Asynchronous Telecommunication

# Introduction

For our telecommunication session part 2, we were to read three documents on 21st century skills. Next we reflected on the content in separate threads on the class discussion board. We were divided into three groups of four, with each group having its own discussion board. We also had to consistently respond to other group members posts in a reasonable timeframe while demonstrating good self initiative. The idea was to consistently post topics related to the discussion topic and citing additional references to the topic while presenting creative approaches to the topic while motivating group discussion.

I have organized my contributions by subject matter rather than listing my posts first and my comments later. My posts include short article summaries.

# I. Afterschool Programs:

# Helping Kids Compete in Tomorrow’s Workforce

## Original Post

The article “Afterschool Programs: Helping Kids Compete in Tomorrow’s Workforce” appeared as a brief of the Afterschool Alliance. The article refers to various research results by the National center for Education Statistics (NCES) (p. 1) and the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) (p. 2). All research seems to find that today’s students lack vital skills when entering the workforce, even basic ones such as reading, writing (spelling and grammar), and mathematics. Research also shows that few students prepare for college coursework (NCES, p.1) while once in college - compared with other economically leading nations such as German, China and Japan - too few undergraduate students earn degrees in science and engineering (NCES, p.2). The article identifies the increased need for critical-thinking and social skills as necessary to compete in this increasingly service-based economy (NCES, p.1). SCANS research lists five core competencies for the future (resources, interpersonal skills, information, systems, and technology) and an underlying core set of skills and personal attributes (basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities) (p. 2). The article continues to point out that “today’s youth agree that they lack the knowledge and tools to be successful” (p.3), then concludes the article by citing afterschool programs as a solution to the dilemma.

There are several issues that are worth commenting on. First, there is no doubt that the problem is real. Students do lack basic skills and considering the continued curbing of curriculum and mandatory classes, the situation is most likely to deteriorate rather than improve. Research clearly shows that interpersonal skills are lacking, yet the focus continues to be on technology which has curtailed interpersonal skills more than any other contemporary force by chaining even young children in front of electronic devices, starting with television, instead of learning how to interact with others – the infamous semi-circle replacing the (family) circle.

Another discrepancy is America’s unilateral obsession with sports – a skill that colleges seem to admire, but no employer considers vital - and rightly so. The obvious solution to the problem would be to get rid of all those sports but two or three and use that time and those funds to invest into teaching students skills that actually have an impact on their options in the job market. If students want to engage in sports, fine, let them join a sports club.

Third, I would like to point out that the article was written by the Afterschool Alliance. That said I read the article as an infomercial rather than a research-based article. From my own experience I can say that the percentage of afterschool programs that actually do what the article promises. When I was looking for afterschool programs ten years ago I noticed that those whose programs were actually semi-acceptable charged $1,000 per child per month. With three children in elementary school at the time I could not afford any of those. My question is: Do those programs claim to improve grades of those who do not plan on a college career or do they in reality just cater to children of families who can afford them and who would go to college anyway? Hence this, to me, horrible result of only 41-45% improvement rate explains itself. Students in those programs did not improve because the children came from economically advantaged families and probably had good grade to begin with. Those with lower grades did improve. Interestingly, neither initial nor final grades were provided to show the actual impact of the afterschool programs, nor were the actual programs specified or outlined– which I am sure covered a large scope of curricula and methods. Statements like the “study revealed that participants attended school more regularly and had slightly higher proficiency ratings” (Anne Arundel County, p. 4) only prove that if you come from a household that cares about and can afford an afterschool program then yes, you are probably more likely to have parents who insist on sending you to school every day. Your home probably also has more books and access to educational resources than a home that cannot afford this luxury. It seems that, as with most infomercial, cause and effect have been reversed in order to sell a product.

What is needed are affordable programs that do not babysit but that actually teach classes. Europe offers many such options. Germany has the *Volkshochschule* (VHS) which consists of local chapters in most communities. They are housed in school-like buildings and are comparable to community colleges. They do not offer diplomas but prepare for diplomas (Cambridge, Oxford, TOEFL, DaF etc.) and also offer classes just to expand the mind (e.g. foreign languages without diploma prep, photography, pottery, internet classes). The cost is around $ 60 to $100 per trimester and classes take place once or twice a week for two hours. You can see how affordable and easy it is to custom tailor an educational program for teenagers of middle and high school level. When I grew up in Germany, I took Russian, French, Chinese, Greek, Philosophy and ballet at this institution. These classes are frequented by students and adults and do not necessarily prepare for university – which is free of cost other than a $300 or so registration fee.

