



# GEN TEFL

# JOURNAL

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## Strategies for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Mindsets – Best Practices from the Classroom and Connect2Learn.education Platform

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**Abstract:** Learning the English language has become widespread, but in many schools it is still taught in traditional ways, not sufficient enough for the needs of workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. Thus, enhancement of English language instruction with strategies for learning in general is essential in order to facilitate acquisition of lifelong learning skills as well as effective assimilation of skills and competencies essential for success in life. To ensure global, national, and personal success of citizens, education systems worldwide need to provide students with systematic practice opportunities of skills and competencies such as creative and collaborative problem solving, persuasion, adaptability and time management, and further facilitate English language learning for communication and intercultural understanding in order to connect societies across barriers and cultures. This paper outlines several practical strategies for building learning power and growth mindsets for learning, applicable in school-based face-to-face English language learning classes as well as blended learning environments or entirely online learning courses.

### Introduction – the Purpose of Learning English

Teaching English as a Foreign Language is changing, more often than not including technological innovations. (Chong, 2016). Yet “only the innovations that come with solid teaching practices will stand the test of time.” (Chong, 2018). The myriad activities for the classroom vary depending on the language teacher, course, school, student, age, language level, and a multitude of other factors. The effort exerted by the teacher – beyond the obvious classroom presence – can also take on diverse forms: from preparing original exercises for practice to searching for state-of-the-art ready-made handouts available online; from designing interactive role play to marking vocabulary tests. Methodologies vary. A vast assortment of educational websites beckons to work online through blended learning. Numerous startups provide additional tools for learning, with apps ranging from vocabulary acquisition and sentence building to listening comprehension and reading support. Learning a language, especially English, seems to have become widespread worldwide and gone digital.

This digital world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought increased connectivity. Thus, access to language learning seems relatively easier. In many countries children and young adults learn English from kindergarten or elementary school. Such young beginners often learn vocabulary and grammar structures

as naturally as they can be taught, through language immersion courses, interactive play time, and multimedia. Older beginners encounter more traditional methods through various language courses offered outside regular school hours, while at school, with large numbers of students per class, language learning can sometimes take a long time (if school is the only source of learning English) and turn into a tedious, uninspiring task. Students in many countries finish high school with a basic knowledge of the language despite years of instruction, and most of their knowledge is passive rather than active (EF English Proficiency Index, 2019). In many cases, language learning is pursued for a superficial, ephemeral goal: potential future traveling, comprehension of songs, movies or TV shows, and less often to improve employment opportunities or to better understand other cultures.

So how can this trend be altered? How can language instruction reach beyond merely boosting vocabulary range and providing practice of correct grammatical structures in artificially staged, simulated role-play within a classroom? Essential is the enhancement of English language learning with strategies for learning in general: for lifelong learning. How can this be achieved?

Hence this exploration to answer the question: how can English language instruction reach beyond the walls of the school or the course to provide a sophisticated purpose: to empower all students with 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies and skills essential for greater success in life?

## **Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

### **Skills and Competencies**

In order to achieve success in life, taken broadly, student learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to focus on competencies and transferable skills rather than facts and knowledge (Care et al, 2018). Memorization of procedures, lists of vocabulary, or regurgitation of facts accessible with a number of clicks are not enough anymore. Assuming that education overall aims to produce educated workers and competently engaged members of society, students need to acquire a conceptual understanding of concepts, for starters, and then develop the ability to work with them to create new knowledge, products, ideas or theories (OECD, EDUCERI21st, 2019). Design of lessons, units, or courses needs to incorporate pedagogy that is student-centred and team-based, such as project-based, inquiry-based and problem-based learning experiences (Oliver, 2001).

In addition, in order to respond to a world of rapid change, an ever-expanding knowledge base, as well as interactions between a plethora of people in multifarious circumstances (personal and/or professional), students must be able to critically evaluate what they read – online and off – and be able to express themselves clearly in spoken or written form of a language (Milligan & Wood, 2010), in this case, English.

Therefore, what specific competencies and skills do students need immediately? World Economic Forum cites a recent analysis from networking site LinkedIn, which reveals that “2019’s employers are looking for a combination of both hard and soft skills, with creativity topping the list of desired attributes.” The remaining top five competencies are persuasion, collaboration, adaptability and time management (Charlton, 2019).

In January 2016, Alex Gray in his article “The 10 skills you need to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution” cites the Future Jobs Report, listing skills essential for 2020 (Gray, 2016):

## Top 10 skills

### in 2020

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment and Decision Making
8. Service Orientation
9. Negotiation
10. Cognitive Flexibility

### in 2015

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Coordinating with Others
3. People Management
4. Critical Thinking
5. Negotiation
6. Quality Control
7. Service Orientation
8. Judgment and Decision Making
9. Active Listening
10. Creativity



Source: Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum

Figure 1: Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum, 2016

In the four years between January 2016 and 2019, the top five competencies on the skills list have changed:

from

to

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordinating with Others

1. Creativity (up from 3<sup>rd</sup>)
2. Persuasion (previously 9<sup>th</sup> Negotiation)
3. Collaboration (previously 5<sup>th</sup> Coordinating with Others)
4. Adaptability
5. Time Management

The remaining competencies listed in the January 2016 Future of Jobs Report, should not be dismissed, as their importance in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning will certainly reemerge. Moreover, the five competencies listed for 2019 intrinsically include the ten generated in 2015, and none of them can be acquired without the use of a language.

In 2017, Dylan Lyons on [www.babbel.com](http://www.babbel.com) claimed that English “is by far world’s most studied language. And 20% of the world speaks it.” (Lyons, 2017). Although, World Economic Forum in 2016 put the number of speakers at 1.5 billion, with over 1 billion speakers of English as a secondary language, currently, according to [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com) 2019 edition, over 2 billion people speak it (Breene, 2016). Regardless of the exact numbers, an upward trend in English language learning is evident, especially as technology and access to internet permeate remote corners of the world.

Ultimately then, to ensure global, national, and personal success of citizens, education systems worldwide should not only be striving to provide students with systematic practice opportunities of these competencies, especially creative and collaborative problem solving, which includes elements of critical thinking and flexibility in time management, but also to further facilitate English language learning for communication and understanding in order to connect societies across barriers and cultures.

**Creative and Collaborative Problem Solving**

“Creativity now is as important in education as literacy,” said Sir Ken Robinson in his 2006 TED talk entitled “Do schools kill creativity?” (Robinson, 2006) and it seems that despite over 58 million views on YouTube in over a decade not much has changed inside the average public-school classroom. Educators are still struggling to provide creativity, which is crucial in the learning process.

Creativity, critical thinking and communication are essential to keep students motivated. Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council published a report in 2016 that focuses on “developing the capacity and motivation to create, understand, interpret and communicate knowledge” so that citizens can thrive in an evolving society and labor market. The report states that “Central to today’s teaching and learning are inquiry-based and student-centered approaches and techniques shaped by networks, collaboration, technology and design.” (SSHRC, 2016).

