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Why are Soft Skills Missing in Today's Applicants

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Why are Soft Skills Missing in Today's Job Applicants?

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Approval Page

The dissertation of Brian Schooley is approved by the Dissertation Committee.

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Abstract

The employers in our country are claiming students are graduating high school and college without the soft skills to succeed in this country's workforce. This study examined what are soft skills and why are they missing from recent graduates. The study took a historical approach to trace how soft skills have been used and ignored in our nation's educational history to the point where employers are claiming they are missing in today's job applicants. The study then conducted focus groups with elementary, middle and high school teachers to assess their ideas on why soft skills are missing or if they believe these skills are missing at all. The study also contacted employers in the Western Kentucky area to assess if they agree with their national colleagues on whether soft skills are missing, who is to blame for them missing and what can be done to correct this problem. The results were transcribed and coded to recognize the main themes of these two groups. The results, analysis and recommendations were presented to the client, McCracken County Schools. The researcher will work with the school district to use these results to establish what can be done to improve soft skills in their graduates.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Employers are constantly searching for talent that enables their businesses to thrive. The main focus of employers when interviewing job applicants has been to determine the applicants' technical skills. It was not necessary for employers to focus on soft skills in job interviews because students were taught such skills in school (Christakas, 2012). Current employers, however, must look for applicants with these skills as well because although they believe that today's applicant pool is sufficient in technical skills, they have found that it is sorely lacking in soft skills (Christakas, 2012). The aim of this doctoral paper is to conduct a qualitative study in the following areas:

1. How do employers perceive the current state of soft skills in today's applicants?

2. How do applicants perceive soft skills?

3. What factors have contributed to the current state in soft skills?

4. What can be done to increase soft skills in today's graduates and applicants thus making them college and career ready?

The first step that must be taken is to understand what are soft skills. These skills are traits of a person that relate to his/her interpersonal components such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, communication, conflict management, professionalism and ethics (Alam, Azim, Gale, Kirkham, Khan, & Lawlor-Wright, 2010). These skills are in direct contrast to what many of today's applicants believe is needed for a job. These applicants argue that having sufficient technical or hard skills should suffice to obtain a job. Employers disagree because they believe both hard and soft skills are now needed for today's workforce. The employers see these skills as complementary which will make a person more employable (Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht & Lee, 2010). An

employee not only must have the knowledge to complete a task, but also have the critical

thinking and problem-solving skills to assure the task is done correctly. The challenge

employers are stating that they have finding graduates with these skills became an

intriguing problem to the researcher. It led employers and school administration to many

questions such as:

1. Why is this lack of soft skills important?

2. Where have they gone?

3. What has hindered them?

4. What can be done to help increase the awareness and learning of soft skills?

Significance of the Problem

    Employers are claiming that job applicants do not possess the full array of skills

that make them viable employable candidates (Jaschik, 2015). These same employers are

saying the problem lies in their lack of soft skills. The skills that employers seek for their

prospective employees can be divided into hard and soft skills (Omar, Bakar, & Rashid,

2012). The hard skills are seen as the work knowledge a prospective job applicant must

possess to fulfill the position for which they apply (Nilsson, 2010). An example is

whether an applicant for a social studies teaching position has a degree in education and

social studies. This credential is easy to identify, but the skills that are difficult to

determine in a job interview are whether the applicant has the required soft skills for the

job such as critical thinking, problem-solving, dependability, teamwork, communication,

ethics and initiative (Shafie & Nayan, 2010). Employers believe students are receiving

the appropriate training in content knowledge but are lacking in the area of a holistic

education, which hinders their soft skills development. A number of factors contribute to

this hindrance and will be discussed later in this chapter as well as in the literature

review.

Prospective employees do not share the employers' view that lacking of soft skills

means they are unprepared for their future jobs (Jaschik, 2015). Students believe gaining

the hard skills or technical knowledge should be sufficient when securing a job; however,

this is clearly not the case. This gap between applicants and employers can be seen as a

major contributor to graduates' below average performances at job interviews. Students

have shown lack of respect, poor work ethic and insubordination in internships and

lacked communication skills in the interview process (Hargis, 2011). These instances

show the need for this study to not only see if the claim that applicants lack the

employability demanded by employers is valid, but also to trace the factors causing this

loss of soft skills and what can be done to ensure graduates and future job applicants are

college and career ready with the soft skills employers are seeking (Jaschik, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question "Why are soft skills

lacking in today's graduates?" This problem is evident nation-wide and locally in

McCracken County. This study attempted to answer this question along with the

subsequent secondary research questions "What factors are hindering soft skills

development?" and "What can schools and community leaders do to promote the

development of soft skills?" This study sought the answers to these questions and

presents them to the client, McCracken County Schools. These answers will help the

client to determine what results can be used to strengthen their College and Career

Readiness programs along with helping the continued development of their Career

Pathways program with the maritime industry.

Setting and Goals of the Client

The client for this study is McCracken County Public Schools (MCPS), which is

located in Paducah, Kentucky. Paducah, McCracken County's main city, is a quaint town

known for its river industry, flood wall, quilt museum and annual BBQ festival. The city

is also the home of Alben Barkley, a former Vice President of the United States, and Irvin

Cobb, a famous author. The population of Paducah is approximately 25,000. The total

population of McCracken County is 65,316. The percentage of McCracken County's

residents with a high school diploma is 86.9%, while only 22.5% of the county's

population holds a bachelor's degree or higher (US Census Bureau, 2015). The poverty

level for McCracken County is at 16.2% (US Census Bureau, 2015). The main industries

in this county are Services (which includes Education, Government, Health Care and

Public Services) 45.3%; Trade, Transportation and Utilities 30.9% and Manufacturing

7.9% (thinkkentucky.com, 2015). The county's unemployment rate is 5.1%

(research.stlouisfed.org, 2015); and its principle job focus is education, maritime industry

and health care. The city is making a push to be a work-ready community. These work

ready communities provide counties and states with actionable data and specific

workforce goals to drive economic growth (ACT Workready Community", 2016). The

work-ready community initiative is working with the ACT National Career Readiness

Certificate, which is designed to measure and close skills gaps among workers and job

seekers ("ACT Workready Community", 2016). The ACT Career Readiness initiative is

leading the local schools to push for career paths to create jobs in the maritime industry

as well as teaching students soft skills. The schools the researcher worked with (Heath Elementary, Heath Middle School and McCracken County High School) are part of the McCracken County School District Career Readiness initiative. These schools are adopting a neoliberalism type of approach toward this initiative. According to the neoliberalist belief, movement should be made from human capital to a formula of market value and creating workers for that market (Apple, 2006). This way of thinking has become the foundation of school-to-work programs such as the Maritime Career Pathway being created in McCracken County. The basis of thinking is that the world will need as many cash register operators, or in McCracken County's case maritime workers, as engineers and computer programmers (Apple, 2000). This initiative will produce all four types of workers.

The McCracken County School District consists of five elementary schools, two intermediate schools, three middle schools and a newly consolidated high school, which brought Heath High School, Lone Oak High School, and Reidland High School students together to form the McCracken County High School. The district is classified as a "Distinguished District" based on its performance district wide scores on the state mandated test, K-PREP (MCPS, 2015).

The school district also participates in the Commonwealth Middle College. This program is a joint effort by McCracken County, Marshall County, and West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC) to allow students to graduate high school with at least 36 hours of college credit ("McCracken County Middle College', 2015). Students are asked to meet the requirements for WKCTC. Those requirements are as follows:

1) Good attendance and discipline records at school

2) Student shows a focus on higher education

3) First-generation college student

4) Faculty reference

5) At least a 2.5 GPA

6) Strong Work Ethic ("McCracken County Middle College", 2015).

McCracken County Public Schools (MCPS) are focusing on Career Pathways and College and Career Readiness programs to address the concerns of area business leaders who agree with their national counterparts that students are lacking the necessary soft skills to be productive employees. The next section looks at McCracken County Schools' plan to make students part of a work-ready community, and how it will fit into the current study. Career Pathways are examined so it can be determined how the research questions will help promote the goal of producing students with the right soft skills to be successful contributors to the Career Pathways program for the client.

