

## The Independent School Magazine Blog

### Bassett Blog, 2011/11: The Five Cs + One

by Bassett, Patrick on 11/9/2011 11:52 AM  
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*Editor's Note: This blog is the first in a series of seven blogs answering a most important generative question for schools: "What are the skills and values the 21st century will demand and reward?" The "Six Cs" answer to this question — creativity (Oct. 2011); character (Dec. 2011); critical thinking (Jan. 2012); communication (Feb. 2012); cosmopolitanism/cross cultural competency (Mar. 2012); collaboration (Apr. 2012) — describes what many believe we should teach and students should learn in school.*



NAIS President  
 Patrick F. Bassett

Call me Ishmael. I've been on a journey. Its destination is Nirvana, that place where sense and sensibility unite in terms of what we want for our children and grandchildren and their children, and thereby what and how we teach the next generations. And like Ishmael, I hope to share the essence of what I've seen and experienced in my journey, what the school of the future will look like and the 'gobbly sea' in which it sails. I'll do so by giving glimpses of it from the navigators who are charting the course and from the intrepid NAIS schools and other high-performing systems in the U.S. and abroad that are well on their way to sailing to that destination.

If you haven't heard me speak over the last three years on the topic of "Schools of the Future," I'd be surprised. But, for the record, I'd like to capture the essence of that journey in a series of blogs over the next several months, each one dedicated to one of the "Cs," the critical skills and values the 21st Century will demand and reward. The ship that carries me is constructed on a rubric I call "The Five Cs + One," the universally agreed-upon expectations that quality schooling teaches not subjects so much as a handful of essential skills and values that when they stick result in graduates who are ethical and successful contributors and leaders in their families, their communities, the workplace, and the world.

The first forays into uncharted waters began with the crashing waves of Dan Pink's book, *A Whole New Mind*, about how "right-brained creativity" was the key to prosperity in the 21st Century. Those waves were amplified by Sir Ken Robinson's *Ted Talks* (and books) on the centrality of creativity and divergent thinking to intellectual growth, and, at the same time, neutralized by his revealing the growing evidence of the killing of creativity in the suffocating dullness of much of American schooling.

What both of these seminal figures started, many others have developed and expanded, so much so that a litany of reputable voices quickly emerged from a plethora of sectors, all coming to the same conclusions about the skills and values necessary for individuals and the collective culture and economy to succeed in the 21st Century: The "Five Cs" of *critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, character* and the bonus "Sixth C" I've recently added: *cosmopolitanism* (cross-cultural competency).

(In the Resources and Notes section following the end of this blog, you'll find a summary of seven sources for this claim of the universal agreement on "The Cs," with the patterns clearly delineated. I'd add that the evidence from the published works cited is complemented by workshops I've conducted in 30+ states and 30+ countries for school parents, faculty, leaders, and trustees, where, when asked to identify the essential skills and values for the 21st Century, the crowd immediately, spontaneously, and always identify the same five or six indicated above.)

While the first "Five Cs" are not original to the 21st Century, what's new is the recognition of the absence of their emphasis and the lack of evidence of their attainment. And therein lies the story of our challenge and the journey as we embed more consistently and deeply each of these skills and values.

What does all this mean for your school?

**One practical step:** Now that most of our schools have finished "backward designing" and "mapping" subjects (math, language arts, science, foreign language, social studies/history, the arts, etc.), it's time to do so for the six Cs: What's your K-12 creativity map? Your collaboration map? Your character map? Your cosmopolitanism/cross-cultural competency map? Etc.

**One larger step:** Since before the beginning of the university centuries ago, knowledge has been compartmentalized, by the subject area disciplines, those noted above and many others: It's worth wondering if students wouldn't be better-served if we paid more attention to organizing knowledge in the service of skills rather than the other way around. And

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experimenting with how project-based learning, inquiry learning, expeditionary learning, STEM robotics, and the like as the vessels for re-engaging students in real-world problem-solving, "where "just in time" learning replaces "just in case" learning.