Inquiry-based learning provides a number of benefits for learning. Inquiry promotes questioning skills that foster curiosity and increase engagement. (MacKenzie, 2017) Motivation to learn and to persevere when obstacles are encountered is increased as students pursue solutions to problems in topics about which they feel passionate. (Figure 2)

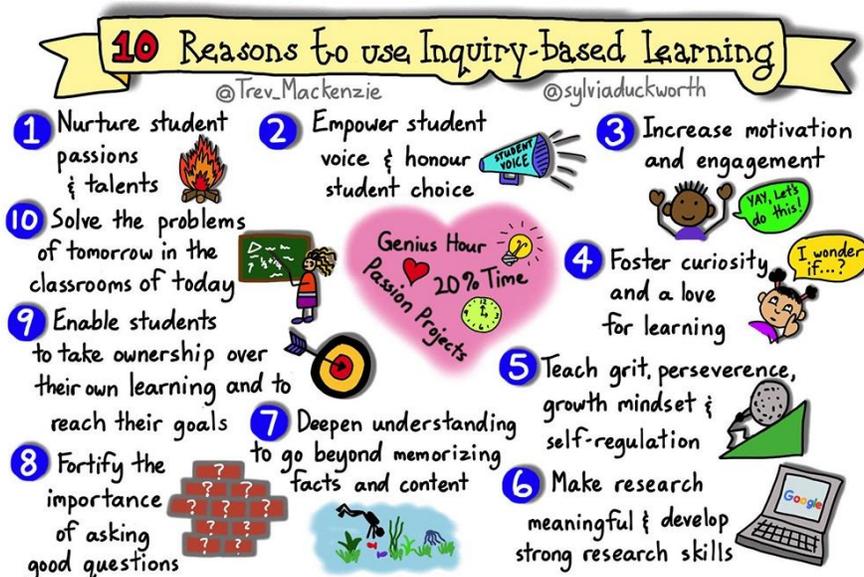


Figure 2. Trevor Mackenzie, 10 reasons to use inquiry in your classroom.

However, in order to develop inquiry mindsets, a paradigm shift needs to occur. The center of teaching and learning needs to shift from teacher to student.

The student-centered approach to teaching and learning requires the teacher to pivot their focus from self to student, empowering the students with choices and decisions to make, providing them with voice, and acknowledging their expertise in some areas. (MacKenzie, 2019) (Figure 3)

In other words, the teacher becomes the designer of the learning experience and facilitator of the learning. The student becomes responsible for the learning, with a heightened sense of accountability in well-designed, collaborative learning situations.



Figure 3. Trevor Mackenzie, Inquiry is....

Recently, the importance of collaborating in a team (2+ members) has been recognized, naming collaboration as an important educational outcome in its own right, not just a way to garner, develop, or evaluate knowledge (this is done through student engagement and practice) (Kuhn, 2015; Lai, 2011). Collaboration has also been described as a skill encouraging a number of learning mechanisms, such as induction, deduction, and associative learning (Dillenbourg, 1999; Hunter, 2006). Furthermore, evidence exists that students working in collaborative teams achieve higher levels of comprehension and retain knowledge longer than students who study alone (Johnson & Johnson, 1986). This is because in a collaborative learning situation, learners have the opportunity to present, discuss, and defend their ideas with peers; exchange beliefs and opinions; and question conceptual frameworks.

Most importantly, in collaborative work on problem-solving tasks, the learners are actively engaged over prolonged periods of time (Srinivas, 2011), while shared learning provides learners with an opportunity to be responsible for their own learning, and subsequently become critical thinkers (Totten, 1991).

As groups of learners work together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product, they are challenged both socially and emotionally through listening to different perspectives, articulating and defending their points of view. As a result, they create their own unique conceptual frameworks and not rely solely on an expert's (for example the teacher's) or a text's/textbook's framework (Laal & Laal, Kermanshahi, 2012). Hari Srinivas lists 44 benefits of collaborative learning, too numerous to mention here in entirety (Srinivas, 2011).

Language learning, therefore, also needs to adopt creative inquiry-based and student-centered approaches in order to simultaneously develop both language and communication competencies as well as the aforementioned "soft skills" essential for achieving success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Intercultural Understanding**

Proficiency in another language, English in this case, enables interaction with people from other cultures in a variety of contexts. But how effective and appropriate is that interaction? It is not enough to learn a language; a student also needs to garner a cultural awareness and knowledge. Effective interaction and communication require interpersonal skills such as empathy, open-mindedness, adaptability and flexibility. Often the art of persuasion, negotiation and conflict resolution are required (Milligan & Wood, 2010).

Milligan and Wood advocate for "a conceptual approach to teaching that responds to a world of rapid change, growing global interactions, and expanding knowledge bases." Walton defines intercultural understanding as "an on-going critically reflexive process involving the development of skills, attitudes and knowledge, necessary for interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves having cognitive, meta-cognitive and emotional capabilities, as well as critical cultural awareness and self-awareness when interacting across cultural groups." (Walton et al, 2013). This intercultural understanding (ICU), links closely to acceptance of cultural diversity, includes anti-racism, and leads to effective cross-cultural conflict resolution (Paradies et al., 2009). In addition, ICU challenges an ethnocentric view of the world through critical cross-cultural awareness (Bennett, 1993).

Therefore, to include promotion of intercultural understanding, language learning needs to shift from teacher-centered instruction aimed at proficiency and mastery of spelling, vocabulary and grammar structures to student-centered inquiry-based creative problem-solving activities, during which language proficiency develops naturally with the built-in need to communicate with others efficiently and effectively. In addition, access to "others" for interacting "across cultural groups" is essential.

### **Mindsets for Learning**

Classroom teachers facing anywhere between 20 and 40 students in a room aim to achieve a central goal: to deliver the content as efficiently and effectively as possible so that the final assessment, the final exam, proves that students have learned the content. However, sometimes it is forgotten that teachers are not the ones making the most important instructional decision (to study), the students are (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2004). When students enter the classroom, regardless of age, with a mind already convinced that "I'm useless with crayons," or "My writing is terrible," or "I can't learn math," or "I'm no good in languages," they often automatically shut down to further learning and

disengage. When the goal of the language learning instruction is to master content and pass an exam, students memorize, regurgitate on a test, and forget. This joyless learning, often devoid of engagement and creativity, does not contribute to development of a mindset for lifelong learning.

Nevertheless, as professor Carol Dweck illustrates in her book *Mindset. The New Psychology of Success*, this “fixed” mindset can be changed. Professor Dweck explains the “fixed mindset” as a belief that a person’s qualities – intelligence, personality, moral character, or abilities – are fixed from the start and unchangeable. On the other hand, a “growth mindset” is a belief that all of those qualities are just the starting point for development (Dweck, 2007). Sustained and systematic training to focus on growth and development allows for greater success because “a person’s true potential is unknown (and unknowable); that it’s impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion, toil, and training.” (Dweck, 2007, 7).

In order to facilitate such a change from “fixed” to “growth” mindset in a school and classroom environment, several criteria must be met:

1. An atmosphere of trust and safety must be established to allow for risk-taking, inevitable ridicule-free failures, and constructive critique (Figure 2).
2. Instructional tasks must be designed to accommodate varied learning styles and abilities to ensure possibility of improvement and growth at any level and any step of the task.
3. Greater focus must be placed on developing competencies and skills through visible learning and collaborative learning strategies, empowering students with choice and reflective voice.
4. Language used by both teacher and student to describe the learning process must change, including a consistent use of “yet” to promote belief that further development is possible with continued training. (Figure 4 and 5.)

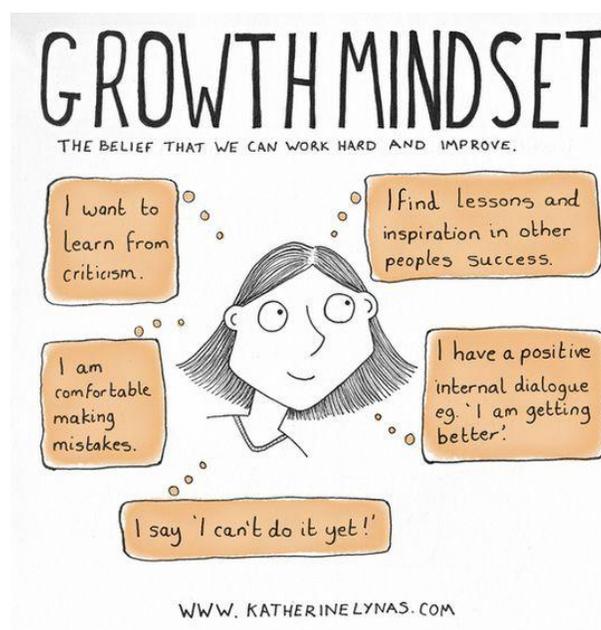


Figure 4. Katherine Lynas, *Growth Mindset*.