Career Pathways

The MCPS is working with the Kentucky Department of Education and WKCTC to create career paths to teach students soft skills so they will exhibit proficiency in the workforce. The main focus of the district's consolidated plan is to provide a program that will create jobs in the county with the priority that graduating students will be proficient in the area of soft skills. The problem arises with how the school district will assess its students to show proficiency. The district is embracing techniques of innovation, implementation and diversity to attack this problem.

The MCPS is actively exploring innovative measures to accomplish its goal of preparing students to be work-ready. Online courses are being put into place to teach the students work-ready skills and to help with the assessment of the students' soft skills and the skills of the new maritime programs. The new program affects every student so it must be a diverse plan. The district is striving to make sure that 100% of its students graduate with proficiency in soft skills to make them work-ready employees.

Career Pathways Accreditation

Accreditation is the second phase that the district must conquer to make the goal of graduating work-ready students become a reality. The district is working with the Perkins Federal Reserve Grant, Kentucky Department of Education and WKCTC to create career paths in the maritime industry where students can embrace soft skills to successfully work in one of Paducah's leading industries, the river. The grant places several stipulations on how classes are to be taught and what skills are to be learned. It also places restrictions on how the career paths are to be constructed. The program must be created, reviewed and approved before the grant is issued. The program is then subject to an annual review, which means the district must follow the guidelines to maintain accreditation. This process will be discussed further in the assessment plan portion of this paper. First, the importance of career paths and soft skills needs to be discussed, which will be done in the literature review.

This section will look at what the components of Career Pathways so a study can be conducted on how to infuse this program with the soft skills its participants need to be successful. Career Pathways is a strategy used to develop a community workforce (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2014). The United States believes that this program

can help employees with the transition from their education into their profession (Center

for Law and Social Policy, 2014). This idea began at the federal level and is currently

spreading to the state and local levels which has resulted in more funding for education,

training and opportunities for America's workforce. McCracken County applied for the

Perkins Reserve Grant in 2016, which helps fund a maritime and soft skills program for

the county's students ("McCracken County Public Schools", 2015). The Career Pathway

program consists of six elements that must be accomplished to create a successful

program.

       The Career Pathways program initiates a partnership with community colleges,

primary and secondary schools, the community's workforce and economic development

agents, businesses, labor unions and social service agencies. This partnership allows the

person in the Career Pathways program to receive training for future occupations, to

fulfill the requirements for the credentials in certain fields of employment while

becoming qualified to fill job opportunities in the area's workforce. The adoption of these

ideas has led to the sharing of the fiscal responsibilities of the program by the partners.

The federal, state and local government also provide various avenues of money to help

fund different parts of the Career Pathways program (Center for Law and Social Policy,

2014).

       The first element in creating a successful Career Pathways program is to build a

partnership with different agencies in the area. This shared partnership allows local and

state agencies to share a vision, a mission, goals and plan (Kozumplik, Nyborg, Garcia,

Cantu, & Larsen, 2011). The second portion of this element allows these partners to

determine roles and responsibilities based on the goals and vision they create. This

partnership allows business leaders to deem what soft skills are lacking while the schools decide which levels will teach which skills. It also allows for the state and local partners to reach a consensus on what will be their working relationships.

The second element for a successful Career Pathways program is that the program must identify sector or industry needs and engage the needs of the employers. The first step the McCracken County Schools District leadership team must take is to conduct a labor market analysis. The team then shares the results with its partners (Kozumplik et al., 2011). These results will also show what soft skills are lacking which will allow the partners to target what work areas have high demand and are growing thus creating Career Pathways for these areas. The partners start by identifying the key elements in those areas and then begin to bring them into the fold. McCracken County is discussing future plans with area barge companies for its Maritime Career Pathways ("McCracken County Public Schools", 2015). Once these partnerships are formed, they must be sustained to keep the program successful.

The third element of the Career Pathways program becomes the main backbone of this program. The first step in this element is to determine the entry point for students (Kozumplik et al., 2011). The entry point ranges from high-school graduate, college graduate, adult learner or someone in the current workforce. The pathway will be different for each learner with different competency models being developed which are based on the learner's education level and the career ladder that the learner is choosing (Kozumplik et al., 2011). The entry-level position will determine what soft skills will be added to the curriculum. The partners then seek the approval of the employer that these models are valid and competent. Once the employer gives his or her approval, the models

are modularized, accelerated and contextualized (Kozumplik, et al., 2011). Once the

creation of models leads the partners to determine the industry-recognized credentials to

be provided to students. The students are then given support services during and after

completion of the program (Kozumplik et al., 2011).

   If the third element is the backbone of this program, then the fourth element is the

heart. This element is to identify funding needs and sources. The first step is to identify

the costs associated with the pathway. These costs include system development and

maintenance, developing and implementing the program, program operations and

sustainability costs (Kozumplik et al., 2011). Once these funds are secured, the partners

determine what the key state and local agencies and partners will contribute. The partners

see how much money is needed after the initial discussions with each other and try to

secure the remainder of the funding from public agencies, private foundations and

organizations (Kozumplik et al., 2011).

   The fifth element, which is needed for the Career Pathways program, is the

alignment of policies and programs. The main issue the partners must face is identifying

the statutory and administrative barriers to the cross-agency collaboration (Kozumplik et

al., 2011). The partners then must pursue reforms in state and local policies. These

reforms must be done to make sure the goals and visions are accomplished. When the

process of policy reformation is complete, the attention is turned to current programs.

This attention to current programs will make the necessary changes to each program, as

the partners deem appropriate (Kozumplik et al., 2011).

   The last element is the key to the success of the program. This element deals with

how to measure system change and its performance. The first step in this element is to

define the desired system and program outcomes. The next step will be how to measure system outcomes. This step usually involves all the stakeholders (Kozumplik et al. 2011). The information from this step will allow partners to establish how data will be collected, stored, tracked and shared. The data is analyzed; the outcomes are revisited and the program is evaluated, re-evaluated and assessed (Kozumplik et al., 2011).

This outline of the Career Pathways program shows the elements and their importance to the success of this program, but soft skills must be included in this program as well. Tisha Green Rinker believes high-school students must learn these soft skills. She explains that soft skills are 77% as important to employers as "hard skills" (Green Rinker, 2014). She continues to explain that soft skills are personal traits that allow you to solve problems, work in groups, manage your time and take responsibility for your work, which is what business leaders are saying as well. She says that there are strategies that all high schoolers can learn to help them with these skills.

The first step to learning soft skills is that students must become an effective communicator. One can do so by being an active listener (Green Rinker, 2014). The student should listen, paraphrase comments back and ask questions when in a conversation. Green Rinker uses Julian Treasures' acronym RASA – Receive, Appreciate, Summarize and Ask to show how one should act when conversing with others. This process allows others to feel like they have been heard and appreciated (Green Rinker, 2014).

The second course of action a student can take is developing a strong personal work ethic. In a national survey over 2,000 managers and human resource professionals said the top three soft skills sought are strong work ethic, dependability and positive

attitude (Green Rinker, 2014). The students will usually be required in Career Pathways

to take at least one on-line course. The purpose of this on-line course is to teach students

those exact three soft skills. Students are encouraged to volunteer at non-profit

organizations, intern or take a part-time job to help learn these skills as well (Green

Rinker, 2014).

The last soft skill Green Rinker believes will make a student successful is the one

where they develop lifelong learning skills. The main reason for this skill is their future.

Many jobs that will be in demand in five years do not even exist today so it is imperative

that students develop attitudes and skills that can fit any job (Green Rinker, 2014). Some

of these skills can be learned by being a tutor or mentor which will teach leadership,

picking a new skill or hobby to master which will teach perseverance, reading which will

promote knowledge and attending events and talking with the patrons which will teach

communication and interpersonal skills.

Graduates Lacking Soft Skills to Research to Explain Why

The problem of soft skills lacking in today's graduates and job applicants is not

only a problem in McCracken County, but it is also beginning to be noticed on a national

level. Publications, such as the *Chronicle for Higher Education* and *Why People Can't

Get Jobs,* are presenting various perspectives on this problem ranging from how can the

skills gap be solved in hiring, what social and emotional skills can make students college

and career-ready, and the reasons why college graduates cannot find employment. This

section will look at these topics as well as recommendations and actions of journalists

and community colleges to combat this problem.

