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Great Lakes Center: Otherwise valuable report about assessment of 21st century skills neglects discipline-specific considerations

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Key Takeaway: Report highlights the importance of 21st century skills internationally but presumes a domain-general approach to teaching and assessment of those skills.

EAST LANSING, MI (April 2, 2019) – A report from the Brookings Institution uses international examples to make the case for the importance of "21st century skills" as goals for education systems. It focuses specifically on the development of new assessment methods as a primary means to help countries integrate these 21st century skills – such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and communication – into curricular reforms.

Lorrie Shepard, of the University of Colorado Boulder, reviewed *Education System Alignment for 21st Century Skills: Focus on Assessment*. Professor Shepard found the report very useful if the reader understands that it tells only part of the story.

The report is a review of research and a policy analysis rather than an empirical study. Its main contributions are (a) the identification of three challenges to implementing a 21st century skills agenda, and (b) the organization of key ideas and research to possibly address these challenges.

A major limitation of the report, however, is its presumption of a domain-general approach to teaching and assessment of 21st century skills. The report does not acknowledge the possibility of, nor does it consider supporting evidence for, adopting discipline-specific contexts for the development of 21st century capabilities. Yet extensive reviews of research from the cognitive and learning sciences explain the benefit of jointly developing deep understandings of content along with participatory and thinking competencies.

Although such discipline-specific curricula and learning progressions create problems for large-scale comparative assessments that cross curricular jurisdictions, policymakers need help addressing this dilemma explicitly. This is because discipline-specific approaches are better for teaching and deep learning but problematic when attempting to develop large-scale international assessments, and possibly even national assessments.

Find the review, by Lorrie Shepard, at:
http://greatlakescenter.org/docs/Think_Twice/TT-Shepard-Assessment.htm

Find *Education System Alignment for 21st Century Skills: Focus on Assessment,* written by Esther Care, Helyn Kim, Alvin Vista, & Kate Anderson, and published by The Brookings Institution, at:
https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/-Education-system-alignment-for-21st-century-skills-012819.pdf

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