Figure 5. James Anderson, *Change Your Words – Change Your Mindset*.

In language classrooms set up to promote development or nurturing of “growth mindsets”, students do not mind making mistakes, so common yet too often perceived as debilitatingly embarrassing, because mistakes are evidence that the work is hard enough to make them smarter. This is when they understand that unchallenging tasks do not promote further advancement in their knowledge (William, 2013). Student athletes know that to improve in their chosen sport, they must systematically and continuously practice what they cannot yet do, and push further during each and every practice session, even a tiny amount: millisecond or centimeter, lap or kilogram, whatever their measure is. And in the face of failure, they must get up, spit on a scraped knee, and try again and again.

Students in the classrooms need to understand this “growth mindset” concept as well. Especially in language learning, where it allows students to believe that they can not only memorize 20 new words for a quiz but also use them effectively, genuinely improve their communication skills and language proficiency to build learning power for life.

Clearly, the process of learning anything, including the English language, encompasses a complex web of essential elements in order to achieve success. Most children enroll in the public education system provided by their governments. In the average public school worldwide, the language class is composed of local students (therefore monolingual and monocultural). To provide uniformity for examinations, the curriculum is most often sequentially set by the Ministry of Education or a local education administration. Mastery goals are set uniform by age. The language syllabus still mostly concentrates on proficiency in specific grammar structures, syntax, and vocabulary, while students sometimes wonder what is the purpose of this lesson. Due to time constraints and prescribed amounts of “content to cover” within the lesson or year, learning is often limited to passive contemplation of texts, both written and oral/visual, rather than the practice of receptive and productive language skills for an authentic purpose.

And what about 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and competencies? Students whose mindsets tend to fixate on present limitations in their language proficiency, in an atmosphere of fervent competition for points, grades, stars, “likes” or another external reward system, disengage. Students with low self-esteem become targets for ridicule or bullying. The vulnerable disconnect from learning and spiral towards a feeling of permanent failure that spreads to other areas of their life; the few intrinsically high achievers, regardless of external stimuli, thrive. Between these extremes jostles for position the vast majority, struggling to keep up with the increasing demand for ephemeral “ideal, perfect, the best.” And they wonder, even fear how they will fare in a few years when they enter the ever-changing and increasingly internationalized and digitized job market, where English language is a staple.

Hence the question again: how can English language instruction reach beyond the walls of the school or the course and empower all students with competencies and skills essential for greater success in life?

The answer lies in a set of strategies for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Strategies to empower students with skills and competencies, unleashed creativity and collaborative problem-solving, and intercultural understanding essential for life in a multicultural world. Strategies to also equip students with learning power for lifelong learning.

## **Strategies for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning**

### **Competencies and “Soft” Skills**

The competition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century depends on the quality of the nation’s population (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). As mentioned before, the top five “soft” skills desired in new workers by their employees are creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability and time management.

To develop their creativity in school, students need space and time as well as opportunities to delve into various themes and topics, with the assistance of a skilled educator, whose chief role is to design the learning experiences and facilitate the problem-solving and learning process.

Such practice opportunities are available through a variety of project-based and inquiry-based activities, either designed by creative teachers or available online on a number of educational sites. One strategic online learning site is [Connect2Learn.education](http://Connect2Learn.education).

### ***Case Study***

[Connect2Learn.education](http://www.connect2learn.education) ([www.connect2learn.education](http://www.connect2learn.education)) currently provides creative thematic units based on the syllabus of the IB English B, newly released in 2018 for first examinations in 2020. Each collaborative unit integrates a wide variety of both receptive and productive skills, as well as soft skills needed by students in today’s world: teamwork, collaboration, astute assessment of responses, thoughtful language of opinion, agreement and disagreement. Each unit includes critical analysis of texts and insightful research, allowing student creativity to thrive. Each skill is practiced in conjunction with another to provide an overall authentic experience that enhances intercultural understanding and builds a growth mindset through perseverance and grit.

For example, the *Human Ingenuity - Innovation in Technology* unit includes six online lessons, each divided into three sections, with an additional optional extension activity. Tasks involve the practice of reading, speaking, listening and writing skills. Students make choices and decisions as they proceed through the tasks, self-regulating their time and engagement, with classroom teacher providing guidance and feedback. Reading, integral to the unit, requires students to critically analyze provided texts, self-researched texts, and texts produced by themselves and their peers. Listening skills are honed during class discussions of texts in order to thoughtfully reply to peer recordings. Speaking is demonstrated through recorded introductions and replies to peer opinions. Further refinement occurs while deliberating on the collaborative research task and through peer feedback. From scripts for introductions to opinion recordings, from forum discussion to collaborative product creation, and ultimately the project feedback at the end, students express themselves in writing through each step of the process.

The learning units proposed by Connect2Learn.education encompass numerous strategies for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. The tasks are student-centered, with many opportunities to make choices, execute decisions, and reflect upon their effects with the teacher's support and feedback.

The themes and topics, required by the IB English B course syllabus, illustrate that prescribed content can be delivered through inquiry-based and project-based activities that unleash student creativity and allow for collaborative teamwork. It is the teacher's role as facilitator of instruction to establish and maintain an atmosphere of trust and safety, so that English language learners can comfortably engage in risk-free, ridicule-free development of their communication skills and constructively critique each other's work.

#### **Collaboration for Improvement of Communication and Persuasion Skills**

A lot has been written on peer tutoring and collaborative learning, especially in English language arts. The term "collaborative learning" refers to an instruction method in which learners at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. Responsibility for one's own learning and that of the group members' rests on the learner. In this way, the success of one learner helps other students attain success as well (Srinivas, 2011).

Having conducted informal observation of high school students in her classes over three decades of teaching English as a Second or Additional Language and various Language Arts courses, the researcher can verify that class peers can be very effective assessors of one another's work, especially when the focus of the collaboration is either on a common goal or on improvement rather than grading.

Establishing and maintaining an atmosphere of trust and safety is crucial for effective language learning and risk-free, ridicule-free engagement to hone receptive and productive communication skills. Students must be able to listen to peers speak, deliver a talk or speech, or engage in a conversation with confidence and trust that an error will be perceived as a lesson to learn, not as source of shame or fodder for bullying.

One effective strategy to establish an atmosphere of trust is a student-generated list of beliefs and values for the classroom (Figure 6). Focusing on the positive and minimizing the list of "don'ts" ensures greater buy-in. Posting the list on the classroom wall allows misdemeanors to be quickly acknowledged and behavior corrected through apology, restitution measures, or another type of instant intervention.