Charlotte Kent explained in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that teachers must raise expectations in the classroom, which will help with the skills gap (Kent, 2016). She states that employers are seeing little decline in reading or math skills but quotes Peter Cappelli's *Why Good People Can't Get Jobs* which expresses the belief that skills gaps are due to hiring practices (Cappelli, 2012). An example of this would be employers hiring people who they feel are intelligent and can be trained to do certain jobs while at the same time ignoring their lack of people competencies. Instead of focusing on hard skills, employers should be asking peers, teachers, or other former employers if these applicants are organized, self-motivated, punctual or possess a strong work ethic (Kent, 2016). These employers are claiming applicants do not possess these skills, but the employers are not doing their homework to see if they ever possessed them.

The skills many employers are seeing applicants lack is accountability for work, self-motivation, strong work ethic, punctuality, time management, professionalism and adaptability. If employers would research where these applicants came from, they would see that many of the schools are the problem (Kent, 2016). Instead of teaching students there are consequences to their actions, many teachers enable the student by allowing them to turn in late work. This lenient atmosphere totally destroys any attempts to build responsibility, self-motivation, strong work ethic or punctuality in graduates. The graduates that succeed are the ones that posses the aforementioned soft skills. The ones that fail are the graduates that were given endless extensions and second chances (Kent, 2016). Students must realize there is no extra credit in life. If employees continually turn in wrong and tardy work, they will be penalized or even fired. If students are taught

beginning in elementary school that work ethic, punctuality, time management, and adaptation to situations are keys to success, this gap in soft skills will greatly shrink.

Eric Pianin from CNBC explored why college graduates cannot obtain a job. Young people ages 18 to 34 account for over half of the 10.9 million unemployed Americans in today's society (Pianin, 2014). The reason is that hiring agents for corporations claim this group, even if they have college degrees, lack adequate work ethics (Pianin, 2014). These hiring managers are not alone. Corporate recruiters, business leaders, academic leaders and CEOs in a survey gave millennials a C for preparedness for their first job. The National Association of Colleges and Employers surveyed 200 employers to discover the top 10 priorities that they look for in new hires. The top five characteristics given were a candidate who has team-building skills, who is a problem-solver as well as being a planner, an organizer and someone who can prioritize their work (Pianin, 2014). Sixty percent of these employers believed that today's applicants lack these skills plus did not have the ability to think creatively or critically (Pianin, 2014).

Pianin also looks at the opposite of this argument, which is what the college graduates believe. The graduates disagree with the employers' statements insisting that they have the soft skills needed to be successful in today's job markets (Pianin, 2014). The major problem is the gap between how graduates and employers view work ethic and soft skills. Graduates believe soft skills such as work ethic and preparedness is much less vital to their success than their future employers. The millennials argue that employers send mixed signals because they claim they want graduates with soft skills but tend to hire those with the necessary hard skills even if there is no room for the advancement or growth of those individuals. The employers disagree and claim that this lack of soft skills

is why they now have to outsource entry-level jobs or hire baby boomers that have the

necessary soft skills to help their companies become a success (Pianin, 2014). This

increased competition is causing public schools and universities to explore programs that

can be beneficial to their students and help them expand their soft skills.

Change Magazine outlined the growing awareness of focusing on social,

emotional and effective skills that are required to increase student engagement and

achievement (Savitz-Romer, Rowan-Kenyon, & Fancsali, 2015). These skills should be

set forth in programs where they are developed along with exploring career outcomes and

having faculty to teach soft skills (Savitz-Romer et al, 2015). If students can master these

skills in secondary and post-secondary schools, they will possess the characteristics that

employers are looking for in successful employees.

The University of Arizona is setting up a program called the My Wildcat track

that will provide students the ability to grow in the following ways (Savitz-Romer et al,

2015):

1) Key areas for student development are communication skills, problem-
   solving, self-advocacy, coping with stress, self-management/self-regulation
   and anxiety.

2) Learning specialists will connect students with resources on campus to help
   with these key areas.

3) Students will have three to five individual meetings with a learning specialist
   who will be an academic coach which will help with confidence levels.

4) Regular trainings, workshops and webinars are offered on a variety of topics.

This program is giving their students the soft skills to succeed at the collegiate level. The University of Arizona has seen the cumulative grade point averages of their students increase 60 to 70% while having one-third of their students removed from academic probation (Savitz-Romer et al, 2015). Ninety percent of the students in this program claim they have a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses while learning soft skills and learning strategies that have worked (Savitz-Romer et al, 2015). This self-awareness and ability to use knowledge to adapt is exactly what employers are saying is missing in today's graduates. If universities and secondary schools can train their students to think on a self-awareness level, the students will be on the right path to master soft skills which will close the gap that employers are stating exists in the job market.

If an elementary, middle, secondary or post-secondary school wants to set up a social, emotional and assertive skill program to develop soft skills, it should include the following components. First, it should include career readiness and target student populations accordingly (Savitz-Romer et al., 2015). The McCracken County Schools are providing College and Career Readiness classes for its students. These classes are able to provide the career readiness that students need to develop soft skills. The Career Pathways program arose from the need to help students without a career path find an area in which they could excel. The schools worked with the community, the maritime and the community college to establish a program that could provide students with a career in which they can do well immediately after graduation. Second, faculty should help students develop social, emotional and assertive skills (Savitz-Romer et al., 2015). Teachers should have professional developments to learn new and creative ways to help

students develop the soft skills of critical thinking, self-motivation, problem-solving, punctuality and communication. Third, assessments should measure specific skills (Savitz-Romer et al., 2015). Soft skills can be measured, but not by the standardized tests. These skills can be included as part of a student's grade. Asheville-Buncombe Technical College provides an excellent example in this area.

Asheville-Buncombe Technical College had developed a program where students were be given a grade on soft skills such as punctuality, attendance and emotional intelligence. These grades accounted for eight to ten percent of the final grade while providing its students with a certificate to show that they are prepared for the workplace. This system was introduced due to the mounting pressure of employers in the Asheville area who believe graduates are not ready for the workplace. The college believed it would be able to produce a more well rounded student who will be able to demonstrate the soft skills employers are seeking (EvoLLLution, 2016). The college discontinued this program due to unpopularity amongst staff and students, but it still provided an example of how to give concrete grades on soft skills. This example is something that public schools could be following. Public schools are starting to develop College and Career Readiness classes, but only recently are they pushing soft skills as part of this curriculum.

Caralee Adams in her *Education Weekly* article explores how students are learning in middle and high school and the components they will need to be successful not only in college but also in their careers. Schools are starting to teach the importance of managing your own time and getting along with roommates and co-workers as well as with dealing with setbacks and the necessity of being resilient in the face of adversity (Adams, 2012). The main reason the students are having to be taught these skills which

we all take for granted is due to what this century is calling "helicopter parents." These types are parents that protect their children from any problem. This protection keeps the student from learning what to do when they struggle and stunts their development of grit, resiliency and soft skills. College enrollment is growing, but graduation rates are remaining flat (Adams, 2012). Schools are looking at implementing classes that teach the soft skills that students will need to be successful in their years after high school both in college and life.

First, the schools are attempting to infuse responsibility in students. Many students have their parents and teachers working harder on their success than they are. Students are given the responsibility of keeping up with assignments, sign-ups, college applications and deadlines (Adams, 2012). Leniency is not given if a deadline is missed. This action is preparing students to realize consequences will happen if you fail to do your job. It is also teaching students responsibility and punctuality, which are two of the important soft skills that employers are seeking.

Second, students are concentrating on the development of communication and problem-solving skills in these programs. Students lead conferences on their progress with an advisor, give presentations and work in groups to solve problems. The teacher acts more as a facilitator asking, "Why do you think that happens?" or "What will be your next step?" (Adams, 2012). This action by the teacher allows the student to develop problem-solving skills instead of depending on the teacher to give them the answers or solve the problem for them.

The last soft skills that schools are trying to develop are leadership skills. A great example of providing leadership help is the Chicago-based OneGoal program. This

program hires teachers to work with students to not only improve their standardized test scores, but also to teach them five principles of leadership which include: resilience, ambition, resourcefulness, integrity and professionalism (Adams, 2012). The program follows the students from secondary school to their first year of college to ensure their first year is a success while helping them to cope with classes as well as personal issues. Programs such as OneGoal and the YMCA are helping students develop the leadership skills that will help them be successful in college and career.

