



The Right Partner For 21st Century Skills: A Critical Success Factor

The previous two articles in this series introduced 21st Century Skills to readers, and how educators should prepare to deliver these skills to students. This article dives into the planning and implementation aspects of the process, including selecting a suitable partner to help the school in delivering the skills.

In With the New... Not So Fast!

You are now aware of the importance of 21st Century Skills, and that preparing your school ecosystem is crucial for delivering them effectively. Is it time to start Skills classes? Not yet!

“The biggest challenge encountered when implementing anything new is the attitude of all involved, be it teachers, parents or management”, opines Mrs. Jayanthi Vijaygopal, Retired Principal of Mitra Academy, Bangalore. She has found that convincing everyone in the ecosystem of the value of a new program can be a herculean task.

Spreading awareness amongst your staff, teachers and the parent community about the value of the Skills, and how they can vault children to greater success in life and work is key. A workshop to talk about the skills and the various programs that could be implemented will set the right tone to get the effort started.

Mitigate Hazards With Upfront Planning

As with any other project, delivering 21st Century Skills to students in a school setting involves significant amount of planning, resource allocation and associated activities. Careful planning and preparation can mitigate – even eliminate – many of the hazards encountered during implementation, such as inadequately trained and under-motivated coaches, insufficient resource allocation, uneven monitoring of progress or lack of evidence of positive learning outcomes.

WHAT?	HOW
Awareness	A workshop to educate teachers, management and parents about 21st Century Skills and their importance to our children's future.
Assessment	Visits to schools/education centres that are running 21st Century Skills programs to understand the learning outcomes and methods.
Make or Buy?	Decide: Do we have enough time, resources and expertise in-house to design and deliver the curriculum? Or, should we bring in a partner?
Provision	Provision budget for the program. Allocate time in the school timetable. Allocate staff and teacher resources as needed.
Implement and Monitor	Track delivery of the program. Measure the rubrics for success. Assess students. Report results to the chosen stakeholders.

Table 1: Steps to take To Implement 21st Century Skills In Your School



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Perhaps the biggest question stakeholders must confront when they get into the planning stage is whether to start the program in-house or to partner with an external provider. Both options have their pros and cons.

For instance, an in-house program offers tighter control over content, and expertise remains in the hands of the school's staff. In reality however, most schools are typically under-staffed and the staff overburdened. The credentials and motivation levels of teachers may be varied. Teachers are almost always racing to finish portions in time for exams. They have little or no time to acquire new skills, design content, or deliver the program effectively. Beyond all this, designing new programs involves tremendous research into the latest pedagogies and is no mean task by itself.

It makes eminent sense in such a scenario to partner with an external provider to deliver the 21st Century Skills program effectively to students.

What Kind of Provider?

Schools should evaluate potential partners on several criteria – depth of content, design of curriculum, professional approach; support before, during and after implementation; and quality of teaching aids and manipulative sets utilized for program delivery.

CRITERION	KEY QUESTIONS
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · What is the research basis for the content? · How well rounded is the material in terms of being interdisciplinary and spanning disciplines like STEM and the Language Arts? · Does the program offer adequate material to engage children and ensure concepts are delivered effectively? · Does the program make use of a broad range of quality resources, including digital tools? · Are the components of a 21st Century classroom integrated into the program?*
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · What are the credentials of the program provider in the education services space? · How professional is their approach towards engaging with schools? · What is the quality of their coaches, teacher trainers and staff?
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Is professional development/training of my school's teachers part of the program?* · What kind of support does the provider offer before, during and after implementation?
Customer Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Is the provider able to provide references of other schools where their programs are running successfully?

*See Educast August 2013 for components of a 21st Century Classroom, and to understand the importance of teacher training.

Table 2: Questions to Ask While Selecting A Partner to Deliver 21st Century Skills

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“Partnering with the right provider can be the differentiator between success and failure”, says Mr. Vamshi, Trustee, Sri Lakshmi School, Kurnool. “Rather than spend copious amounts of time, money and resources on in-house trials, we preferred partnering with Creya. It allowed us to instantly leverage the depth of their experience and expertise, and integrate the program seamlessly into our school timetable.”

Pioneers in Delivery of 21st Century Skills

There has been a flurry of companies that have gotten into the business of partnering with schools for 21st century skills – some local and some international. One of the pioneers in this space worth watching out for and evaluating is Creya Learning.

Creya Learning is an innovative education company focused on equipping children with skills, literacies, competencies and the attitude needed to thrive in the dynamic world of the 21st Century. These in-school programs are based on the path-breaking “studio-based learning” model, involving children in solving real life problems, using an interdisciplinary, hands-on approach. **The strength of the Creya program is in having a comprehensive and complete solution that addresses all concerns of the school for effective delivery.**

All Creya programs are meticulously designed to adhere to a robust 21st Century Skills-based curriculum working in over 7500 schools worldwide. The curriculum has been built on 20 years of research and aligns to the National Curriculum Framework. Creya also provides manipulative sets that complement the curriculum perfectly.

Another aspect of Creya's offerings is a well-designed professional development program for teachers that goes beyond the narrow focus of training, and extends to 21st Century Skills and Experiential Learning for the teachers. Along with extensive on-site and offline support through video repositories, Creya's unique 'Creya Connect Studio' provides in-person video guidance anytime during school hours Monday through Saturday for support, trouble-shooting and remote guidance.

Evaluate providers, and assess each one on all the elements within your budget before finalizing the best fit for your school.



Creya Solutions: Complete & Comprehensive

Next in the Series: Success stories of schools delivering 21st century skills using a partner

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