Greece has a system that is based on tutoring. Unlike most countries, Greece has thousands of private evening schools, called *frontisteria* (pl.) that offer after school tutoring not to those who are bad at a specific subject, but to those who want to major in it. There are science *frontisteria* (for math, biology, physics and chemistry) and language *frontisteria* (classical ones for Modern Greek and Ancient Greek and Foreign Language ones for German, English, French and Italian). Teachers must be licensed. I worked at such schools for three years and the educational as well as motivational levels of these students were phenomenal. Costs were extremely low, around $100 per semester. All students went on to university which also is free of cost but requires excellent grades. Classes took place daily for 2 hours per course.

## Response

**Author:** Valorie Jonas  
**Date:** Saturday, March 27, 2010 6:21:48 PM EDT  
**Subject:** After School article

As a former after school care employee in California schools, I am aware of the differences it makes for some students. I felt this article had some very valid points.

These two statements really stood out to me:                                                             Jobs requiring postsecondary education are among the fastest growing jobs.                  A lack of preparation for the jobs of tomorrow will not only mean lack of access to higher paying jobs for the future workforce, it may also mean that our nation may not be as well equipped to compete in the global economy.

It shows more needs to be done in order to help our students succeed and choose to further their education.

After school programs are an excellent way to give students the opportunity to develop skills which will help them succeed in the workplace. Employers are looking for skills such as good oral communication, exposure to working with different cultures and ethnicities, and the ability to work collaboratively with groups of people. After school programs also help students get help with math and science, improving their test scores and making them more likely to pursue careers in these subjects. After school programs also give students time to interact with peers outside of a classroom setting, often giving them chances at communication and collaboration they may not get within a classroom.

The program I worked with had a schedule we followed which I felt was beneficial to the children. I worked with fifteen 4th-5th graders, and we had 2 1/2 hours or so together every day. We spent an hour doing homework, so they had a chance to do it, but also could ask questions and get help. Children could also read if they finished their work. We would then spend approximately 45 minutes for a snack and "recess". We had a 30-45 minute activity which was lead by the teacher, and was usually educationally based (we had them approved by the director in advance). We celebrated trees on earth day by trying foods grown on trees, we played math games, or some form of other game. We concluded our time with 15-25 minutes of "free play" in which the children were able to play with any of the supplies within our room.

While this sounds like it is rigorous, I honestly thought it was effective. I had students who could not finish their schoolwork during their hour, so I know they had to do some at home. One who often did not finish was from a low income family, so I doubt he would be able to get the help he needed at home.

I agree with this article that after school programs can pave the way to helping our students succeed.

**Author:** Beate Pody  
**Posted date:** Sunday, March 28, 2010 3:53:52 PM EDT

Valorie, you write that "employers are looking for skills such as ... working with different cultures and ethnicities". That is true. However, what has not happened in this job market is that employers are willing to pay more for such skills. I am quatrolingual (see, nobody even knows this word, including the dictionary!), yet have never taken a position that requires language skills because these positions are either volunteer jobs(!) or pay minimum wage.  
Everywhere else in the world multi-lingual jobs are among the highest paying. I worked in Europe, the Mid-East and Africa, and everywhere I only needed to work one week per month to have twice the income I have now.  
Yet everyone is touting globalism and multi-culturalism which are empty words uttered by people who can't find Indiana on a map.  
Are after-school programs really helping with this? From your description I visualize a pre-school setting (snack, recess, food grown on trees), yet the true need for after-school programs arises in middle and high school, at the very point when society drops the ball, citing state laws that children of that age may be left unsupervised. It is the 12-18-year old ones that desperately need our attention.  
And no, your program does not sound rigorous to me at all compared on an international level.  
Last week I attended a competition with my son. One group of Korean immigrant kids from NY City just creamed the competition. THEY had a rigorous program. Our group was the one with snacks, recess and tree planting. They did not even place. Unless we get kids out of this "feel-good" "I am OK, you are OK" state of mind they will never be competitive. Getting good grades for coloring maps on a high school level should be a crime, not the norm.  
Nothing against your program. It is probably great for Kindergarten and lower elementary, and I am painfully aware that due to all these electronic gadgets kids are unaware of food growing on trees. When was the last time a kid came to class all scratched up because they fell into a gooseberry bush (or even know what that is) or with a broken arm because they fell out of an apple tree. And we are talking about school children from an extremely rural setting here.  
But something needs to be done for kids when they actually prepare to go out into the workforce within the next few months and years.  
You address a key issue in your last paragraph: students get no help from home. Uneducated and uncaring parents are the real issue. The other day I saw a first grade girl wearing a T-shirt that said: "Wake me up when class is over". Who bought this child that T-shirt? Who sends her to school with it?