Professional literature is catching up with the problem of the lack of soft skills in today's youth. Schools and universities are starting to develop programs to close this gap; however, we must examine why the gap was created in the first place and what can be done to ensure that it is closed. The next section of this introduction will look at the research questions, what was examined and how the data was gathered to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

1) Why are soft skills missing in today's job applicants?

2) What is hindering the development of soft skills?

3) What can be done to promote the development of soft skills?

Next Steps

The conclusion that the researcher has derived from this hypothesis is that the educational process set forth by *Plessy v. Ferguson* through No Child Left Behind coupled with today's technology has hindered the growth of soft skills in today's students. The first step in proving this theory will be the literature review. This review will consist of the exploration of literature on the claim by employers that students are

lacking soft skills. The literature review will then trace the history of soft skill education

through the social, political and educational obstacles it faced from *Plessy v. Ferguson* to

its high point in the Progressive Education movement. The literature review will then

examine how the political landscape of the United States led to the downfall of the soft

skills movement due to events such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, Sputnik, Elementary

and Secondary Education Act, 1965 and No Child Left Behind Act, 2001. The literature

will also examine the effects of technology on today's youth and how it is hindering the

development of soft skills. The last part of the literature review will show how

educational leaders such as Alfie Kohn are leading a revitalized Progressive Education

movement thanks to the concerns of employers that students are lacking soft skills.

The second step will be the methodology of this study. Focus groups were

conducted of middle, high, and college students, middle and high school teachers along

with college professors and business leaders addressing the primary research questions

and secondary research questions. Data was collected through in-person and conference-

call focus groups. The data was coded to determine the answers to the research questions.

The Findings and Analysis chapter and the Conclusions and Discussions chapter will

follow this section.

Definitions

1) Communication Skills - abilities in the areas of language understanding,
   communicating expressively, and practical language skills ("What Employers
   mean by Good Communication Skills", 2015)

2) Critical thinking skills - disciplined thinking that is clear, rational, open-minded,
   and informed by evidence (Petress, 2004)

3) Employability skills – a group of essential abilities that involve the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mindset that is increasingly necessary for success in the modern workplace ("Skills for College and Career Readiness", 2016)

4) Hard Skills - specific, teachable abilities that can be defined and measured (Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht & Lee, 2010)

5) Problem-solving skills - the process of working through details of a problem to reach a solution ("Analytical and Problem Solving", 2016)

6) Soft skills - desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge which include common sense, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork and a positive flexible attitude (Dixon et al., 2010)

7) Teamwork skills - cooperative or coordinated effort on the part of a group of persons acting together as a team or in the interests of a common cause (Dixon et al., 210)

8) Work Ethic - a belief in the moral benefit and importance of work and its inherent ability to strengthen character (Jenkins, 2016).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The United States has patterned its educational needs based on the day's social issues since the late 1800s. These social issues have been tied to developing skills in the country's youth. *Plessy v. Ferguson* put forth the idea that separate schools, as long as they were equal, were sufficient for white and African-American Students. This idea hampered the development of academic and soft skills of the African-American community, which would eventually lead to *Brown v. Board of Education*. Seeing the problem of the lack of soft skills in its youth, the country began to develop curriculum and hands-on education to rectify this lack of soft skills. This movement became known as the Progressive Era of Education with John Dewey as one of its leading protagonists. The movement was leading the country in the direction of soft skills when *Brown v. Board of Education* came to the forefront. This issue of segregation was the main social issue and inertly helped white and African-Americans develop soft skills by having students of both races work through the racial tensions of the day.

Soft Skills took a backseat again when the educational system realized that the gap in education between whites and African-Americans had developed due to *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The United States' educational system under the direction of Lyndon Johnson developed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), which helped target gaps for minorities and females (McGuinn & Hess, 2014). This act was reconfigured in the late 1990s and early 2000s under the guise of No Child Left Behind (2001), which focused on core curriculum and benchmark test scores (US Department of Education, 2014). This focus on test scores moved schools away from teaching soft skills and provided a holistic education for their students. This act plus the introduction of

technology into our society has hampered the development of soft skills in today's

graduates. According to the claims of business leaders, this lack of soft skills is one of the

main traits lacking in the job applicants that they interview. President Obama worked

with Congress and the states' education leaders to assist schools in the development of

Career Pathways and College and Career Readiness classes where students will develop

soft skills and a career plan for their lives.

What are Soft Skills?

What are soft skills? Many educators and employers in today's world ask this question.

Soft skills are seen as a combination of interpersonal and social skills (Dixon et al.,

2010). These skills are shown in our personality traits, social interactions, language, non-

verbal communication, conflict management, teamwork capacity, cultural awareness and

creativity (Schulz, 2008). Employers are seeing it is more important to have employees

with these soft skills because the knowledge and technical skills of the job or "hard

skills" can be taught (Schulz, 2008). The soft skills employees need to be successful must

be taught at an early age. If they are neglected, it is very difficult to teach these skills later

in life. The purpose of this literature review is to show how these factors have caused the

decline of soft skills today and what can be done to strengthen these skills.

Lack of Soft Skills a Problem for Employers

Current employers are saying that college graduates are not prepared with the soft

skills needed to work in their corporations. Students believe they are exiting college well

prepared and ready to take on the work force. The Association of American Colleges and

Universities decided it was time to settle this debate. They surveyed 613 students at

public and private two-year and four-year colleges while asking the same questions to

400 employers whose organizations have at least 25 employees with 25% of their new

hires earning an associate degree or higher (Jaschik, 2015).

Figure 1 shows that students consistently ranked themselves prepared in areas

where employers are ranking them as extremely unprepared. The closest area where

employers and graduates agree is the area of staying current with new technologies.

These results show that 37% of employers and 46% of graduates believe they are

prepared in this area (Jaschik, 2015). The chart also shows that in a number of important

areas, such as oral communication, written communication, critical thinking and being

creative, that employers believe graduates are falling short even though students believe

that they are well prepared (Jaschik, 2015).

Figure 1
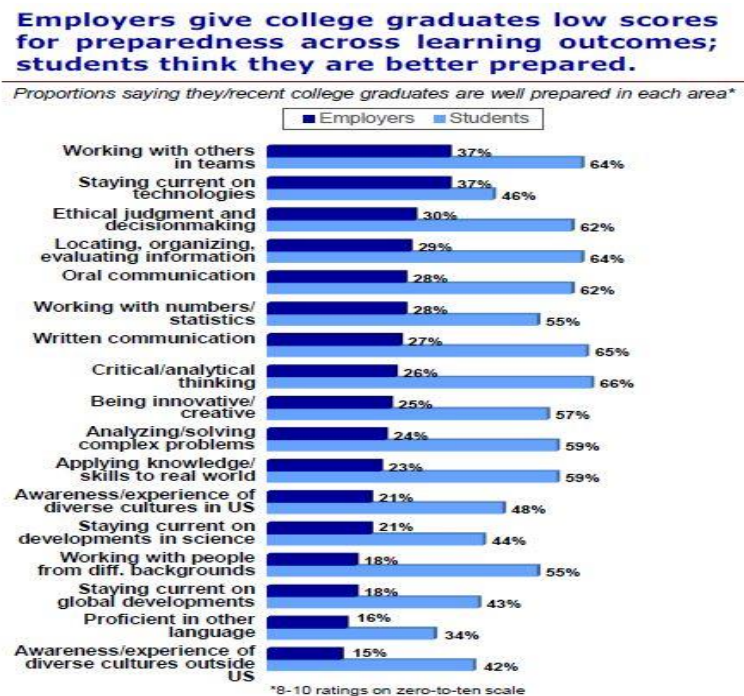
(Jaschik, 2015).

This figure illustrates that in a number of key areas students believe that they are

well prepared to join the work force at a two to one ratio to their future employers. An

average of 60% of students believe they are competent in the soft skills employers are

looking for such as communication, critical thinking, being innovative, teamwork and

problem solving. Employers disagree significantly as seen by only 27% of them believing

students are competent in these same skills. This gap between students' and employers'

thinking is troubling because of such a low percentage of employers believing that

students are well-prepared to assume tasks that include critical thinking, problem-solving

or communication. Employers are asking educational institutions to take note of this

discrepancy because they believe graduates must have a range of knowledge of common

core subjects as well as possess the soft skills to complete tasks in their corporations

(Jaschik, 2015). Table 1 explains the beliefs of employers on what their employees need

to possess.