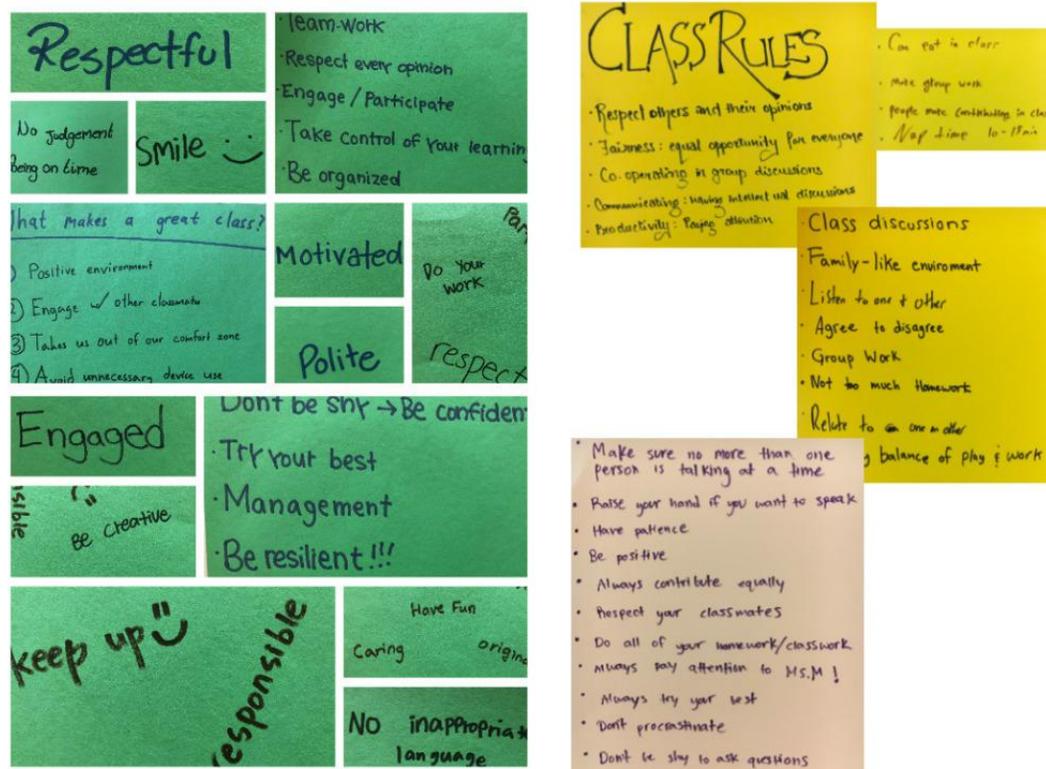


Figure 6. Student-generated class rules (beliefs and values)

Classes engaging in collaborative work through the Connect2Learn.education platform are provided with a framework of beliefs and values established by the IB Learner Profile, which includes traits such as “caring” and “principled.” Participating teachers are encouraged to engender and extend the atmosphere of trust and safety to the online collaboration with students outside the classroom walls to support successful teamwork.

Teamwork is defined by Scarnati (2001, 5) “as a cooperative process that allows ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results.” A study on successful teamwork conducted by Tarricone and Luca (2002) at university level reveals that key attributes need to be carefully considered by both instructors and students when teamwork activities are proposed. These attributes include commitment to team success, interdependence, interpersonal skills, open communication and positive feedback, appropriate team composition, and commitment to team processes (leadership and accountability). High school students are developmentally still constructing many of these attributes; teamwork and development of collaborative skills must be learned.

**Case Study**

Collaborative learning requires practice. Since "collaborative learning" means learners at various performance levels work together in small groups and are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own, it is important to carefully assemble the teams and rotate the students throughout the length of the course (month, semester or year), taking notes on individual performance and engagement within the groups, language proficiency, roles played and levels of responsibility to exert utmost effort.

The researcher has implemented this collaborative learning strategy and informally observed its beneficial effects over the course of each school year since the 1990's. In the first weeks I observe student behavior and collect the first written task, "letter to the teacher," in which students answer a list of questions, including "how do you feel about group work, what is your experience in teams." Based on gathered information, teams are composed, first assembling groups with at least one self-proclaimed leader and one who prefers individual work over a group. For subsequent assignments students change seats to eventually closely interact with every member of the class. After every collaborative task, students write reflections, either informal in their journal notebook, using checklists with questions, or – since the dawn of the internet – via Google forms.

The careful team composition and member rotation allows students to hone adaptability skills, while frequent opportunities to reflect and engage in a written or oral conversation with the teacher enhance their understanding of effective cooperation to reach a common goal or completion of a task or project (See Figure 7a and 7b). Benefits of this collaborative work and reflection were verified through a recent Facebook Messenger conversation by Rahul Vasandani, my former 9<sup>th</sup> grade student in 2010-2011 and author of reflection in Figure 7b: "Having the opportunity to work collaboratively with others, to discuss and explore these themes with others, has helped hone my leadership skills in many life activities: sport, family and business." (Vasandani, 2019)

**Group/pair work reflection Semester Two**

A group works effectively when:	Agree/Disagree	How do I fare? Do I do this? Comment
There is a good leader to organize group members	Agree	Always is one Not chosen
The work is distributed equally	Agree	Most of the time
Everyone contributes to the best of his/her ability	Agree	I am not sure about everyone
Everyone collaborates and communicates	Agree	Mostly yes
Everyone brings his/her contribution on time	Agree	I have, but not everyone
<b>A group doesn't work effectively when:</b>		
The leader is assumed/expected to do most of the work	Agree	they give themselves more
All the crucial work is "dumped" on one person	Agree	depending on people in group
Group members do not communicate (sms, email, meet)	Disagree	people do, or I do
Contribution is late or not completed	Disagree	I've never
Time is wasted by procrastination, distraction	Disagree	NOPE
Group members don't care about effect	Disagree	I care about it but not everyone does

**CONCLUSION: Am I a valuable team member? YES / NO / SOMETIMES**  
 Would people WANT to work with me if they had freedom to choose their groups/pairs YES /  NO  
 What can I improve? Trusting people with their work But if they don't do it then it shouldn't reflect badly on me.

It's hard working in a group when you have people that don't care about their work in your group. And since you want to get a good grade you never know if you should give yourself double the work or let yourself & your "partner" get in trouble.

*I see your point - this is reflecting why we're reflecting so much, in the effort that maybe those who don't care start caring actually and change their ways :)*

Figure 7a – Group/pair work reflection Semester 2

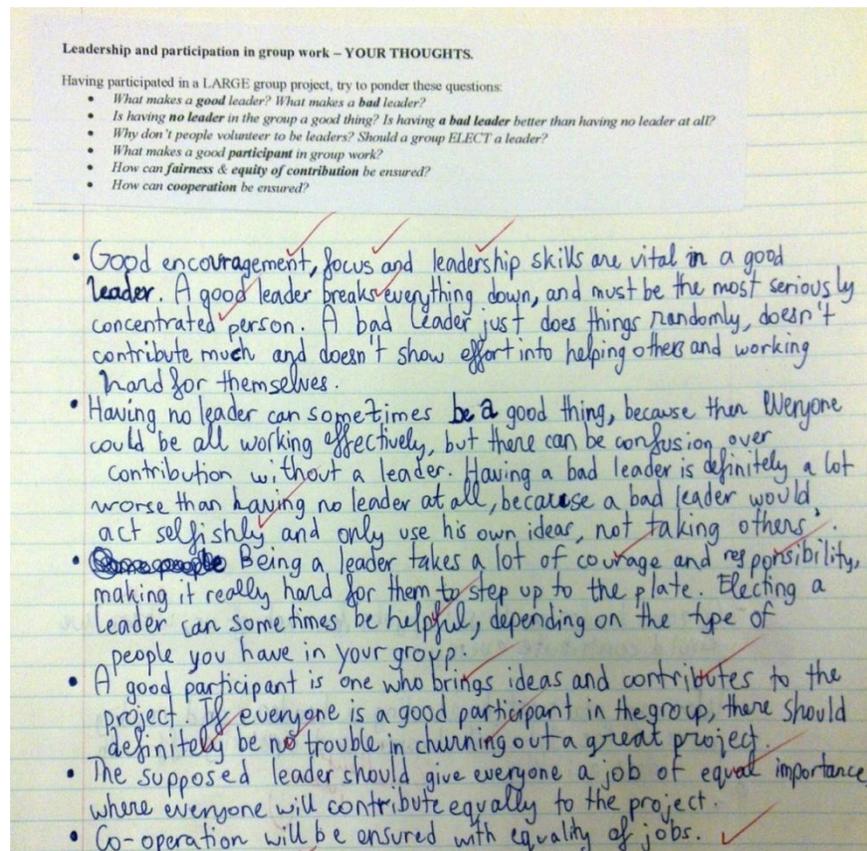


Figure 7b – Leadership and participation in group work – your thoughts

Intercultural and multinational teams working collaboratively on tasks provided by the Connect2Learn.education platform rely on participating teachers to encourage the team members to sustain high engagement in the collaborative process in an atmosphere of trust and safety. Especially important here is the precision of communication skills – negotiation or persuasion – which may falter due to the use of asynchronous digital tools. Imprecision in English language use may lead, for example, to miscommunication of vocabulary or emoticons, or to misuse of expressions and therefore breakdown of mutual understanding. Asynchronous nature of digital educational tools for communication develops many 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, for example adaptability to another person's time zone or cultural framework. This may challenge efficient time management and impact task completion by the team. It is therefore crucial, as in face-to-face situations, for the participating teacher to engage in communication with the students and the other teachers in the collaborative session, and together with the involved students strive to resolve the issues, linguistic or cultural.

