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Trilling, Bernie. & Fadel, Charles. (2009) *21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Time*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass.

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21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Time is a book about how advances in technology and communication capability have changed the way we socialize, learn, and interact with each other and the world around us. If you teach children, and you want to prepare them for *their* future, you will want to read this book. If you are a leader in an educational organization and you want to get a glimpse of what will be important for children to know and be able to do in this 21st century, then you will want to read this book. I am an assistant principal and a doctoral student, and because of reading this book, I have gained a broader perspective while developing laser like focus for my purpose and mission in life—and that is to advocate for 21st century learning within our schools. You will want to read this book if you agree with the authors who state that education plays the following four roles in our society: “It empowers us to contribute to

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work and society, exercise and develop our personal talents, fulfill our civic responsibilities, and carry our traditions and values forward.”

People can now access and learn from huge databases and other sources of information, go to work with colleagues from many different countries, and socialize and play games with other people from all around the world. What was once considered personal face-to-face interactions have become depersonalized and globalized transactions across social networks as anyone with access to the internet can now learn, work, and play from home or any other location on the planet with internet access. Trilling and Fadel also point out that with this new age of communication technologies and information sharing, new knowledge and services are being created, causing a fundamental shift in our economy from an Industrial and manufacturing economy to one of a globally networked, information-driven knowledge economy.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 is titled “What is 21st Century Learning?” Chapter 1 looks at the history of the interconnectedness of work and public education. We have moved from a society whose economy was based on agriculture, to industrialism, and now to one based on knowledge. In Chapter 2, Trilling and Fadel indicate that the convergence of four forces—knowledge work, thinking tools, digital lifestyles, and learning research—is requiring the need for new forms of learning. There is growing pressure for schools to produce knowledge workers and innovators. There will always be a need for individuals with key core knowledge of a particular field, but having computers and search engines with capabilities to find new information allow for the growth of new fields of knowledge. Personalizing learning and differentiating instruction will become the two greatest challenges for teachers of our time. Teachers must transition from the notion of teaching content and focus on their students’ thinking and learning.

Part 2 is titled, “What are 21st Century Skills?” and contains chapters 3 thru 5. In this section, Trilling and Fadel

elaborate on just what exactly are the 21st century skills students will need to be successful in the Knowledge Age economy. They introduce a global competition that requires the use of these 21st century skills called ThinkQuest that encourages students to examine real world issues and collaborate globally to devise a website that engages and informs their peers around the world. Chapter 3 begins with skills that are grouped into three categories: critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, and creativity and innovation. They also present an approach to learning that shatters the “Taxonomy model” of learning that suggests students acquire basic knowledge first and then they move through a process of understanding, before they are able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate. The new learning model that is supported by research indicates that all of these processes can, and in fact, do happen simultaneously. Learners would benefit much more if creative lessons that are project based were implemented that explore this new learning model.

Chapter 4 introduces three more sets of skills: information literacy, media literacy, and information and communication technology literacy. Learners must analyze and discern what useful information from propaganda is, make ethical decisions about information sharing, and create new knowledge and services.

Chapter 5 introduces five more sets of skills: flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction skills, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability skills, and leadership and responsibility skills. Trilling and Fadel mention that the real world problems that we come face-to-face with everyday are often complex and require teams of individuals to work together to solve them. Often times the unpredictable nature of real life requires collaborative cross-cultural team members to be flexible and adaptable to solve problems. Team members must show initiative and self-direction as they may be required to work independently while serving the team. Trilling and Fadel state, “Productivity and accountability are important skill sets that all 21st century students and teachers need for success in school, work, and life.” The authors use the terms “studio

model” to describe a form of learning that is project based where several students come together to share responsibility in working on different aspects of a project. Students celebrate together at the conclusion of the project before they separate and create new groups with new leadership roles and responsibilities for the next project.

Part 3 is titled, “21st Century Learning in Practice.” Chapter 6 looks at the two primary motivators of all learning and they are questions and problems. Scientists and engineers have developed procedures over the years that have generated learning that has produced many answers and solutions that have fundamentally changed the way of living throughout history. Chapter 7 introduces a project-based learning model called “the bicycle method.” It is comprised of four components: *define* the question, problem or challenge; *plan* procedures and set-up preparations for the experiment; *do* the activities and experiment; and *review* results. The authors looked at small collaborative group based learning and found research supporting the notion that students working in collaboration outperform students working alone.

The authors elaborate more in Chapter 8 on what it takes to transform school systems into 21st century learning centers and supporting Partnerships for 21st Century Skills or P21. The effort must include a commitment from leadership, funding for teacher professional development, and policy changes that reflect 21st century learning goals within school accountability plans. Trilling and Fadel commit to a healthy discussion on formative assessments *for learning* rather than summative assessments *of learning*. As more schools like those in West Virginia transform to 21st century models, a call for better assessments will become needed since many standardized assessments do not currently evaluate 21st century learning skills at all.

The authors wrap the book up in Chapter 9 with a vision of what 21st century schools might look like. In no way has there been established a global education network to rival the global economic network that exists. Education continues to lag behind considerably, but there is hope.

With the recent and current economic recession, the need for 21st century skills and learning become ever more apparent. The author gives an overview of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills and its purpose. There is a companion DVD that chronicles eight documentaries of 21st century skills and learning in practice. The one thing that I like the most about this book is that it does not attempt to sell you on a specific expensive program. It very poignantly points out our current reality of the impact technology and the age of information and innovation has had on the way students learn, the trends that have led to that reality, and proposes a new instructional model for educators to consider.

About the Reviewer

Curtis Wren is a doctoral student at Lindenwood University in Missouri. He is also an assistant principal in the Hazelwood School District, Florissant, Missouri 63034. His doctoral Dissertation topic is “The Impact Single-sex Classrooms Have on Middle School Education.” He is interested in having his school district formally adopt 21st century skills that include developing critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and digital literacy for middle school students.

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