



Overview: Twenty-First Century (soft) Skills

Introduction

There is increasing interest in how schools develop transferable skills and competencies for students which will support their school career and future job choices. Variously known as soft skills, transferable skills, 21st-century skills, this terminology refers to the suite of skills and competencies which are needed in the world of work and employment¹. Developing deep knowledge and skills are interlinked. Ofsted suggests leaders adopt or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to

give learners, particularly the most disadvantaged, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life. The curriculum needs to be coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment². The English education debate at times appears to pitch knowledge and skills against each other³, but project-based learning (PBL) approaches build knowledge AND skills as core components of a project design.

¹ Education and Employers.2018. Joint Dialogue: How are Schools Developing Real Employability

² Ofsted School Inspection Handbook. 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif>

³ The SecEd Podcast: Teaching knowledge & skills <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/knowledge-bank/the-sec-ed-podcast-teaching-skills-knowledge-skills-knowledge-academia-education-inspection-ofsted-school-sec-ed-secondary-pedagogy-curriculum-teaching-learning/>

Overview: Twenty-First Century (soft) Skills

Fettes et al (2018) suggests that employability is a combination of skills, competencies and metacognition strategies⁴. Here skills, personal qualities, behaviours

and attitudes are harnessed in problem-solving, and the application of existing knowledge and skills to new situations.



Adapted from: Fettes et al. (2018). *Putting Skills to Work: It's not so much the WHAT or even the WHY, but HOW...* London: Commercial Education Trust

Some definitions

[NB each school will have skills/employability frameworks and expectations⁵]

Soft skills:

Personal and social attributes such as problem-solving, communicating, collaborating and so on. These are 'soft' in contrast to 'hard' technical skills

21st-century skills:

Often associated with digital skills, and include skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and 'creativity'.

Employability skills:

A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that enable individuals to be effective in employment and adapt to new work situations.

Character:

A set of dispositions that are valuable to individuals for success in learning, work and life; can be 'performance' or an implied moral dimension at the individual or societal level.

Perseverance:

A set of attributes which include effort, persistence, attention, focus, grit and a commitment to long-term goals.

Resilience:

The ability to adapt to challenges and seek growth in them, as well as the idea of being able to bounce back from setbacks.

Social and emotional learning:

The process by which individuals develop competence in managing the feelings of working collaboratively, forming relationships and managing impulsivity – the development of emotional and social intelligence.

Skills and employers:

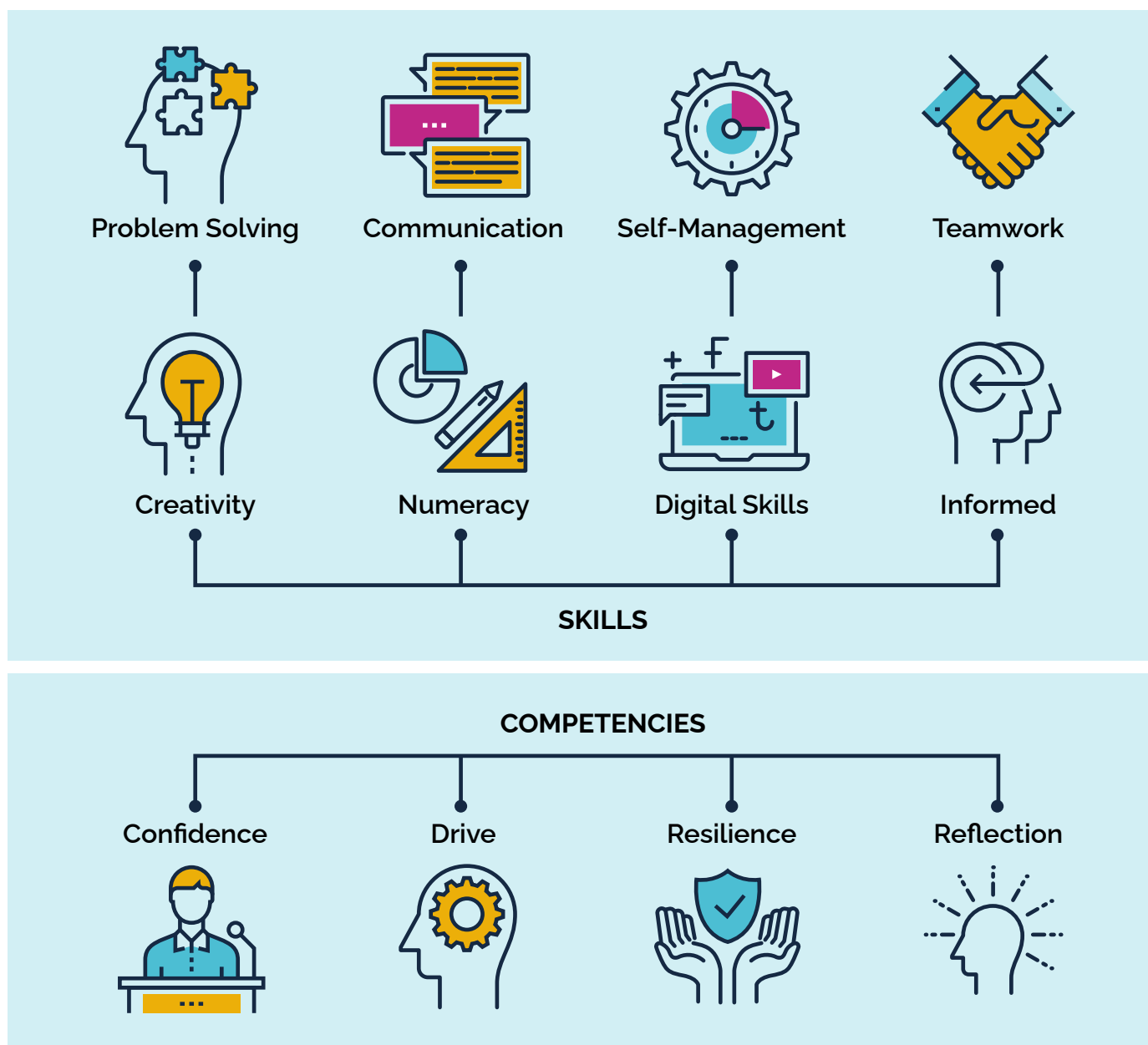
The CBI reports that employers are placing more importance on the skills and competencies young people possess. These include creativity, collaboration, teamwork, communication, problem-solving and critical thinking.⁶ These attributes are common across vocational, technical, higher education and apprenticeship skills frameworks⁷.