Communication includes the ability to negotiate and persuade, and these skills are honed through collaborative work on multifarious inquiry-based and project-based tasks. In order to ensure support of further improvement and growth, students must be taught a set of strategies to provide encouraging, constructive feedback, and frequently practice their use.

Providing feedback, assessing or commenting peer work requires skillful use of specific language structures. High school students in my classes use a prepared list; many such lists are readily available online by searching for a “list of English expressions for agreement or disagreement.” Feedback success arrives with systematic use and purposeful application of these expressions.

One beneficial and successful strategy is the “2+1” method the researcher has implemented to build a mindset for continuous learning through provided feedback. Commenting on a peer’s work, the student is required to focus on two positive aspects or observations made, and suggest one area for improvement. To provide support and encourage further practice for refinement, students are asked to avoid using “don’t” or “must.” Students gather peer feedback for the communication task and write a self-reflection with a plan for further improvement of their performance. This strategy can be applied to peer evaluate both oral and written tasks, collaborative or individual. (Figure 8 a, b, c)

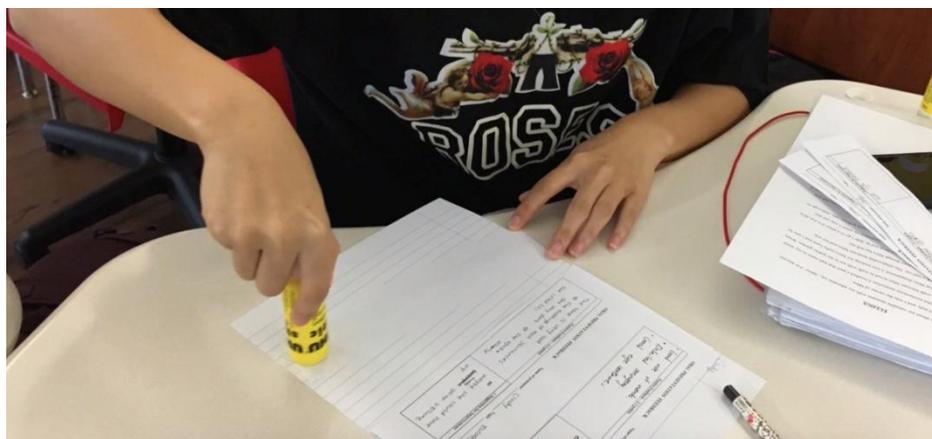


Figure 8a. Gathering peer feedback on an oral presentation.

Cindy

ORAL PRESENTATION FEEDBACK		Name of presenter	Topic
Positive Feedback - 2-3 points		Cindy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good use of words.</li> <li>• Detailed imagery.</li> <li>• Good eye contact.</li> </ul>	Suggestion for Improvement		Voice was not loud enough. ✓
ORAL PRESENTATION FEEDBACK		Cindy	Eulogy
Positive Feedback - 2-3 points			
The tone is very sad. ↳ The endings of each sentences are very dark. ↳ She spoke slowly. She cried 3/21	Suggestion for Improvement		m maybe she could have <del>spoken</del> your volume up. ✓
ORAL PRESENTATION FEEDBACK		Cindy	
Positive Feedback - 2-3 points			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good tone</li> <li>• Facing the audience</li> </ul>	Suggestion for Improvement		None
ORAL PRESENTATION FEEDBACK		Cindy	
Positive Feedback - 2-3 points			
used a lot of good words good acting.	Suggestion for Improvement		more eye contacts? ✓
ORAL PRESENTATION FEEDBACK		Cindy	
Positive Feedback - 2-3 points			
1. As I closed my eyes and listened her, it actually felt that I'm in funeral 2. Serious 3. literary devices	Suggestion for Improvement		FEEDBACK ✓

Figure 8b. Peer feedback – focus on at least two positive aspects and one suggestion for improvement.

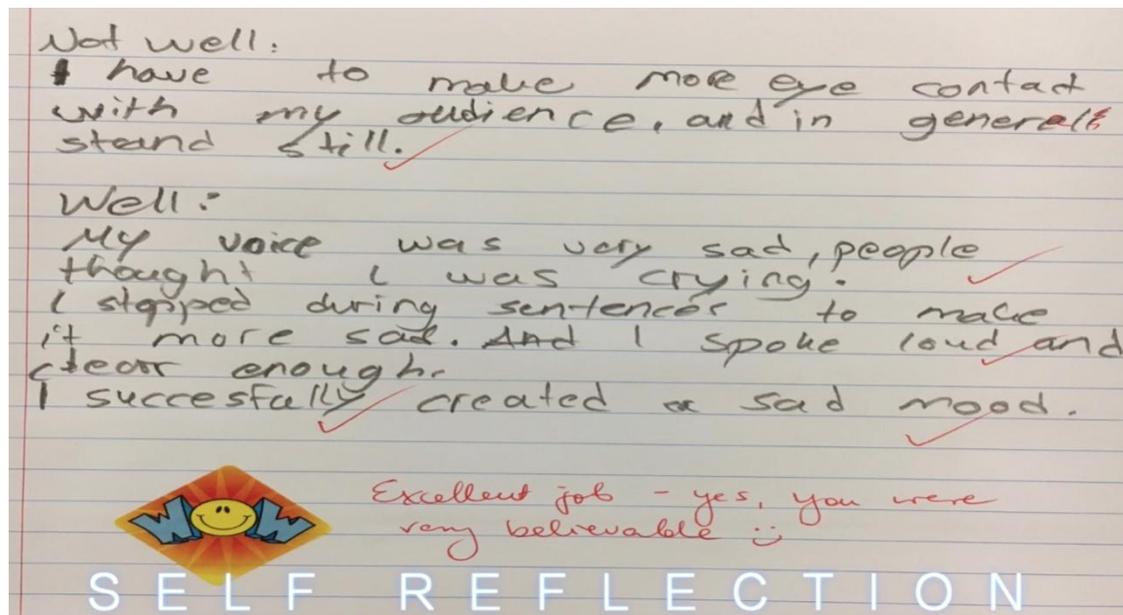


Figure 8c. Self-reflection on gathered and analyzed peer feedback.

The same “2+1” feedback strategy can be successfully applied to online feedback and commenting on student blog posts, or uploaded oral presentations, or multimedia projects. It does take some practice and sustained effort to reduce or eliminate the tendency to criticize with negative comments, focusing on the positive aspects and adding a suggestion for improvement. (Figure 9a and 9b).