Table 1

Employers Who Strongly or Somewhat Agree With These Statements

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree
All College students should have educational experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different than their own	59%	37%
All College students should gain an understanding of democratic institutions and values	32%	55%
Every college student should take courses that build the civil knowledge, skills and judgment essential for contributing to our democratic society	33%	53%
Every college student should acquire broad knowledge of all the liberal arts and sciences	29%	49%

All college students should gain intercultural skills and an understanding of societies and countries outside the United States	21%	57%

This table is an excellent explanation of what educational institutions need to do to prepare students for the work force (Jaschik, 2015). Learning institutions are beginning to teach the areas deemed most important by employers. These institutions are recognizing their responsibility; and as a result of this recognition, College and Career classes are being formed from elementary schools to community colleges. These College and Career Classes are teaching students the importance of working with others to solve problems, understanding democratic policies, civil duties, intercultural skills and communication all of which employers in the above chart say important for future employees to possess. Erika Christakis says that a simple dying task could help today's youth learn these skills that employers are so desperately seeking. That task is a summer job. She explains how a simple summer job could take a student from a sub-par entry-level worker to a viable employee of any corporation (Christakis, 2012).

Summers used to be a time when teenagers mowed lawns, waited tables, or bagged groceries just to name a few of the usual summer jobs for youth. The summer job was the social equalizer. Whether you came from a rich family or a financially-strapped family, these summer jobs taught you hard work, respect and teamwork (Christakis, 2012). These jobs are not socially acceptable now, and teenagers are currently missing the opportunity to gain valuable soft skills in the summer months. Students are now spending more time on electronics, which is curtailing their soft skills. Socialization is

becoming an online experience (APA, 2012). Students tend to have withdrawals from the internet which makes working summer jobs seem less important (APA, 2012).

Less than half of the youth in the United States were employed in the month of July in 2010 (Christakis, 2012). This percentage is the lowest percentage since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began collecting such data in 1948 and 20 points lower than the peak in the summer of 1989 (Christakis, 2012). Due to the current economic state, teen workers are being replaced in these jobs by senior citizens, immigrants and adults who need jobs.

Two main factors are the reasons for teenagers being replaced in these jobs by the aforementioned groups. First, students lack the social skills these groups possess (Christakis, 2012). This lack of social skills is largely due in part to the aforementioned time spent socializing online (APA, 2012). Teenagers lack the experience, communication and critical thinking skills that the other groups have shown for a number of years. Second, life has become very competitive for today's students. Students at the college level feel immense pressure to build their resumes with unpaid internships, political campaigns or preparing for graduate school exams (Christikas, 2012). High schoolers are feeling the same pressure to perform well on the ACT and SAT (Christikas, 2012). These events make working an entry-level summer job even less of a priority. Teens in high school are dealing with tougher standards, which might lead to students working on unique life experiences during the summer to impress college admission councils (Christikas, 2012). This generation has technology and social experience like no other generation, but they have the attitude that the aforementioned types of jobs are beneath them, which is one of the main contributing factors to loss of soft skills. Some

community colleges are taking matters into their own hands and attempting to certify soft skills (Reed, 2012).

Many community colleges are becoming aware that their students do not possess simple soft skills such as being able to determine what to wear to a job interview, as many students believe that do-rags, jeans and being unshaven are completely acceptable in the work place (Reed, 2012). They also have no idea of the proper way to shake hands, are not proficient in oral communication such as small talk, nor do they see the benefits and importance of reporting in ten minutes early (Reed, 2012). These lost skills plus those of critical thinking and problem-solving have lead some institutions such as Asheville-Buncombe Technical College to try to grade and certify their students in soft skills. The teachers were given templates to measure such soft skills as communication, attendance, punctuality, professionalism, work ethic and preparedness (Fain, 2012). The performance the student exhibits will result in $8 - 10\%$ of the students' grades. This certifying of soft skills helps students learn that being prompt, meeting deadlines, communicating your frustration with colleagues or your boss, in the correct ways, dressing properly, using electronic communication etiquette and possessing critical thinking skills are just as important as your content knowledge in regard to obtaining a job (Reed, 2012).

During the Progressive Education Era, these ideas were taught in schools; but this practice was swept aside for more "important" lessons during the Elementary and Secondary Education and No Child Left Behind eras of education. The next section of this literature review will explore the social pressures that the educational system endured while trying to determine the proper place to teach soft skills. The Progressive Education

Era educators believed that the schools were the proper place to teach soft skills (Dewey, 1938) while the home was considered the place for students to learn these soft skills during the Elementary and Secondary Education and No Child Left Behind eras. The educational leaders of the United States now realize that these skills should be taught in schools because not every child gets this instruction at home (Reed, 2012). This movement is leading schools from the elementary to community colleges levels to promote programs that will teach our youth soft skills that will make them college and career ready.

Plessy v. Ferguson

In 1890, the state of Louisiana passed a law called the Separate Car Act. This act required separate railroad car accommodations for African-Americans and whites (Medley, 2012). A group comprised of African-Americans, Creoles and Caucasians persuaded Homer Plessy to challenge this law. Plessy was 7/8 European descent and 1/8 African (McBride, 2007). He was seen in the eyes of the law as an octoroon and was considered to be African-American and thus was required to sit in the "colored" car (Medley, 2012). He was arrested when he tried to board the white-only car.

Plessy's lawyer took his case before the Louisiana court system where he argued that segregation of the railway cars violated Plessy's rights under the 13th and 14th Amendments (Maidment, 1973). Judge John Howard Ferguson ruled Louisiana had the right to regulate the railroad company. Plessy was found guilty and was ordered to pay a $25 fine. The committee supporting Plessy took the case to the Louisiana Supreme Court where they received the same result as Ferguson's court. The committee then took the case to the United States Supreme Court (Maidment, 1973).

The main point of the committee's argument was still centered on the violation of the 13th and 14th Amendments. Plessy's lawyers argued that the protection of the guaranteed rights to all citizens was violated by this act (Gordon, 2015). The Supreme Court rejected this idea in a 7-to-1 decision. The court determined Plessy's rights were not violated because the court could not find any differences between the rail cars for each race. Since no differences were found, they upheld the separate facilities manifesto (Fireside, 2003).

The Supreme Court ruled Plessey's argument that Louisiana violated the 14th Amendment was invalid (Reckdahl, 2009). The majority of the court believed this law did not imply that African-Americans were inferior. The Court stated the law separated the races as a matter of public policy and safety (Bishop, 1977). Thus the actions of the railroad company did not violate Plessy's rights in the eyes of the Supreme Court.

Justice Henry Billings Brown wrote the opinion for the majority ruling. He stated the law treated all races fairly. He also conveyed forced segregation does not mean African-Americans are inferior (Chambers, Jr., n.d). His argument was that if an African-American legislature passed this law Whites would not feel inferior (Chambers, Jr., n.d.). He believed individual states should determine these problems, and cited *Roberts v. City of Boston* as the case for upholding school segregation (Brands, 2010).

Justice John Marshall Harlan, the Justice who wrote the dissenting opinion, saw many faults in this way of thinking. He felt the 14th Amendment was to ensure freed slaves were to enjoy the same rights as White Americans (Chambers, Jr., n.d.). He argued that The Supreme Court's decision set back the Reconstruction Amendments especially, the 13th and 14th, which said all citizens were equal before the law. He explained that

Plessy v. Ferguson negated this idea and was setting a racial divide in the country essentially gutting the 14th Amendment (Chambers, Jr., n.d.).

This ruling set forth the basic legalization of the Jim Crow laws. These laws were put into place to separate all public arenas from restaurants, hospitals, churches, libraries, and waiting rooms as well as the one, which most affected the country's children and youth, the public schools. Laws not only regulated segregation but also social relations. This greatly challenged the development of soft skills in both African-American and white students. These students were not allowed to work together or compete against each other in school or sports. As a result, many skills such as teamwork, communication or problem-solving were not developed because they were not allowed to be in positions to use these skills. Any attempt by African-Americans or Whites to use these soft skills to negotiate racial equality was met with resistance, which was usually violent (Pilgrim, 2012). Thus, the area in which African-Americans were impacted most was public schools.