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| Response **Author:** Karena Jordan Carlson **Date:** Sunday, March 28, 2010 12:05:27 AM EDT **Subject:** Afterschool programs   I found the article concerning helping kids compete in tomorrow's workforce enlightening. The issues connected with critical thinking skills and job preparedness certainly are not new yet this article brought up a solution I had not thought of before. My daughter was in an after school program briefly, she is only in the first grade so I didn't connect her experience with job preparedness.        According to the article, the after school programs sound similar to school. This made me wonder, while I was reading the article, why we can't duplicate this "after school experience" during school. As I read I realized that perhaps the students got to choose after school programs that interested them or choose programs where they had a connection with one of the adults already. Those are things that if they happen in school, are wonderful assets yet we cannot recreate on a large scale in school.       As I continued to read, I became a believer in after school programs when I saw the statistics linking after school programs with college completion and development of work-force skills. I think students spend too much time doing homework these days, my daughter started doing homework in kindergarten and I did not have homework until middle school! At the same time, I was very active in after school sports in middle school and I have very fond memories of my middle school years. Due to a lack of a ride in high school I was not active in any after-school sports or programs and I did not enjoy my high school years as much. I wonder if these after school programs somehow recreate those team-member moments for students today.        Finally, I am curious about the socio-economics, the article did not mention it. Perhaps Valerie can help me with this as she has worked for after school programs, do after school programs serve lower-socioeconomic students? |
| **Author:** Beate Pody **Posted date:** Sunday, March 28, 2010 4:08:05 PM EDT  Karena, I would like to pick up your point on lack of rides. This is also an issue I have only found in this country. If municipalities could focus on supplying us with even such rudimentary infrastructure as semi-hourly buses from 4am until midnight along major routes (this is about the level Africa functions on), many of the problems would go away. Students would not feel the need to text their friends, they could actually go and see them - like the rest of the world does. Seeing their friends would reduce students need to socialize during class. This might lead to students actually paying attention and learning something. The reduced gadget dependency would free money parents are now spending which would leave some money to cook actual meals which reduces obesity etc. etc. Since my county cut after-school buses, I am spending every afternoon chauffeuring assorted children of mine to a variety of activities for a total of eight hours! In Europe, the Middle East and Africa I did not have to do this. Children there are much more independent. They use public transportation from the age of six. Here I teach 18 year old teenagers the majority of whom have not been on a public bus, metro or street car (not counting school buses), and have never seen a train station or an airport! In what way are those children prepared for a global level job? The problem is far more complex than after-school programs can ever touch. Until governments realize that they will continue to put band-aids on corpses. |

# ****II. Brochure “enGauge – 21st Century Skills”****

## Original Post

**The brochure “enGauge – 21st Century Skills” was developed by the Metiri Group and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). The brochure focuses on “helping students thrive in the digital age” (title, p.2) and builds on the concept that “in order to remain competitive tomorrow, today’s students need to develop techniques that readily adapt to changes as they occur” (introduction, p.2), in other words, flexibility. In addition to the just referenced introductory page, a page on methodology and a final page of references, the brochure offers three visually pleasing main pages. The first (p. 3) divides academic achievement in the 21st century into four groups (digital-age literacy, inventive thinking, effective communication, and high productivity) with three sub-groups each. The second and third (p. 4 and 5) analyze the sub groups of these groups in one column per group.**

**The list proves that even the self-anointed undefined “experts” (Inventive Thinking, Creativity) are somewhat missing the point. Under Basic Literacy they demand that “students demonstrate language proficiency” (Digital-Age Literacy, top), then immediately limit themselves by adding in brackets (in English). Yet students are expected to be competitive in a global economy. Ouch. Under Global Awareness (Digital-Age Literacy, bottom) students are expected to “recognize and understand relationships among various entities across the globe”. Excuse my sarcasm, but that is really insufficient, not to mention vague – and certainly not taught in school. As with multicultural literacy, global awareness presupposes education in geography, history, literature (of those countries) and multiple foreign languages, ancient and modern. None of this is in the curriculum other than in short form and/or as an elective. To acquire proficiency in any of those disciplines, students need six to ten years of exposure.**