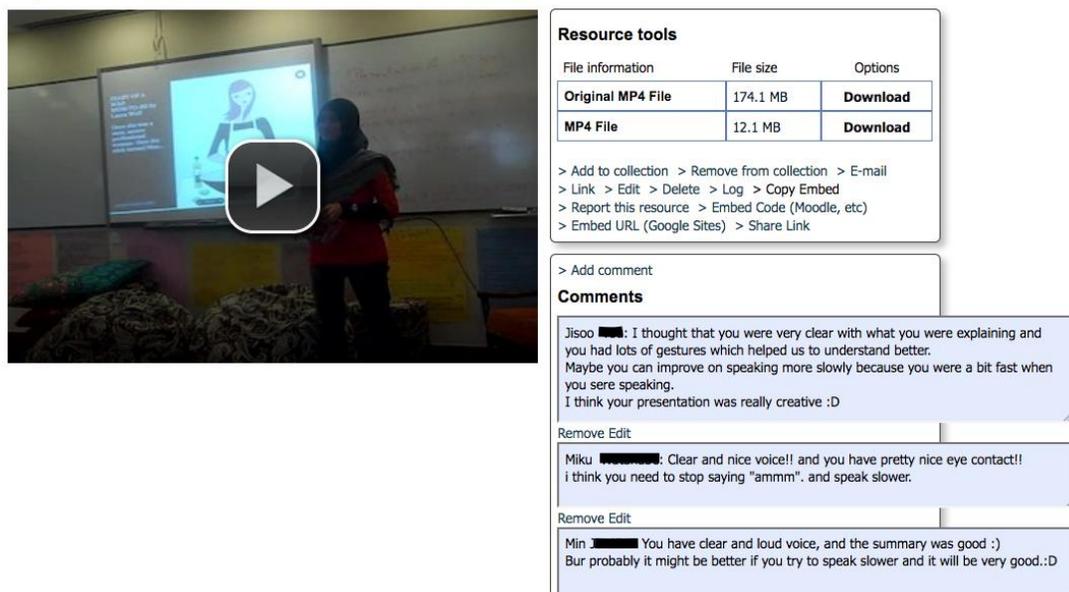


Figure 9a. First try at positive feedback. Students view positive comments in contrast to negative, and include the negative in their feedback.

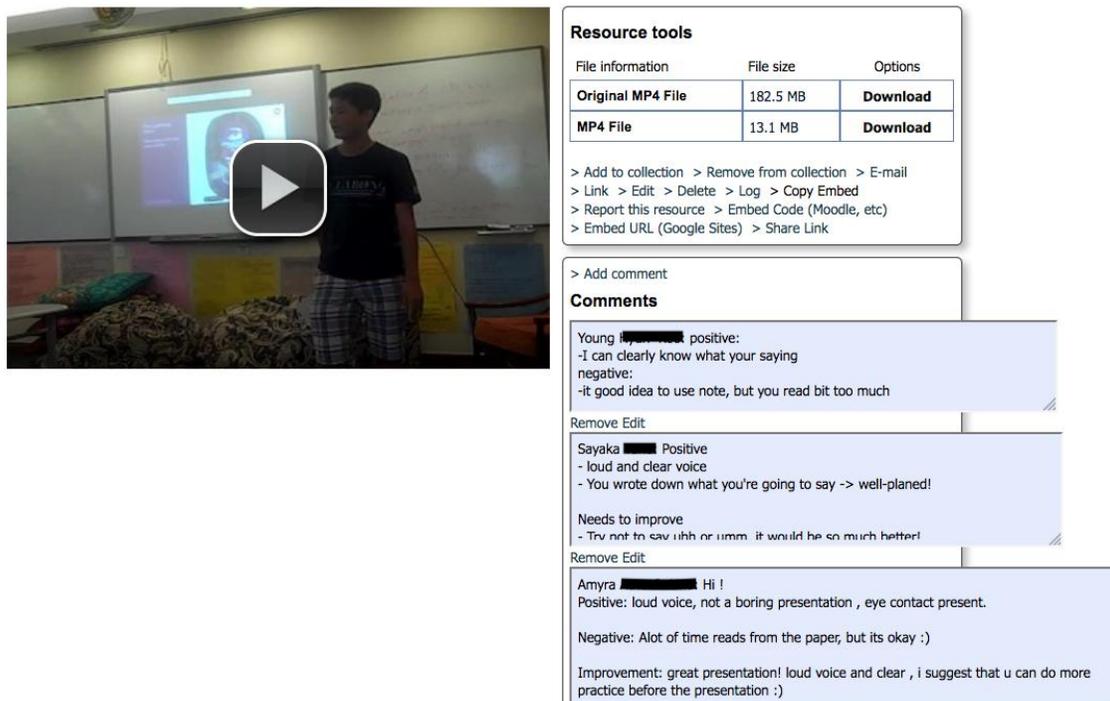


Figure 9b. After class discussion on use of “plussing” technique, greater use of positive feedback and suggestions for improvement.

This positive feedback strategy, similar to Pixar’s “plussing” technique of feedback, whereby one is only allowed to critique an idea if one adds a constructive suggestion, using language structures such as “what if...” or “yes, and...” (Gogek, 2015), has been utilized by students in the researcher’s classes for over two decades. Incidental errors in English language usage (visible in Figure 9a and b comments) are corrected by teacher’s use of the proper structures when discussing the feedback and its impact on the student’s willingness to review their errors in the performance and try again. Repeated practice of the task as a result of a positively charged mindset built on received supportive encouragement, as well as heightened student engagement to correct the flaws ultimately yield greater proficiency and fluency in language use.

**Learning Power – Growth Mindset**

Why is it important for students to provide positive feedback and suggestions for improvement? Because this is one of the strategies to help develop a growth mindset and build learning power. Both are essential for lifelong learning in the digital 21<sup>st</sup> century, in which the workplace requires inordinate amounts of flexibility, adaptability, and skillful time management.

**Case Study**

To help develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and competencies, another strategy involves reflection on past performance and analysis of the learning process. Even when English language proficiency is limited (Figure 10), the process of reflecting on team performance after each meeting allows the student to creatively use language, albeit with numerous errors, while simultaneously gaining conscious awareness

of “soft” skill development, for example greater confidence in acting/public speaking despite the limited proficiency.

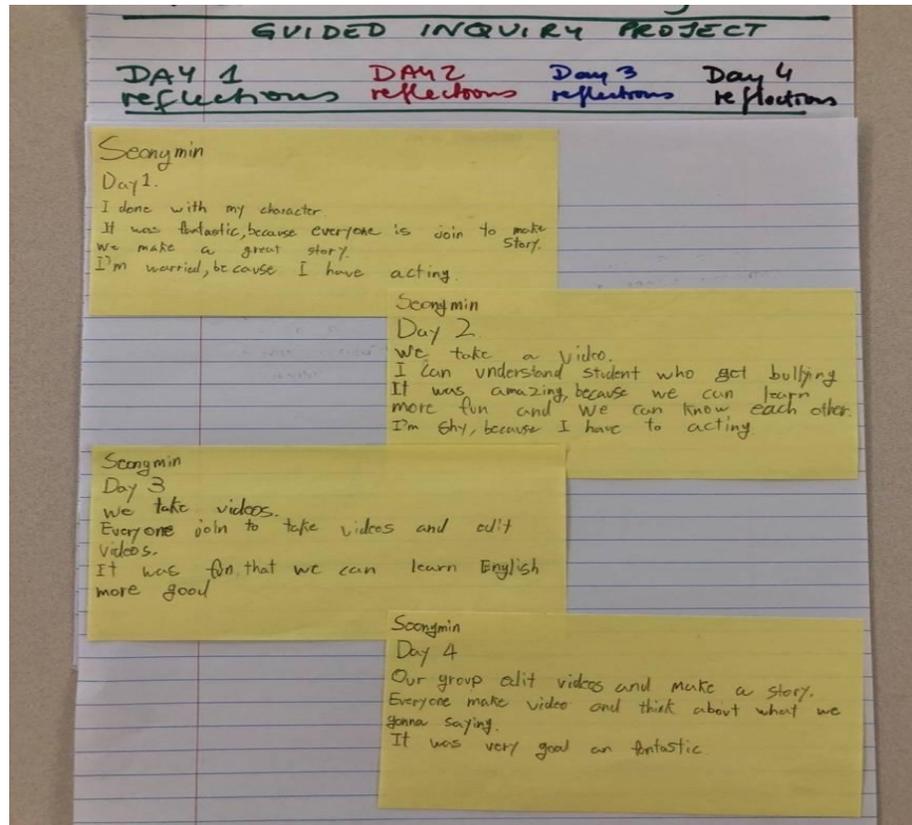


Figure 10. Four-day guided-inquiry group project reflection.

In an inquiry-based, project-based learning experience, due to the nature of the activity requiring collaboration, noise, and possible initial chaos, every student regardless of language proficiency enjoys an opportunity to actively engage in the activity. Every student is included. Every student can contribute to their utmost ability and work collaboratively to complete the task, correcting errors as they appear and are noticed by either peers or the teacher supporting the learning process.