The *Plessy* decision established legal segregation in the United States. This creation set forth the idea of separate but equal, to mean that as long as both races had separate facilities they were considered equal. The separate schools of African-Americans were almost always of lesser quality. The basic curriculum of African-American primary schools reflected jobs open to black workers (Irons, 2004). Ninety percent of African-Americans still lived in the former Confederate States of America, and the only jobs they could obtain were in the farming or domestic service fields. Whites would only fund what they thought the value of education of the African-American was worth. This funding was very little; for example, in Alabama for every $37 spent per

white student, $7 was spent per African-American student (Irons, 2004). These numbers

were $32 to $7 in Georgia, $31 to $6 in Mississippi and $53 to $5 in South Carolina

(Irons, 2004). In addition, fewer African-Americans were enrolled in school, either due to

the fact they were needed to work on the farms or counties only had enough money to

fund one school, which was the white school (Brooke, 2012). Most African-American

students only went to school around the cotton season, and they usually only attended

school through the fourth grade (Brooke, 2012). This evidence showed their education

lacked greatly compared to their White counterparts.

The African-American schools were extremely underfunded resulting in

substandard buildings, out-of-date books and materials and mostly uncertified teachers.

The school buildings had leaking roofs, sagging floors and windows without glass. The

schools were overcrowded usually not having enough desks and only one teacher per

class (Brooke, 2012). Horace Mann Bond, a famous African-American educator,

administered the Stanford Achievement Test to a large number of African-American

teachers in Alabama. The results showed the average score was below that of the national

level of ninth grade students (Irons, 2004). These results showed that almost half of these

teachers had not mastered eighth grade content. They were trying to teach students in

grades above their knowledge base with hand-me-down books that did not have all the

information that their students needed to succeed (Brooker, 2012). This led many to

question was the Plessy decision of separate but unequal, which was evident in education

for many years until *Brown v. Board of Education*. All students were not receiving a

basic education so the notion of teaching them soft skills to be successful in the real

world was an afterthought.

This thinking was more than evident when three years after the *Plessy* ruling, the school board in Richmond County, Georgia, closed the only African-American school in Georgia (Digital History, n.d.). The state law required school boards to "provide the same facilities for each race, including schoolhouses and other matters appertaining to education" (Digital History, n.d.) The district funded two white high schools but only provided half of that amount to the African-American school. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Richmond County in *Cummings v. School Board of Richmond County, Georgia* (1899). This decision was not based on the evidence that the African-American school had been the victim of discrimination; but, instead, it was based on the fact that there was racial hostility in the county (Digital History, n.d.).

These decisions then began to filter over to other races as well. A Chinese girl was denied the right to attend a white public school in Mississippi. The Supreme Court ruled in 1927 in the case of *Gong Lum v. Rice,* that despite laws enforcing compulsory education and lack of public schools, for the safety of the young lady she must attend private school (Nahuja, 2009).

The atrocities of these Supreme Court rulings and inferior learning conditions covered up the fact that students were not learning soft skills to work with each other to solve these racial problems. Both the white and the African-American schools were teaching the core subjects in the traditional classroom setting, but the African-American students were receiving a lesser quality of education pertaining to these core subjects. Both schools gave no regard to helping students learn skills to deal with the racial tensions they faced every day. The African-American schools due to the inferiority of funds, supplies, buildings and quality of teachers had a difficult enough time teaching

subjects to their students much less equipping them with the skills to help them succeed in the work force. The traditional classroom-setting problem was addressed by new educational and teaching ideas put forth by John Dewey and other educators in the Progressive Education Movement as well as numerous Supreme Court cases, but none more important than *Brown v. Board of Education* addressed the racial inequality.

Progressive Education Movement

The idea of a traditional education fit into social trends from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. John Dewey's ideas set forth the characteristics of the Progressive Era and shaped future educational leaders thoughts and the current soft skills movement. This section will explore those ideas and how this connection was made. The idea of students learning the basic core subjects in a classroom with a teacher seemed to be sufficient for most educational leaders in this era. This way of schooling was adopted by both segregated school systems. This time period also was fortunate to have Americans who challenged the status quo such as the traditional school setting. They believed it was their duty to question the way things were being done (Koliba, 2002). Their goal was to progress the country toward new and innovative ideas. This movement was named the Progressive Era after the progressive attitude of its members. Education became a focal point of this movement. Educational leaders stated that there was a better way than the traditional schools of this time period. They believed it was their job to prove this Progressive Theory.

Progressive Education was viewed as a way to not only teach students their core subjects, but also to help them learn social skills, which would allow them to succeed in the work force. This movement was very popular from the 1910s to the 1950s (Koliba,

2002), but it lost its momentum with the creation of the Elementary Secondary Education

Act of 1965, which led to the test-oriented No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The

educational atmosphere of the United States now sees the importance of this movement

to the development of soft skills. Educational leaders of today, such as Alfie Kohn, are

reintroducing the ideas of John Dewey to counter the test-based instruction the country

was under with No Child Left Behind (Hayes, 2006).

Progressive Education has two essential elements: The first element is respect for

diversity; meaning students' abilities should be promoted (Koliba, 2002). The students'

interests, ideas, needs and cultural identify must be taken into account. This idea

conflicted greatly with the traditional classrooms of the 1910s to 1950s. African-

American students were not allowed to embrace their culture, but instead they received a

watered-down version of a white education (Irons, 2004). The second element of this idea

critically and socially engages one's intelligence (Koliba, 2002). If a student is engaged

in these matters, they are able to develop the skills one must have to be able to work with

others to help achieve common goals in their community (Koliba, 2002). This element

develops the soft skills of the student so that they are able to communicate, problem-

solve and work in teams with members of their community in order to make their

community the best it can be.

Progressive Education also used its name to distinguish itself from the stale,

traditional curriculum of the 19th Century. John Dewey wanted to develop a curriculum

that incorporated skills not separated students into academia or vocational (Dewey,

1897). Progressive educators stressed the importance of emotional, artistic and creative

learning (Koliba, 2002). This allowed students to develop under a holistic education not a

fragmented one. Table 2 shows the ideas of what a Progressive Education should include

and how it differs from a traditional education (Love, 2005.).

Table 2

Characteristics of Traditional Classroom vs. Progressive Education Classroom

Traditional	Progressive
School is a preparation for life.	School is part of life.
Learners are passive absorbers of information and authority.	Learners are active participants, problem-solvers.
Teachers are sources of information and authority.	Teachers are facilitators, guides who foster thinking.
Parents are outsiders and uninvolved.	Parents are the primary teacher, goal setter and resource.
Community is separate from school.	Community is extension of the classroom.
Decision-making is centrally based and delivered by administration.	Decision-making is shared by all stakeholders.
Program is determined by external criteria primarily test scores.	Program is determined by mission, philosophy and goals for graduates.
Learning is linear, with facts and skill mastery.	Learning is spiral with depth and breadth.
Knowledge is absorbed through lecture, worksheets and text.	Knowledge is constructed play, direct experience and social interaction.
Disciplines, especially language and math, are separated.	Disciplines are integrated as students make connections
Success is competitively based, taken from regurgitation of facts.	Success is shown through applying skills and collaboration.

IQ is shown through language and mathematical abilities.	IQ is measured in the ability to problem-solve real life situations.
School is an enduring task.	School is fun but challenging.

Table 2 outlines the differences between traditional and Progressive Education

(Love, 2005), and the characteristics of Progressive Education. The chart shows elements

that can be connected to the soft skills movement of today. These elements include:

emphasis on learning-by-doing, strong emphasis on problem-solving and critical

thinking, group work and development of social skills, collaborative and cooperative

learning, social responsibility, and life-long learning (Love, 2005). These elements are

essentially what employers in today's job market are saying that students and graduates

lack when they come to them seeking employment (Christakas, 2012). This section will

show the importance of each element that became the foundation of the Progressive

Education and soft skills movement.

The first element that was important for Progressive Education is learning by

doing. This idea was the backbone of Dewey's ideas. He believed that through

expeditionary learning and experiments students will use their thoughts to process their

material (Dewey, 1897). These thoughts, along with past experiences, will create their

learning foundation upon which everything else will be built.

The Progressive Education movement just like the soft skills movement places a

huge focus on problem-solving and critical thinking. Dewey believed it was impossible to

teach students how to react to precise conditions (Dewey, 1897). If students can develop

problem-solving and critical thinking skills, they will be able to adapt to any situation.