**It was interesting to see Curiosity under the Inventive Thinking category. I believe that many ills in education could be cured by addressing this issue. Students are so self-centered and complacent in their “gimme-gimme” world that actually *wanting* to think and learn something completely eludes them. As the “Afterschool” article pointed out, students are aware that they do not have the skills. However what that article forgot to mention is that students do not take responsibility for that lack, but rather blame others who, in turn, instantly jump on the guilt wagon instead of holding the younger generation responsible for being in charge of their own learning who are busy wallowing in self-indulgence while texting their friends during class how it is their teachers’ fault they are failing – instead of actually paying attention, hunker down and study.**

**Under the Effective Communication header I missed seeing appropriate face-to-face communication. Meeting with teenagers and young college-level adults it is obvious that interpersonal skills and especially face-to-face communication was not only not a priority in their upbringing but virtually non-existent. They cannot look adults in the face, do not greet first – or at all, do not know how to shake hands properly – or at all, and are awkward when it comes to making conversation. Yet they communicate constantly through e-mail, messenger, texting, chat rooms and what not. Why on earth is the focus on technology when the obvious need is to turn these anti-social zombies into functional co-workers that can write a logical, complex, correctly spelled, grammatically and syntactically sound sentence? Just one sentence, at least in English!**

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| [Show Parent Post](https://blackboard.umw.edu/webapps/discussionboard/do/message?action=list_messages&forum_id=_10931_1&course_id=_16087_1&nav=group_forum&conf_id=_15406_1&group_id=_4374_1&message_id=_179680_1) Response **Author:** Valorie Jonas **Date:** Sunday, March 28, 2010 5:41:01 PM EDT **Subject:** enGauge 21c skills  My initial reaction to this article was that it was incredible similar in concept to the other 21st century article. Both state that we need to enforce technology in schools. They both state students need to develop "people" skills.  When you look at the chart on page 3, it lists that children to develop inventive thinking. Schools fail here, as they in no way encourage "curiosity, creativity, and risk taking". It is not until high school that students get the ability (via extracurricular clubs) to develop "personal, social, and civic responsibility". Our schools do nothing to help our students acheive the academic excellence this article says they should have. |
| **Author:** Beate Pody **Posted date:** Sunday, March 28, 2010 6:14:13 PM EDT  I would like to disagree. Actually, I think from my experience in elementary schools that that is all kids learn there. What they don't learn is basics, like grammar. Curiosity is great among elementary school kids and good elementary teachers foster that. It is middle school that kills curiosity by focusing on SOL's and squashing any initiative to research anything other than what is in the curriculum. Creativity is definitely fostered in music and art classes as well as in regular instruction. Those classes also disappear in middle school and become electives. Students with clear career goals don't have time to take music or art because they have to take higher math, foreign languages (well, that's the only good part) and AP courses, which prevents them from growing as a person and makes them slaves of the career mill. Risk taking is also encouraged in elementary school by eliminating a lot of the consequence that failure at risk taking in higher grades brings with it since all the focus is on exams and everything is graded for quality and not for effort (which has led to lowering standards so everyone can pass). Elementary students are also much better at civic responsibility. They still care what the teacher and the parents think of them and are very proud when they are able to accomplish something that has impact on the community. By the time kids are in high school, most kids have stopped caring. The only reason I don't mind teaching elementary school once in a while are exactly those points. Kids are still curious, creative, take risks, and care. That is nice to observe after weeks on end in middle and high school. |

# III. 21st Century Skills – Cross-Match to National Models

## Original Post

The handout 21st Century Skills compares different national standards of educational technology in spreadsheet form. The first three pages compare the 2000 National Educational Technology Standards (ISTE-NETS) for students with enGauge 21st Century Skills. The author points out that ISTE Standards fail to specifically address visual literacy, global awareness, adaptability/managing, complexity, curiosity or risk-taking. Despite these shortcomings, ISTE manages to address some issues more to the point, though. Under “2. Social, Ethical and Human Issues” (p.1) ISTE admonishes students to “practice responsible use of technology systems, information, and software”. This statement shows incredible insight of the fact that although technology is here to stay and is rapidly evolving, there can be too much of a good thing and caution should be exercised. ISTE also supports lifelong learning (same category, p.2), a concept that does not seem to occur to the other group. Under “4. Technology communication Tools” ISTE asks that “students use a variety of media and formats to communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences”. To me, the emphasis lies on “multiple audiences”. Teens need to learn to communicate with others than their peers, including manners and change of register.