The excitement for collaborative work, coupled with some needless worry (as the student admitted when we discussed the four reflections), is clearly palpable in the reflections (Figure 10): Day 1 “it was fantastic” because “everyone is join”; Day 2 “it was amazing”; Day 3 “it was fun”; Day 4 “it was very good and fantastic” – and noticeable is the informal contraction “gonna” that this student picked up along the four teamwork sessions.

This student’s motivation and enthusiasm for learning received a substantial boost through participation in this collaborative guided-inquiry project right at the beginning of the school year. The fact that each slip and stumble in English proficiency was met with support from both teacher and peers led to realization that “I don’t know this YET, but with practice I will get better.” This in turn triggered a sustained effort to improve over prolonged periods of time. Inevitably, the student encountered less successful days when tasks posed more problems and vocabulary acquisition or grammar structure usage

proved insufficient to score well on a summative assessment, but over the year this student's "growth" mindset resulted in heightened perseverance and grit to keep on going, yielding high grades in the end.

In subsequent collaborative tasks, this student worked with different people, adapting to various learning styles and work ethics of his peers. Each time, through reflection and self-evaluation of own performance and own contribution to the team outcomes, this student resolved to work harder and apply the lessons learned in a thought-out fashion. In fact, by the end of the year, quite unsurprisingly despite very low entry test scores, this student was scoring in the top 5% of the class on productive vocabulary usage in writing and comprehension of written and spoken text. The learning power of the growth mindset, albeit assessed only through anecdotal evidence, is authentic.

This success of collaborative engagement and building learning power can be achieved by students in any English language class worldwide, through engaging teamwork to complete thematically arranged, multifarious tasks like those provided on the Connect2Learn.education platform. Reviews on the platform include a statement from Ben Rinne, whose English class at Sekolah Bogor Raya in Bogor, Indonesia, worked collaboratively with my IB English B students in Jakarta Intercultural School: "I think that the authenticity of the types of materials being used and the skills being exercised are all integrated well with this unit. I especially appreciated the built-in differentiation for each of the tasks, where the students were allowed to create, write, and reply to the extent that they were most comfortable with, while still providing them with specific targets to achieve." (Rinne, 2019)

When language learning incorporates development of 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies and skills, the language is learned in an authentic way and enthusiastically practiced for a specific, sophisticated purpose: communication and lifelong learning for success in future life.

#### **Intercultural Understanding for Success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Without delving into intercultural and cross-cultural communication research, it suffices to say that culture, synthesized as a "set of knowledge, values, emotional heritage, behaviour and artefacts which a social group share, and which enable them to functionally adapt to their surroundings" (Aneas & Sandin, 2009), affects people in the way they interact with their environment, influencing both how they construct it and how they understand it.

Learners of a foreign language who attempt to use it within the context of the culture of that language can understand how intercultural communication reaches beyond knowledge of the language itself. It takes much more than understanding of the language – it involves understanding symbols, values and behaviours, all of which vary by culture and individuals within the culture as well. (Malik, 2019) And it is important not to stereotype behaviours typically attributed to a culture: not every Frenchman walks the streets of Paris in a chequered shirt, a beret on his head and a baguette under his arm. Nevertheless, the symbols, values and behaviours impact communication interactions, and understanding these factors is crucial in the modern era of globalization and worldwide migration.

Therefore, in the era of rapid and exponential change, intercultural understanding, broadly taken beyond mere acknowledgement of diversity, is essential for success, as the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace may not only include workers from various countries and cultures but also exist as a remote, entirely online, virtual work environment. Students in today's high schools must therefore expand their knowledge of

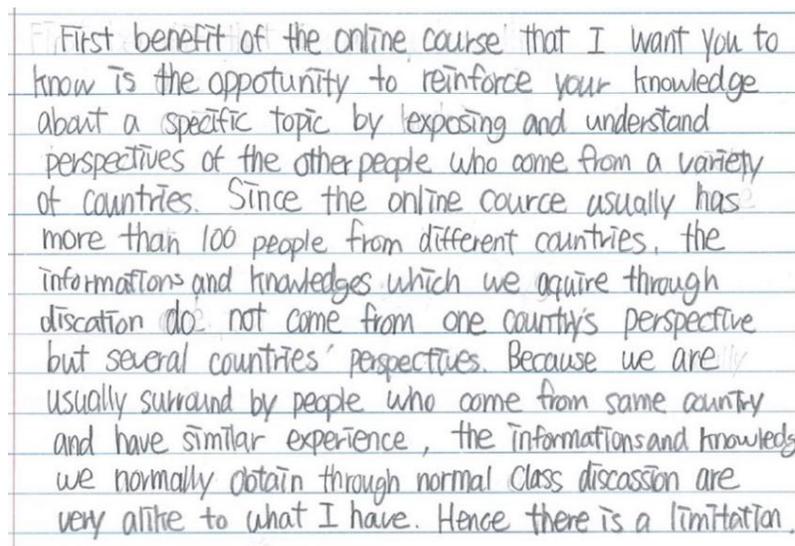
various cultures, and while learning English they need to interact and communicate with a wide array of peers from many nations.

At international schools like Jakarta Intercultural School, where over 60 nationalities study together, this expansion of knowledge occurs naturally as students interact on a daily basis. But what about local high schools, where students mostly encounter their loyal friends from elementary school and sworn enemies from the sandbox? How can they interact and communicate reaching beyond their monocultural and monolingual classroom peers?

### *Case Study*

One strategy the researcher has found very successful is the online interaction and collaboration on unit tasks provided by Connect2Learn.education, where teenagers can validate their own knowledge and English language skills and gain a different perspective on an issue raised in the thematic unit. While collaborating on and offline on a project of their choice, students practice working in a multinational and multicultural team, learn to negotiate breakdown and distribution of tasks, manage their time, and familiarise themselves with various educational online tools they may later use for academic or personal purposes. Through this collaboration, students reach beyond mere awareness of other cultures. They gain an understanding that with respect for others, through cooperation on a task with strange peers, with negotiated compromise and with genuine empathy, they can creatively resolve challenges, solve problems, make progress in English, and feel proud of their collaborative achievements.

Students in the researcher's IB English B class (2018 graduates) took part in several collaborative 2-3-week sessions on a variety of topics ("Do Monuments Matter" and "Decision Design" on the Global Online Academy platform, and "Human Ingenuity – Innovation in Technology" on Connect2Learn.education) and upon completion of each unit reflected on their intercultural experience. They acknowledged the benefits of interaction with peers from several countries and their varied perspectives (Figure 11a), the benefits of the contrast in views and ideas (Figure 11b), and the enhanced interaction and engagement in this type of inquiry-based and project-based learning (Figure 11c).



First benefit of the online course that I want you to know is the opportunity to reinforce your knowledge about a specific topic by exposing and understand perspectives of the other people who come from a variety of countries. Since the online course usually has more than 100 people from different countries, the informations and knowledges which we acquire through discission do not come from one country's perspective but several countries' perspectives. Because we are usually surround by people who come from same country and have similar experience, the informations and knowledgy we normally obtain through normal class discission are very alike to what I have. Hence there is a limitation.

Figure 11a. Benefits of interaction with peers from several countries and their varied perspectives

in them that they view certain subjects differently. I enjoyed ~~the~~ <sup>the controversy</sup> ~~the~~ ~~are~~ ~~different~~ between students' ~~views~~ <sup>opinions</sup> because ~~there was no~~ <sup>I could learn enormous</sup> ~~high~~ ~~into~~ amount of information from that contrast. ~~II~~ Our school, Jakarta Intercultural school, ~~does~~ <sup>include</sup> ~~have~~ <sup>many</sup> ~~many~~ ~~students~~ cultural backgrounds, but there is a limit to ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> have a variety of those back grounds in one class. Overall, the online learning ~~is~~ <sup>broadens</sup> ~~at~~ the perspectives ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~students~~ through the <sup>global</sup> ~~interaction~~ <sup>interaction</sup>.