The students will use these skills to help solve what they at first believed unsolvable by

drawing on past knowledge and experiences (Dewey, 1897). This idea is the same one many proponents of soft skills are saying about today's students. If we can help students improve their noncognitive skills, they will have the tools to succeed in the work force (Garcia, 2014).

Progressive Educators believe if students are to be successful they must learn how to work in-group settings while developing their social, collaborative and cooperative skills (Dewey, 1897). Students' schools must foster these factors. If students are placed in a situation where they must work with others, it will strengthen their noncognitive skills such as motivation and self-control which will help them understand what is needed to be a successful member of a class or community (Garcia, 2014).

The next element Progressive Education promotes is the practice of teaching the students their social responsibility to their community (Dewey, 1897)). Schools should strive to incorporate service projects into the curriculum, which will teach students that learning and community service is a life-long task. It strengthens the Progressive Education's movement for schools to be challenging and a part of life instead of preparation for life (Love, 2005) This main idea allows students to understand that social and noncognitive skills are skills the students must constantly be honing and will never be truly mastered (Love, 2005). These elements of the movement come directly from John Dewey, who many consider to be the main supporter of the Progressive Education movement. This next section will explore Dewey's ideas from his writings that many Progressive Movement Educators utilized to build their philosophy.

John Dewey's Theories

John Dewey wrote a summary of the Progressive Education Theory for *School Journal* in 1897. He followed those ideas with a more in-depth exploration of social skills and education in 1938 with his book *Experience and Education.* In these writings he explained what he believed Progressive Education was and how it can help students grow into contributing citizens to society and their communities (Dewey, 1897).

Dewey believes education is a lifelong process (Love, 2005). A child or student starts learning from the day he/she is born. They are continuously gathering knowledge, which helps them learn social cues (Dewey, 1897). Teachers play a huge part in this process by giving students experiences that are valuable and will help them contribute to society (Neil, 2005). These teachers can include parents, siblings, family, friends or trained educators (Dewey, 1897). Dewey also felt this freedom of Progressive Education provides more of a holistic education helping the student not only learn core subjects, but also learning noncognitive or soft skills to help their community be successful (Neil, 2005).

Dewey states the learning process is both psychological and sociological. The psychological portion allows the student's instincts to process the material presented (Dewey, 1897). This processed knowledge forms the foundation for everything coming afterwards that the student will process (Dewey, 1897). He also explained the interaction from past experiences or other people will determine how the student reacts to a sociological situation (Neil, 2005). Dewey believed instruction must focus on the child as a whole if both psychological and sociological needs are to be met. Stopping a student's education at just facts and theories will keep educators from fostering a student's sociological needs, which will hinder the development of social skills (Dewey, 1897). If a

student walks away with just knowledge and lack of social or soft skills, the Progressive Educators see it as a waste of education.

In his 1938 writings, Dewey argued that teachers in traditional settings are mainly worried about maintaining control (Dewey, 1938). He likened the teacher to an official of a sporting event; however, to achieve true understanding of the material and provide a holistic education, progressive teachers maintain control through the participation of their students, not through forced order (Dewey, 1938). Once this participation is in place, the curriculum of the school should be created to mirror its community. It should not only cover core subjects, but also reflect the development of human social skills (Dewey, 1897). Dewey used the example that language, history and science should be taught alongside sewing and soft skills (Dewey, 1897).

Methods of teaching should focus on the child's thoughts and interests. If a child is thrown into a passive role in the classroom, they become timid; and the full educational process is failing them (Dewey, 1897). If students have freedom of movement, their physical and mental health flourishes (Dewey, 1938). Dewey also called for freedom of intelligence, which gives students the ability to evaluate decisions, judge wisely, interpret images and symbols, and to communicate with others in a peaceful and productive manner (Dewey, 1938).

Schools must be a place for social reconstruction where students reconstruct their social skills to coexist and respect others (Dewey, 1897). This idea greatly opposed segregation and Jim Crow schools, and it called for all children to be taught each one of them have a sense of purpose. These purposes should not be strictly wants or desires, but educator driven (Dewey, 1938). The educator would teach the students to assess past

experience and make judgments to determine what their purpose is and how it can better

society (Dewey, 1938).

The ideas set forth by Dewey have again come to the forefront in recent years.

Employers have stated graduates are not career-ready. Many educators and legislators

believe the test-oriented teaching associated with No Child Left Behind has been the

downfall of teaching soft skills in schools. The teachings of William Heard Kilpatrick,

one of Dewey's students, are being reintroduced due to his ideas of project methods of

teaching. This method teaches students the need to be actively engaged in learning.

Students should be taught not only core subjects, but also social skills and how those

skills should be used in society (Hayes, 2006). Kilpatrick argues that the worst thing for

soft skills is simple reading and regurgitation of material (Hayes, 2006), which is exactly

what the No Child Left Behind tests and its educational process called for schools to do.

Development of Progressive Education in the United States

John Dewey, along with Charles Eliot and Abraham Lexner, established the

Lincoln School of Teacher College at Columbia University (Cremin, 1961). The school

taught teachers how to organize units to embrace their students. It also taught teachers to

show students that learning was a life-long event as well as showing them what they must

do to adapt to the changing needs of life (Cremin, 1961).

The Progressive Education movement flourished from 1919-1955 as it strived to

promote a more student-centered, hands-on learning approach. A set of 1500 students

who had been taught this approach was compared to a set of 1500 students from

traditional schools when they reached college. The students from progressive schools

outperformed students from the traditional schools in grades, extracurricular

participation, dropout rate, intellectual curiosity and resourcefulness (Kohn, 1999). The

more a school departed from the traditional setting the better its students performed

(Kohn 1999).

The 1950s changed society's outlook on the Progressive Education movement.

The Cold War and McCarthyism touted this movement had too much liberal even

communist elements (Koliba, 2002). Rudolph Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read* blamed

the Progressive Education movement for students' problems with reading because of the

lack of order in the classroom and focus on social skills (Flesch, 1955). The 1950s also

gave us two major events that would signal the beginning of the end for the Progressive

Education movement. In 1954, the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, led

to the desegregation of schools. Soft skills of communication and working with others

wasn't seen as important during this time, the overwhelming gap in educational

opportunities for African-Americans became one of the main focuses of education in the

1950s through the 1980s (Topeka Courier Journal, 2002). The second event that changed

the landscape of education was the Soviet Union's successful launch of the satellite

Sputnik. The Unites States was thrown into a panic, and the cry rang out that the schools

must do a better job of producing science and math graduates. The educational mission of

the United States was no longer providing a holistic education for its students, but it was

closing the educational gaps for African-Americans and producing math and science

students that could help the United States compete with the Soviet Union in the space

race. This idea of core subjects being the main focus for schools fueled the passing of the

Elementary Secondary Education Act, which later evolved into the No Child Left Behind

Act. Progressive Education is making a comeback in recent years, but we must first look

at three other elements: Brown vs. Board of Education, Elementary Secondary Education

Act and No Child Left Behind that kept it from flourishing from the 1950s to the 2000s.

Brown v. Board of Education

The idea of separate but equal lasted about 50 years in the United States, but the

late 1940s and 1950s saw a change in the mindset of many Americans. First, came

desegregation at the collegiate level. Then the landmark case that desegregated the public

school systems occurred in 1954. Two court cases that were over shadowed by the

landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* took place in Oklahoma. First, *Sipuel v.*

Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma (1948) ruled that African-Americans

must be admitted to state universities because they afforded them more opportunities than

African-American institutions could. Second, *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*

(1950) ruled that it was illegal to isolate African-Americans into separate cafeteria and

classroom seating. *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) ruled that the University of Texas Law

School's separate African-American Law School was unequal in reputation and

opportunity for professional contact. These cases ironically were brought to the forefront

due to the critical thinking process of the Progressive Education Movement. These cases

plus the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* would solve an important problem of

separate was not equal, but it would also restrict and eventually stop the development of

soft skills in our public schools.

Brown v. Board of Education brought to light many of the problems that were

being caused by the inequalities of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. These cases that came before

Brown showed some inequalities in isolated incidents on college campuses. *Brown v.*

Board of Education addressed the inequalities that students were facing in K-12 across

the United States. The case of *Brown v. Board of Education* sought to reverse the idea of

racial segregation in the local elementary school in Topeka, Kansas. The state of Kansas

had a law from 1879 that permitted, not required, districts to maintain separate

elementary schools. The middle school was integrated in 1941, and the high school was

integrated from its beginning in 1871; and the desegregation of sports followed in 1949

(Topeka Capital Journal, 2002). The elementary school was still segregated in 1951 due

to this 1879 law.

