

# Four Cs

## Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Collaboration, and Communication

Written by Sandra Love, Ed.D., Staff Writer for Mentoring Minds and Former National Distinguished Principal

In 21st century learning, students have almost unlimited access to information. On the other hand, many students lack the skills to benefit from this abundance of information. Students gather and read information from libraries, textbooks, and digital materials. To be prepared for global learning opportunities, teachers must teach for these challenging times. Students must learn how to develop and apply four competencies within core content areas and beyond – critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, and communication.

**Critical Thinking** - Critical thinking is a key component of 21st century learning. Students must engage in learning experiences that require depth and complexity of thinking as they analyze, infer, compare, reason, interpret, synthesize, and evaluate. Students need to question data, consider various perspectives of issues, determine patterns of information, form judgments, and present individual points of view with evidence and logical reasoning. These are merely a few of the critical thinking skills essential for students to acquire in order to become citizens and productive members of a future workplace.

**Creative Thinking** - Creativity includes innovation, original ideas, and risk-taking. Students demonstrate creativity in many forms and through multiple learning style preferences. When students examine and evaluate ideas from different perspectives, think in new directions, and synthesize information in useful ways, they

demonstrate their creative thinking abilities. Planning instruction that purposefully encourages students to apply creative thinking and problem skills is essential.

**Collaboration** - In the world today, individuals from diverse backgrounds and people with different abilities work together to study and bring resolution to ongoing issues or problems. Thus, students must learn how to collaborate with others, respecting knowledge, cultures, differences, and viewpoints. Teachers serve in the capacity of facilitators, modeling standards of behavior that guide 21st century learners as they acquire the skills for collaborative problem solving. Teachers might incorporate onsite discussions as well as promote digital contact with thinkers beyond the school walls and from other parts of our global society.

Multiple and varied learning opportunities should be designed that lead students to value individual contributions. Students can work with partners or in small groups to investigate and collaborate about texts, current learning, or other relevant topics. Instructional activities might include discussing characters' actions, predicting future events, designing creative solutions, analyzing and responding to text, drawing inferences or conclusions, and making personal real-world connections.

**Communication** - Unlimited opportunities are present for communicating in 21st century classrooms and showcasing different ways of thinking. Students demonstrate effective communication skills by clearly expressing their thoughts to various audiences and for a range of purposes. The purposes include entertaining, persuading, or informing. Communication comes in many forms including printed texts, digital texts, or visual texts. Students should learn to move easily from print to nonprint, and from communicating face-to-face with peers to communicating through other technological means such as online learning environments.

Students need critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, and communication skills to thrive in an internationally competitive environment. Schools must integrate the four Cs into core academic area instruction. These skills should be an integral part of teaching and learning to ensure highly effective teaching and to make learning more rigorous and relevant in the 21st century. The infusion of the four Cs into education defines a powerful learning environment, producing students who emerge with the skills needed to be successful citizens and leaders of tomorrow.