Pages four through six compare the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills’ (SCANS) and enGauge’s criteria for schools. The author points out that SCANS proficiencies “ do not explicitly address multicultural literacy, global awareness, aspects of interactive communication and visual literacy, nor high-quality results. Again, I personally prefer ISTE standards because they are more specific as to their sub-categories of which ISTE on average offers twice as many each as does SCANS, thus enabling a better understanding of what it actually is that they postulate. As an example I would like to cite ISTE’s “Knowing how to learn” and “reasoning” versus enGauge’s “sound reasoning”. Knowing how to learn really is not covered by the sonorous “sound reasoning”. How is reasoning different from sound reasoning to require only the second, but not the first? I have voiced my opinion on curiosity in the enGauge discussion and do not wish to repeat myself.

Pages seven through nine compare enGauge with the findings of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). The author points out that AASL and AECT standards are somewhat limited from the point of view of library media specialists compared to the broader scope enGauge has to offer. Again, I prefer the non enGauge version as more hands-on and “both-feet-on-the-ground” than vacant-buzz-word-oriented enGauge. Let me quote a poignant dialogue from one of my favorite movies, “Groundhog Day”:

*“*[*Phil*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000195/)*: I think people place too much emphasis on their careers. I wish we could all live in the mountains at high altitude. That's where I see myself in five years. How about you?*[*Rita*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000510/)*: Oh, I agree. I just like to go with the flow. See where it leads me.*[*Phil*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000195/)*: Well, it's led you here.*[*Rita*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000510/)*: Mm hmm. Of course it's about a million miles from where I started out in college.*[*Phil*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000195/)*: You weren't in broadcasting or journalism?*[*Rita*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000510/)*: Uh unh. Believe it or not, I studied 19th-century French poetry.*[*Phil*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000195/)*: [laughs] What a waste of time! I mean, for someone else that would be an incredible waste of time. It's so bold of you to choose that. It's incredible; you must have been a very, very strong person.”*

Source: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107048/quotes

Phil is the cold-hearted career-oriented self-centered idiot who gets stuck in time and doomed to relive the same day until he finally discovers what really counts in life and gets the day – and his life – finally right. In the dialogue above he is obviously “a million miles” from redeeming himself. I cannot help but equate the librarians with Rita. A solitary voice of culture and dignity that predicts doom correctly – and no one cares – l like the proverbial Cassandra of Greek mythology. But they are right anyway.

Pages ten and eleven compare enGauge with the findings of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) and the National Research Council (NRC). Their findings were surprisingly enlightening as they referred to technology shaping human history and people shaping technology (p.10) and the remark that “…all technology entails risk(s), some that can be anticipated and some that cannot” and the encouragement to “ask[s] pertinent questions, of self and others, regarding the benefits and risks of technology”. Although I would be reluctant to let engineers make the rules for what the curriculum in schools looks like, I have to admit that it is best to listen to a lot of opinions before making policies.

Pages 12-14 compare enGauge to standards developed by the International Technology Education Association (ITEA). They also emphasize technology, as should be expected. Again, interesting the reference to other fields, as with the previous groups and a first mention of how the environment will be affected, this apparently was of no concern to everyone else. I was glad to hear that at least one group takes that aspect under consideration so our children will not end up living planet-less on a space station hurtling through the universe in self-imposed exile.

The last to pages are a checklist- overview of all entities and constitute a good quick reference guide.

In conclusion I want to caution against making education about technology. Technology has always been a tool of culture and civilization, occasionally changing history such as the wheel and the printing press. But turning it into a god and becoming its slave will cripple our minds – as it has already done to millions of people. There is a point which neither I nor my children want to reach where we cannot function without being surrounded by gadgets. Children need technology classes as much as they need lessons on how to survive without it, such as a ten-day camp-out in nature without electricity and battery-operated appliances and gadgets.

