## An overview of 21st Century Learners

In contemporary society many teachers have and continue to adapt to the unique characteristics of teaching contemporary learners. Although, this has proved to be a positive for the very nature of education professionals, better understanding of 21st century learners will confidently enable teachers to pursue and integrate the necessary fundamentals of how to appropriately implement relevant teaching strategies for 21st century learners. First and foremost, understanding as well as enabling creativity within the classroom it a necessary fundamental to provide to 21st century learners. “Creativity has been regarded as one of the crucial skills in the toolkit of the 21st century learner and indeed key to effective learning in higher education and beyond” (Jahnke, Haetel, & Wildt, 2015; Nissim, Weissbllueth, Scott-Webber, & Amar, 2016; Ram persad, & Patel 2014; as cited in, Egan, Maguire, Christophers, & Rooney, 2017). Furthermore, creative concept has been a key factor into the education of 21st century learners, particularly within a contemporary context. Although this may be, within the realm of teaching 21st century education the very idea of creativeness has and continues to become a forgotten notion. “Creativity has been described as ‘maligned, neglected and misunderstood” (Azzam as cited in, Egan et al., 2017). In brief, understanding and acknowledging the creativeness of 21st century student is and must be a crucial focal point for contemporary teachers.

Moreover, strong leadership is an integral aspect within the realm of teaching 21st century learners, however combined with effective pedagogical approaches teachers should ultimately be enabled to appropriately and accurately enhance the learning of 21st century students. In order to achieve this, teachers must construct to pedagogical narratives which ultimately adhere to the nature of 21st century learners. “The conventional assumption appears to be that if an educational organisation exists then the leaders within must subscribe to pedagogy and, therefore, are pedagogical leaders” (Male & Palaiologou, 2015). Thus, the importance of effective pedagogical approaches within a 21st century classroom is a bare necessity to adhere to the unique nature of 21st century learners.

In relation to education, the very definition has changed to be adapted to a 21st century context. However, this was all in due time as teacher education programs were the foundation on where to adapt and define 21st century education. “In the early part of the 20th century, teacher preparation was based on the content of the curriculum, limited largely to basic literacy and numeracy” (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2015). The authors further elaborate, for decades the main focus was on curriculum content and the developmental needs of children were of secondary importance. Although this was the case, the need for placing particular emphasis on students’ developmental needs must be established as a priority within a 21st century context. In addition to this, the nature of teacher education programs have changed to a considerable extent. For example, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler identify that teacher education programs in Australia now offer both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees which qualify pre-service teachers to teach among all sectors of teaching. (Pendergast & Bahr as cited in, Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2015). These factors, and some additional aspects are credited to the changing definition of education in a 21st century context.

Although, the education realm has changed significantly with policies and pedagogies adapting to contemporary times, it is just as important to put particular consideration on the characteristics and attributes of 21st century learners. However, in order to understand these unique attributes, pedagogies must acknowledge these characteristics of 21st century learners. For instance, applying digital pedagogies within a 21st century classroom fundamentally resonates with the unique digital savvy nature of 21st century students. “In the 21st century and with the new technologies, there are multiple opportunities to capture both performance and assessment data and analyse them to understand how students are progressing” (Bichel as cited in, Spector, Ifenthaler, Sampson, Yang, Mukama, Warusavitarana, Dona, Eichhorn, Fluck, Huang, Bridges, Lu, Ren, Gui, Deneen, Diego & Gibson, (2016).

## Current and Relevant Theories

Engaging 21st century learners is a fundamental necessity within the realm of 21st century education. However, as a pre-service teacher that will be entering the realm of 21st century education, it is an increasingly difficult factor to implement within teaching practices. Although, this may be a cause of apprehension, a range of learning theories can be integrated to help assert effective 21st century teaching strategies. For instance, the pedagogy and andragogy refers to the formal teaching (pedagogy) where the teacher directs all learning, and the andragogy (informal teaching) where the learner is the primary focus. Furthermore, humanism theory presented by Rogers (1983) expresses the notion that learning ultimately comes from an intrinsic eagerness to learn which is fuelled by fulfillment. Lastly, Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the importance of social interaction the fundamental role in this plays in the process of cognitive development (ETL301 Lecture, Week 4). Moreover, the above outlined theories are just a few among a range of learning theories which can be devised to help teachers engage 21st century learners. in particular, these three presented theories strengthen my conviction for helping my future students engage. Specifically, Vygotsky’s theory of social interaction. Vygotsky articulates that children are in constant contact with parent, teachers, peers, friends and relatives, which ultimately shape children’s human development including cognitive and learning (Clarke and Pittaway, 2014). In relation, Vygotsky’s theory, humanism theory and pedagogy and andragogy correlates in conjunction with the unique learning characteristics and attributes of 21st century learners.

## 21st Century Pedagogies:

Evidently, there are a number of challenges, unique characteristics and attributes that face teachers upon teaching 21st century learners. However, contemporary and new devised pedagogical approaches provide teachers and pre-service teachers with the knowledge and understanding to integrate effective pedagogical strategies within 21st century classrooms. For instance, Clarke and Pittaway analyse the theoretical implications of integrated widespread cooperative learning within classrooms. “Cooperative learning is a technique whereby a groups is given a task to do that requires effort from all students. Students need to interact with and support each other in completing the overall task and the sub-tasks (Cruickshank as cited in Clarke & Pittaway, 2014). In contrast, the effective nature of cooperative learning allows teachers to utilise this abundant tool to effectively implement relevant teaching pedagogies into students learning practices. According to Clarke and Pittaway (2014), role-playing and simulation pedagogy allows students to utilise the use of simulation games (simulations merged with game rules) which can be very powerful ways of exploring values and interpersonal issues. Furthermore, role-playing which are usually teacher directed, may involve a limited number of students playing or miming a specific role during an activity. In addition, ICT and digital pedagogies play a vital role within 21st century classrooms. Due to the nature of 21st century learners being predominantly digital savvy, it is vital that teachers and pre-service teachers consider the useful purpose of ICT technologies. Clarke and Pittaway (2014) state that ICT devices within classrooms means that it is now possible to create multi-sensory classroom environments, where students can experience highly sophisticated sorts of sensory multimedia experiences. In my personal experience, I have witnessed teachers utilise an abundance of ICT devises such as iPad’s, computers and online programs, thus proving that the information age has ensured ICT pedagogies as a necessity within 21st century classrooms.

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