So, dear reader, stay tuned for six blogs on each of these "Cs." And comment on where your school is on this journey into becoming a "school of the future." Or, for that matter, why you might think it's a map to folly.

#### Resources and Notes: Themes Extracted

1. *Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills for the American Workforce.*

This report is, in effect, *Nation at Risk, The Sequel*, in which a similarly credentialed blue ribbon panel of governors, college presidents, Fortune 500 company CEOs and educational experts scan the economic and educational landscape and call for bold re-engineering of schools, focusing on...

- creativity and innovation (*creativity*)
- facility with the use of ideas and abstractions (*critical thinking*)
- self-discipline and organization to manage one's own work and drive it through to successful conclusion (*character*)
- leadership
- ability to function well as a member of a team (*collaboration*)

Missing from this list: *cosmopolitanism/cross-cultural competency*

2. *Five Minds for the Future.* Harvard's Howard Gardner (known best for his *Multiple Intelligences* book and research) contributes these concepts:

- synthesizing mind - scanning, filtering, and weaving into coherence (*communication*)
- creating mind - discovery and innovation (*creativity*)
- respectful mind - open mindedness and inclusiveness (*cosmopolitanism/cross cultural competency*)
- ethical mind (*character*)

3. *College Learning for the New Global Century.* Published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, this work identifies the following as key learnings:

- cross-disciplinary knowledge (*critical thinking*)
- communication skills (*communication*)
- teamwork (*collaboration*)
- analytical reasoning (*critical thinking*)
- real world problem-solving skills (*critical thinking*)

4. *Google:* Google's Hiring Criteria:

- creative and entrepreneurial (*creativity*)
- high character (*character*)
- effective communicator (*communication*)
- collaborator (*collaboration*)

Missing from this list: critical thinking – but only because it is implied in the Google culture, as revealed by its billboard found all around the country meant to attract intellectually curious and smart applicants: "Name the first 10-digit prime found in consecutive digits of e."

5. *EdLeader21* (the public school sector's equivalent of NAIS is using NAIS's exact list):

- Critical thinking
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Creativity

Missing from this list: character

6. *ETS* (Educational Testing Service): The new GRE (graduate record exam) is an adaptive computerized test, with the requirement that applicants have two professors submit letters of recommendation to send with GRE scores to graduate schools. The letters require the professors to comment upon:

- knowledge and creativity (*critical thinking and creativity*)
- communication skills (*communications*)
- team work (*collaboration*)
- resilience, planning and organization (*character*)
- ethics and integrity (*character*)

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Missing from the list: *cosmopolitanism/cross-cultural competency*

7. *The General Public*: The Knowledge Works Newsletter (October, 2007) reveals that the public knows exactly what all the scholars and experts know: the Five Cs are critical skills not well-taught in schools:

	<b>Percentage of voters who rank this skill as a 9 or 10 in importance on a scale of 0 to 10</b>	<b>Percentage of voters who give schools a 9 or 10 in teaching this skill on a scale of 0 to 10</b>
<b>Reading comprehension</b>	76 percent	10 percent
<b>Computer and technology skills</b>	71 percent	26 percent
<b>Critical thinking and problem-solving skills</b>	69 percent	6 percent
<b>Ethics and social Responsibility</b>	62 percent	6 percent
<b>Written communications</b>	58 percent	5 percent
<b>Teamwork and collaboration</b>	57 percent	9 percent
<b>Oral communications</b>	56 percent	6 percent
<b>Lifelong learning and self-direction</b>	50 percent	5 percent
<b>Mathematics (algebra, geometry, and trigonometry)</b>	48 percent	13 percent
<b>Leadership</b>	44 percent	6 percent
<b>Creativity and innovation</b>	43 percent	5 percent

Source: Public Opinion Strategies and Peter D. Hart Research Associates

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