting in person, but rather by “using 21st century tools,” notes Theisen, including sharing information and discussing ideas via a wiki. When they then came together in late August, they had already made much progress online and via Skype calls and were able to quickly distill their ideas about the skills map.

“Since we had time for discussion, sharing, and putting things together online and via Skype,” says Theisen, “by the time we arrived on scene, everything moved so smoothly.”

Theisen said that the committee members quickly realized that following the 4th/8th/12th grade structure of other skills maps would not work for world languages. Instead, “we went with the Performance Guidelines of Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced, since we have multiple entry and exit points,” she says. “We also know that this document will be for *us*—language educators—and so we definitely wanted to overlay it with the standards, so that people don’t see it as just

another document, but rather that it is an integral part of all the documents we have.”

The next steps are for the group to share their draft map with interested reviewers online as well as in person at the ACTFL Convention. “What we want to do is to put this out on social media sites—Facebook, Twitter, and in the ACTFL Community,” says Theisen. “We want people to comment: ACTFL members and other language teachers, parents, and kids. We need to collect examples and we really want people to have a buy-in. In the past, a new document might have come just from ‘the committee.’ But this is how it works in the 21st century—now we can be wide open and have a lot more people participate in the discussion,” Theisen says. “Then, there will be a session in Boston where we’ll get even more feedback.”

Once considerable input is gathered and processed, the goal is to release the final version of the map in February 2011. [Look for another article in *The Language Educator* around that time, detailing what is included in the skills map and how it can be used by language teachers.]

All of the committee members who have worked on the skills map strongly agree that languages are a natural fit with the 21st century skills movement.

“The skills identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills have always been embedded in high-quality language instruction,” says Smith. “The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning released in 1996 encourage and support the development of these skills. The development of the world languages skills map clearly identifies the outcomes as they relate to world language instruction and provides classroom examples.” Smith calls the map “a resource for instructors that defines what is meant by each skill set and provides all educators with a clear picture of how world language instruction is critical to supporting a world-class education in the 21st century.”

What will happen when this is done? Once skills maps are completed, they can be used in a number of different ways, according to Greenhill.

“They can be used at the state level as communication vehicles for policy makers, so education chiefs or legislators might use it to explain to their colleagues the vision for what 21st century skills should be in the context of the K–12 system. At the district and school level, they can be used as guides for developing or refining curriculum and instruction. They could even be used as guides for professional capacity development.”

In essence, the skills maps are meant to “make it real and more clear what we’re talking about with the 21st century skills effort,” says Greenhill. “The maps are designed to show an approach that blends the core content in an academic subject classroom with intentional, specific higher-order thinking skills.”

Sandy Cutshall is editor of The Language Educator. She is based in Mountain View, California, where she also teaches English as a second language and citizenship preparation to adults.

Stay Tuned for More on the Skills Map

Those who are interested in giving input on the 21st Century Skills Map for World Languages can come to the session on **Saturday, November 20** at the ACTFL Convention and World Languages Expo in Boston, MA. When the final version of the skills map is released, it will be featured in *The Language Educator*, as well as on the ACTFL website and in the ACTFL Online Community.