*Just some trivia for those who love the scene from Groundhog Day: the poem that Phil recites after he finally does learn French is actually an excerpt from a famous song by Belgian mega-songster Jacques Brel called “La Bourrée du Célibataire”. It was written in 1957. Way to go, Hollywood! Could not even find a 19th century French poem and had to substitute a Belgian 20th century song. To top it off, it is not romantic as suggested in the movie, but basically telling the girl friend tongue-in-cheek to get lost because she definitely is NOT what the poet wants.*

Response:

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| [Show Parent Post](https://blackboard.umw.edu/webapps/discussionboard/do/message?action=list_messages&forum_id=_10931_1&course_id=_16087_1&nav=group_forum&conf_id=_15406_1&group_id=_4374_1&message_id=_179656_1)  **Author:** Valorie Jonas **Date:** Sunday, March 28, 2010 5:18:23 PM EDT **Subject:** 21st century skills  The purpose of this article was to show the ways in which the standards of learning have developed throughout the years. It places an emphasis on technology by comparing these skills to the 21st century skills student need to be productive.  One of the main things I took from this article is that each of these standards may be different, but each focuses on both technological and economic literacy.  This proves the importance of using technology in schools. Students need to be exposed to various methods of implementing technology in learning.  I think the main problem with this article is similar to the problems addressed in the "Afterschool" article. The issue is that these skills are not taught in the classrooms at all. When you look at the section "What Work Requires of Schools" (p.4-6), it lists multiple skills that deal with interacting with peers. It states employees need an ability to problem solve and manage time, money, and human resources. Our schools teach information from a textbook and that is it. Children are tested on facts and information and are never given a chance to develop the skills that are beneficial to be successful in the workforce. It often is not until college that classes give students the opportunity to develop many people skills. By then it is often too late. |
| **Author:** Beate Pody **Posted date:** Sunday, March 28, 2010 6:01:45 PM EDT  It is also a fact that job training is non-existing in this country. Europe for example has trade schools that teach exactly that. You learn the theory in middle and high school, then you go to trade schools and learn how to apply the theory to your particular job. As far as I am concerned it is impossible to place such a burden on schools. It is setting them up for failure, just like AYP. How can you ever set 100% success as a goal? It is unrealistic and invites cheating. Why were you happy with the 41 and 45% improvement that the after-school program achieved? Because it was listed as a success! I thought it was pitiful, because as a teacher I am looking at AYP requirements, now in the 90+% range, which is more than twice that of the after-school program's so-called success. If employers need specific skills to be present then they need to develop those programs and have their employees take them. But they are too cheap for that and want taxpayers to do their (the employers') job. As the counselors' and secretaries' bumper sticker points out so poignantly: "Lack of planning at your end does not constitute an emergency on my end." Technology is finite in as there not being sufficient time to teach everyone everything in twelve years and, last but not least, technology isn't everything. Let's not forget the basic skills - and expand those to international standards, both in quality and in quantity. Conclusion Asynchronous telecommunication, such as discussion boards, where students post well-thought out ideas are a wonderful way to both demonstrate understanding of a subjects while being exposed to other people’s thoughts and their responses to one’s own thoughts. Due to the thread set-up it is always clear which specific post other students responded to. Postings usually appear with good spelling and grammar. Participants have the opportunity to time their own contributions as they fit into their personal schedule, rather than at a specified time which might not be convenient for several participants for one reason or other. I can definitely see potential use of asynchronous telecommunication in a classroom, especially for cultural subjects in German rather than language subjects. Students could discuss holidays, the school system, historic events, table manners and like subjects. True dialogue would occur. The advantage to having such a discussion orally is of course that there is a record which could be printed or posted on a class web page. Parents and administrators would know the level of thought that occurs in German class and could easily determine their child’s contributions to this particular concept/task and thus gain a better understanding of grades. Other teachers (history, English, geography, government, music, art) would have easy access to the information and would be able to cross-teach. For the teacher, the discussion board could function as a record and as a help for additional guidelines that may be needed in future discussions, such as an additional topic that should definitely be discussed. It can also help the teacher adjust and fine-tune rubrics.  Finally, the discussion board can give the teacher insight as to how well a subject was understood, if further instruction is needed and how much background knowledge students bring to the table. As for differentiation, students who have trouble raising their hand in class may welcome this opportunity to voice their opinion without having to stand up in front of the entire class without a chance to prepare.  Overall, I believe that discussion boards are a great way to enliven instruction. On a high school level, it may be a good idea to start a session in class, then let students add additional thoughts throughout the week, either from home or from school computers. By allowing ample time – which, by the way, does not all come out of instructional time – students would be required to think about an issue for more than 90 minutes. At the same time, even students who do not have access to technology are given the opportunity to provide full input. |

References

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METIRI Group. (2003). *EnGauge 21st Century Skills* [Brochure]. Retrieved from http://www.ncrel.org/engauge/skills/skills.htm