Source:
- Google Education on Air Webinar May 8th 2015  
  https://educationonair.withgoogle.com/live/2015-may/watch
- YEFG Summit on May 8th 2015

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Insight & Learning Questions (What do we want to learn about?):
How is the nature of work changing? What is driving this shift (business & public policy)? What are the skills that job seekers will need in the future to access job / business opportunities? How will this vary by beneficiary group? What do skilling practitioners need to do in order to adapt their programs to this shift?

Insight Byte:
Two recent events focused on ‘soft skills’ triggered this Insight Byte.

Google EduAir Conference:
Speakers: Jaime Casap (Global Education Evangelist, Google), Jouni Kangasniemi (Senior Adviser, US Ministry of Education and Culture), Ken Shelton (Educator, Trainer, and Google Certified Teacher), Zoe Tabari (Editor, Economist Business Intelligence Unit), Nicole (Secondary Student, UK)
- Many skills are needed to succeed in the “21st century skills” like digital literacy, leadership, creativity, etc. However, based on a recent survey of business leaders around the world, the top 3 skills that are the most critical for success in the 21st century are: problem solving, teamwork, and communication
- However, our education system isn’t keeping up with this. In that same survey of business leaders, over 50% stated that a skills gap is hindering their company’s performance.
  - These same employers stated that the private sector needs to be more involved in the education system, considering their most high-potential involvement channels to be providing internships/apprenticeships and helping to broaden access to technology in schools and universities
- One reason we’ve struggled with developing these 21st century skills in our existing education system is that we haven’t embedded development of these 21st century skills into the curriculum but are rather trying to teach them apart (e.g. teaching how to debate rather than integrating a debate component into existing history curriculums). We need to be making every subject we’re teaching practical to encourage development of problem-solving.

The current education isn’t broken in the sense that it’s still doing what it was designed to do well – it’s just that the world has changed. But now we need to do what we did when we designed that system – ask ourselves what we need to do in our schools NOW and reshape that system to support the new age
What we need to do better to teach these 21st century skills of problem solving, collaborating, and leading:

- We need to teach students that failure isn’t a bad thing – knowing how to fail and extract the necessary lessons to be better the next time is key in developing problem solving skills (and not being afraid of the problems)
- In a world that is changing faster than ever before, we need to realize that regardless of how much our children learn in school, the learning process will need to be continuous throughout their lives to succeed. Therefore, we need to realize that teaching students how to learn (“learfing”) is one of the most important things we must provide them with – to interrogate knowledge (i.e. develop critical thinking) and to seek out knowledge for oneself in response to ever-changing situations. Learning is no longer about remembering or having the right answers but about empowering yourself to seek out these answers and understanding them.
  - Therefore, we need to teach mindsets – not skills. Skills can become obsolete and have a finite time period often while a curious mindset is lasting and is what helps you acquire the needed skills for whatever you need to learn.
  - The teacher role is thus becoming more about supporting the students than instructing them.
- We need to transition to an action learning approach – especially key when teaching skills like problem solving, communication, and entrepreneurship (e.g. set up a snack bar at the school)
  - Instead of asking kids what they want to be, we should be asking what problem do you want to solve. Teachers’ role is to then help define an actionable problem for them to solve, identify what skills they’ll need to acquire to solve it, and then guide them through solving it. Identifying the problem is just as critical a skill as solving it.
- We need to embrace technology, with all of the new tools that it offers to develop problem solving, collaboration, digital literacy, etc. Technology has a central role to play in this transition to a 21st century skilling environment, but schools aren’t keeping up yet.
  - In a recent global survey, only 25% of 11-17 year olds said their schools are embracing technology in the classrooms & Digital Literacy is the #1 area cited where teachers say they want more training, stating that they feel intimidated by students often being more digitally literate than them
  - Educators need to recognize the importance of technology not just as a tool but as an integral part of the education system (communication, collaboration, and networking). There is currently a fledgling approach called “no child left offline” – needs to become more widespread.
  - More educators need to share what’s working more so can be leveraged by others – there’s a lot of great success stories out there but we’re not hearing enough about them.

A few lessons from Finland’s Minister of Education and Culture (a country that is consistently recognized as having one of the top education systems in the world):

- They define the national core curriculum in 10-year cycles and involve cross-disciplinary and cross-sector people around the table to inform it – politicians, teachers, parents, students, etc. It’s done both at the national level (top down) but also at the local level (bottom up) and all of the inputs are then triangulated to get to the final product.
- Furthermore, the local level has the flexibility to customize the curriculum as needed. Teachers are allowed to customize content, metrics, learning assessments, etc. as they see fit based on their context and students.
- They have reduced the amount of homework and started giving more breaks between classes to encourage collaboration among learners and make learning fun. They don’t test everything that’s taught and don’t punish for failure to encourage learning and taking risks.
Youth Employment Funder’s Group summit which previewed findings of the study “Key “Soft” Skills that Foster Youth Workforce Success: Towards a Consensus Across Fields”, conducted by Child Trends, as a partner of the Workforce Connections project managed by FHI 360, and supported by USAID:

- 5 critical skills were identified that appear to increase the odds of S2S outcomes and that employers expect employees to have: social skills, communication, and higher-order thinking (which includes problem solving, and critical thinking and decision-making).

NOTE: Self-control and positive self-concept were two other key intrapersonal skills that were seen as “supportive” of the other five.

- These findings apply across geographies, genders, socio-economic groups, etc.

- These five skills are malleable for the specific age group of 15-29 (i.e. able to be improved through training and experience).

The study will be published in July.

Taking Action: What can you do next with this knowledge?

- Share these insights with your S2S practitioner partners to see whether they are focusing on these 21st century ‘soft’ skills in their programs and whether they are already thinking about these best practices. Ask them if they have relevant experience in terms of other things that have worked well in teaching these skills that they’d like to share or if there are other skills that they see as equally relevant in the 21st century that weren’t covered. If so, leave a comment in the Circle for us to “harvest” and share with the network.

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