Figure 11b. Benefits of the contrast in views and ideas

The greatest advantage of online learning is that it allows communication with the peers and the ~~the~~ teachers all over the world. ~~There are~~ <sup>In my</sup> ~~current~~ ~~online~~ ~~course~~, the number of students reaches ~~15~~ ~~from~~ ~~17~~ ~~school~~ 9 hundred seventy-five from seventeen different schools ~~II~~ located in 4 different countries. Communicating and sharing ideas with over a hundred people are not accessible. However, ~~by~~ ~~leading~~ ~~to~~ the opportunity to discuss <sup>in online</sup> ~~the~~ ~~course~~, I personally has <sup>been</sup> <sup>more</sup> ~~engaged~~ than any other classes due to the contrasting ~~of~~ perspectives of others. The peers from all around the world ~~per~~ ~~ceive~~ <sup>various</sup> ~~different~~ cultural ~~traits~~ <sup>traits</sup> in them that they view certain subjects differently. I

Figure 11c. Enhanced interaction and engagement

Even in a progressive and innovative international and intercultural environment of the Jakarta Intercultural School, students realize the need for additional encounters of blended learning, exposure to e-learning methodologies, and to increased intercultural interactions. (Figure 11d).

The online course is a brand new style of learning for most of the students who is taking IB H1 English B class. The students, including myself, ~~we~~ ~~have~~ ~~struggled~~ ~~to~~ ~~adapt~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~new~~ <sup>struggled</sup> <sup>adapt</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>be</sup> <sup>used</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>new</sup> the unfamiliar learning strategy. However, this online course ~~has~~ <sup>has</sup> enhanced ~~the~~ <sup>a</sup> ~~variety~~ <sup>variety</sup> of abilities regarding ~~the~~ <sup>therefore</sup> ~~English~~ <sup>therefore</sup>. ~~that~~ I would ~~like~~ <sup>like</sup> ~~to~~ ~~line~~ ~~to~~ recommend this program to the other classes. ds / ds / VII

Figure 11d. Realized need for additional experiences

If cultural universal concepts are taught with appropriate focus on powerful ideas, meaning conceptual understanding, and their potential life applications, students should develop basic sets of connected understandings (Brophy & Alleman, 2006). These powerful ideas in language learning may focus on topics connected with how the social system works, how and why it varies across locations and cultures, and what all of this means for personal, social and civic decision-making, in other words, for life. Acquisition of this knowledge requires language.

Therefore, it can be said that language learning, English in this case, through simultaneous acquisition of competencies and skills, through interactions for intercultural understanding, and with a focus on powerful ideas, can become a language learned for a sophisticated purpose, with intent for effective intercultural communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

## Conclusion

“Teaching English as a Foreign Language requires a wealth of activities and massive effort on the part of the teacher as the instructor.” I interpret this statement as a wealth of interactive, collaborative, inquiry-based and problem-based experiential learning in a multitude of various tasks geared towards practicing receptive and productive language skills. The massive effort on the part of the teacher is exerted on designing and preparing such activities, while the classroom tasks are facilitating the learning and knowledge acquisition (vocabulary, grammar, facts, ideas, concepts), as well as providing support (inspiration for creativity, encouragement for perseverance) and guidance for collaboration and interpersonal skills (empathy, open mindedness, respect).

In a face-to-face classroom environment, working collaboratively, students instinctively provide feedback and readily take to the 2+1 “plussing” strategy, initially needing help with focusing on the positive and on suggestions for improvement. Students suggest alternative strategies for problems they encounter if an atmosphere of trust and safety has been established and errors are perceived as lessons to learn. Most importantly, in a student-centered collaborative classroom, students genuinely engage in various naturally occurring communication scenarios and volunteer more often, thus practicing their English language skills.

This also happens in an online team collaboration, albeit the challenge is greater due to added aspects of increased need for precise time management, heightened sense of patience needed for asynchronous collaboration and communication, and the need for intercultural understanding when dealing with a multicultural and multinational team. Nevertheless, such is the nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace, more prevalent year by year as digital businesses mushroom.

According to [www.workflexibility.org](http://www.workflexibility.org) 2017 State of Telecommuting Report, 2.9 % of total US workforce work from home, and increase of 115% from 2005 (Parris, 2017). Meanwhile, Owl Labs in their “23 Key Remote work and Telecommuting Statistics for 2019” cite their Global State of Remote Work report, which says that 16% of global companies are fully remote and 40% are hybrid (Bernazzani, 2019).

This clear upward and global trend of digital workplaces means that today’s students must be prepared for such workplaces of tomorrow and gain experience of collaborating in online teams.

Teachers, therefore, must equip their students with skills and competencies through application of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning strategies, so that students can subsequently thrive.

English language instruction can reach beyond the walls of the school or course to provide this sophisticated purpose – to empower all students with 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies and skills essential for greater success in life through systematic application of several 21<sup>st</sup> century strategies:

- teaching and practicing of contemporary skills and competencies,
- allowing creativity to thrive in the learning process,
- fostering a growth mindset and building learning power,
- focusing curricula on problem-solving and inquiry-based (task-based, project-based, action-based, terminology varies) learning in blended-learning experiences,
- facilitating student-centered collaborative learning to develop interpersonal skills, widen perspectives, and promote greater intercultural understanding, attitudes and knowledge,
- employing online educational platforms and digital tools to connect students for interaction and communication to engender empathy, embrace open-mindedness, develop adaptability and flexibility needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century ever-changing world.

Dylan William says: “People often want to know “what works” in education, but the simple truth is that everything works somewhere, and nothing works everywhere. That’s why research can never tell teachers what to do.” William explains that classrooms are far too complex for any prescription to be possible, and variations in context may change an effective lesson strategy to a disaster in another context. Nevertheless, research can help point teachers to avenues worth exploring. “Across a range of contexts, attending not to what the teacher is putting into the instruction but to what the students are getting out of it has increased both student engagement and achievement.” (William, 2013)

I agree with William, especially in today’s age, when learning includes digital literacy, premised on creativity and innovation, and is essential for functioning in school, workplace, and personal life. A variety of strategies can be tried. Digital literacy also encompasses new methodology that actually takes into account the possibilities brought by new technology.

Up until now, online systems for language learning have resorted to chiefly digitalizing traditional language learning tasks, which the students could equally easily complete with pen and paper. (Talmo, Einum, & Støckert, 2014). Further innovation in language learning and combining language learning strategies with strategies for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in general, including a variety of e-learning set ups, will inevitably yield greater success in language acquisition, ease of communication, efficacy in interaction and greater intercultural understanding.

This paper is based on case studies involving a small sample size of students in several classes, a limitation in terms of being able to infer statistical significance or generalize at a population level.

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*Figure 2. Trevor Mackenzie, 10 reasons to use inquiry in your classroom.*

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*Figure 5. James Anderson, Change Your Words – Change Your Mindset.*

<https://mindfulbydesign.com/change-mindset-change-words/>

*Figure 6. Student-generated class rules (beliefs and values). Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 7a – Group/pair work reflection Semester 2. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 7b – Leadership and participation in group work – your thoughts. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 8a. Gathering peer feedback on an oral presentation. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 8b. Peer feedback – focus on at least two positive aspects and one suggestion for improvement. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 8c. Self-reflection on gathered and analyzed peer feedback. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 9a. First try at positive feedback. Students view positive comments in contrast to negative, and include the negative in their feedback. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 9b. After class discussion on use of “plussing” technique, greater use of positive feedback and suggestions for improvement. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 10. Four-day guided-inquiry group project reflection. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 11a. Benefits of interaction with peers from several countries and their varied perspectives. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 11b. Benefits of the contrast in views and ideas. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 11c. Enhanced interaction and engagement. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*

*Figure 11d. Realized need for additional experiences. Photo by Beata Mirecka-Jakubowska*