⁴ Education and Employers.2018. Joint Dialogue: How are Schools Developing Real Employability

⁵ City and Guilds.2016. Learning to be employable

⁶ CBI.2019 Education and Learning for the modern world

⁷ Skills Builder. 2020.How do essential skills influence life outcomes?



Adapted from: Education and Employers.2018. Joint Dialogue: How are Schools Developing Real Employability

Developing Skills in PBL

Developing 21st-century or transferable skills is an intrinsic part of PBL. Expeditionary Learning (EL)⁸ suggests PBL supports mastery of knowledge and skills such as the ability to:

- **Demonstrate proficiency** and deeper understanding: show **mastery** in a body of knowledge and **skills** within each discipline.
- **Apply** their learning: **transfer knowledge and skills** to new, meaningful tasks.
- **Think critically**: analyse, evaluate, and synthesize complex ideas and consider multiple perspectives.
- **Communicate clearly**: write, speak, and present ideas effectively in a variety of media within and across disciplines.

⁸ EL Education. 2020.What is Expeditionary Learning. <https://eleducation.org/resources/what-is-el-1>

Overview: Twenty-First Century (soft) Skills

PBL supports the development of 21st-century skills including collaboration, creativity and innovation, communication and critical thinking through:

- The Driving Question which centres problem-solving and creativity at the heart of PBL.
- Teamwork and collaboration are built through group work towards an authentic end product.
- Students compare information from different sources before completing an assignment.
- Students draw their conclusions based on the analysis of numbers, facts, or relevant information.
- Students try to solve complex problems or answer questions that have no single correct solution.
- Students give feedback to peers or assess other students' work.
- Students convey their ideas using media other than a written paper (such as posters, blogs, or videos).
- Students answer questions in front of an audience.
- Students generate their ideas about how to confront a problem.
- Students communicate with expert audiences at public celebration events.

Watch here for how PBL develops 21st-century skills

https://my.pblworks.org/resource/video/21st_century_skills_culture

Rubrics to support skills development

(see Rubrics Overview for more links to rubrics resources)

A rubric is a tool which is used in the process of assessing student work. In PBL, rubrics include evaluation criteria and quality definitions.

A rubric has two parts: *criteria* that express what to look for in the work and *performance level descriptions* that describe what criteria look like in work at varying quality levels, from low to high.

In PBL, rubrics can specify design elements, e.g. a physical product or genre of writing, or a skill such as teamwork or collaboration. Rubrics are arranged in three-four levels showing different levels of student performance aligned with the school language of assessment steps. Rubrics are useful for skill development because of the subjective nature of soft skills. Rubrics mean that students and teachers have common expectations of what a skill constitutes, and how it is made up. For example, the skill of collaboration involves the following competencies:

- Taking responsibility for oneself
- Helps the team
- Respects others
- Makes and follows agreements
- Organises work
- Works as a whole team

A rubric states the criteria which form each competency, and how these are developed/what the expected performance is for a year group.

Click here for links to rubrics for:

- [6. 21st Century Skills – based on the 8 domains- Skills Builder May 2020](#)
- [6. 21st Century Skills Anglicised Critical Thinking Rubric](#)
- [6. 21st Century Skills Anglicised Rubric Collaboration](#)
- [6. 21st Century Skills Anglicised Rubric Creativity and innovation](#)
- [6. 21st Century Skills Anglicised Rubric Presentation](#)

Additional resources and tools to support skills

CBI.2019. Education and Learning for the modern world;	https://www.cbi.org.uk/articles/education-and-learning-for-the-modern-world/
CET.2018. Putting skills to work	https://thecet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Putting-Skills-to-Work-June-2018.pdf
City and Guilds.2016. Learning to be employable.	https://www.cityandguilds.com/~/_media/Documents/what-we-offer/14-19/Learning%20to%20be%20employable%20-%20Full%20report%20pdf.ashx
EL Education.2020. What is EL.	https://eleducation.org/resources/what-is-el-1
Education and Employers.2018. Joint Dialogue: How are Schools Developing Real Employability	https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/joint-dialogue/
High Tech High: 21st-century skills	https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/282249101619326497/
PBL works Rubrics	https://www.pblworks.org/download-project-based-learning-rubrics
Ofsted School Inspection Handbook. 2019	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif
Skills Builder. 2020. How do essential skills influence life outcomes?	https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5a86b2cd68b41700017162ca/5f746a648aa27a0b806ea9ed_How%20do%20essential%20skills%20influence%20life%20outcomes.pdf
The SecEd Podcast.2020. Teaching knowledge & skills	https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/knowledge-bank/the-sec-ed-podcast-teaching-skills-knowledge-skills-knowledge-academia-education-inspection-ofsted-school-sec-ed-secondary-pedagogy-curriculum-teaching-learning/



The Edge Foundation
44 Whitfield Street
London, W1T 2RH

T +44 (0)20 7960 1540
E futurelearning@edge.co.uk
www.edge.co.uk

Making Education Relevant

www.edge.co.uk