Oliver Brown, father of Linda Brown, along with 12 other parents decided it was

time to challenge this law. Under the direction of the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Brown attempted to enroll his daughter in

the nearest elementary school. His argument was based on the grounds that it was

unequal for Linda to walk seven blocks to board a bus to take her to an African-

American school a mile away when a white elementary school was only six blocks away.

She was denied admittance, which led the NAACP to bring a court case against the

school district.

The NAACP argued that the extra travel violated Linda Brown's rights. The

District Court of Kansas ruled in favor of the board of education because although

African-Americans traveled further they were given free transportation. The district did

not provide free transportation for its white students thus fulfilling separate but equal.

(Warren, 1954).

The case was taken to the Supreme Court who reached a unanimous decision in

favor of Linda Brown and desegregation. Chief Justice Earl Warren noted the main

reasoning for this decision was due to the adverse psychological effects that segregated

schools had on African-American children (Mungazi, 2001), and that these effects were the main cause of achievement gaps which were beginning to widen as the result of years of inferior schools and the psychological effects of segregated schools.

The court's decision in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* and struck down the "separate but equal" thought in education. Schools were to be desegregated moving forward. Many saw *Brown v. Board of Education* as a victory; however, a long road lay ahead for educational equality and the reduction of achievement gaps. The *Brown* case created more serious problems than just giving each child a holistic education. Students were going to school amidst riots such as in Little Rock, Arkansas, where nine African-American students had National Guardsman escorting them to class while white students were screaming "Lynch them! Lynch them!" (Anderson, 2010). Students such as the Little Rock Nine, were not being taught communication skills or problem-solving in the schools anymore. They were merely trying to learn survival skills not soft skills. The educational leaders in America were not concerned with giving the students an education with noncognitive skills because the achievement gap of African-American students was extremely high after attending 50 years of separate and unequal schools. The United States needed legislation to help with the desegregation and the reduction of achievement gaps. This legislation became known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This act focused on closing the achievement gap and producing math and science protégés to compete with the Soviet Union. The achievement gap, fear of the Soviet Union and thoughts that Progressive Education was a socialist maybe even a communist movement shut down its ideas (Miller & Nowak, 1977). The next section will explore the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which evolved

into the No Child Left Behind Act and how these two pieces of legislation were able to keep the idea of providing students with a holistic education in the background.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

President Johnson could be seen as a pioneer for education. He used the four principles of innovation, collaboration, diversity and leadership in an attempt to close the achievement gap with this legislation. The task of providing legislation to provide civil liberties for all was a daunting one. Many parts of the country were not ready to embrace diversity and change. The country was not interested in adhering to the principles the Constitution set forth much less to the ideas of innovation and diversity. Many Americans wanted the status quo to continue even at the expense of educational opportunities for the growing diverse population in the United States. Leaders such as President Johnson and the Supreme Court were aware that the status quo must change. Either path they chose, however, would lead to the ignoring of soft skills in the schools of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Many political leaders of both races worked to introduce legislation to promote desegregation as they recognized segregation was a problem. They believed it would take a collaborative effort to create legislation that would grant equal educational access to all races and income levels. This idea led to dialogue, which helped to create the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 or ESEA. While this act was greatly needed, it ignored teaching noncognitive skills to the students of this era. Educational leaders and legislators were more concerned with closing the achievement gap and less concerned about giving students the skills to cope with new racial groups in their school. *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the Little Rock Nine showed us that just simply giving African-

Americans a better school to attend would not solve the racial disagreements that would

rise in these schools on a daily, if not hourly basis.

The United States also utilized two important events to help give the government

the control they needed in the ESEA. First, they used *Brown v. Board of Education* to

promote the idea that public education is a birthright not to be denied based on race

(McGuinn & Hess, 2015). Secondly, the Soviet Union launched the first satellite,

Sputnik. This event caused the fear that the United States was behind in the space race.

As a result of this thinking, the leaders passed the National Defense Act, which gave aid

to schools to improve math, science and foreign language. As stated earlier, these two

events made Progressive Education, which was concerned about the whole education of a

child, seem communist and not as important as it was at its height in the 1920s and 1930s

(Miller & Nowak, 1977).

Reasons for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The Civil Rights Movement along with the emphasis on math and science

revealed the educational shortcomings of minorities due to segregated schools and the

separate but equal mentality. This achievement gap helped President Johnson use his

leadership and collaboration skills to gain support for a more substantial presence in

education. The best way to fight this problem was deemed to be the creation of the ESEA

to eradicate these inequalities. The American public knew President Johnson was the man

to lead the country to diversity, and the ESEA was the key to creating an educational

system to take the United States there.

The ESEA was created to target federal aid to children from low-income families

no matter what school they attended (McGuinn & Hess, 2015). This maneuver by

President Johnsons and his Commissioner of Education Frances Keppel was a true innovative move by two great leaders. They proposed this act to help children everywhere. This approach spread money around to all states, congressional districts, private and public schools. This distribution of wealth to all children helped to decrease opposition to the legislation (McGuinn and Hess, 2015).

Parts to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The ESEA was intended to be a redistributive bill. This approach was to provide additional money to the poorest communities while spurring collaboration among school leaders to find new and innovative educational strategies to meet the needs of the students. The ESEA spent $1.3 billion dollars on five separate titles (McGuinn & Hess, 2015).

1) Title 1 – Assistance to local education agencies for education of children of low-income families

2) Title II – School Library Resources, Textbooks, Instructional Materials

3) Title III –Grants for financing supplemental education centers and services

4) Title IV- Commissioner of Education enters contracts with research and training facilities

5) Title V– Grants to strengthen Department of Education

The centerpiece of this legislation was Title I (McGuinn & Hess, 2015) with $1.06 billion of the initial $1.3 billion being spent on this program. It was created to give aid to communities with a high number of low-income families. The government approached this task by increasing per pupil expenditures. Funding was distributed to state educational agencies which in turn allocated funds to local educational agencies

who then gave the money to school districts (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). The requirements to receive this assistance were that 40% of the school's population must be low-income. This assistance was available to public or private schools.

Over time, the ESEA loosened restrictions on Title I, which led to 94% of the school districts in American receiving this type of aid (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Title I restrictions on what may be purchased with these monies has changed as well. These less strict provisions now allow schools to hire additional staff as well as to purchase equipment or materials for classroom instruction. Title I funds can be provided either through school-wide programs or targeted-assistance programs (United States Department of Education, 2014). School-wide program funding can be used for resources, which the school deems important while targeted funds have to be used to target failing or at-risk students. The schools can receive grants, allocation or reallocations based on applications showing how these funds will be used in restructuring the curriculum (US Department of Education, 2014). Schools had a great opportunity to create programs that would help their students develop critical thinking and communication skills, but they fumbled the ball when given this chance. The backlash of being accused of being a one in the same as the communist movement had schools staying far away from Progressive Education and the educational opportunities it provided (Miller & Nowak, 1977). The schools reverted back to traditional classrooms because it was the safest and easiest approach.

Effects of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The lasting effects of the ESEA are much different than the original intent of the

act. The Great Society created by President Lyndon Johnson wanted to create an

education system where all students, regardless of race, could receive a free and

appropriate education. Years of racial inequality and the changing world were not

providing these opportunities. President Johnson along with his Commissioner of

Education Keppel showed tremendous leadership in creating a task force that crafted such

legislation. President Johnson used his skills of leadership and collaboration to move the

legislation through Congress by emphasizing a principle that everyone would agree upon

– helping students in need. The irony of this whole situation was that President Johnson

was showing the soft skills that this legislation was preventing from being taught in

schools. The same skills that employers are claiming graduates are lacking today (Painan,

2014).

Helping students in need is exactly what the ESEA did by creating programs

geared to closing the achievement gaps in schools. It helped schools create programs to

assist low-income and minority students receive an equal education. This act's legacy is

Title I programs which still provide funds to help students in need today. Although

Title I has changed considerably since it began, it has been successful in raising the level

of education in this country. The program has gone through numerous restructuring

phases, but it has sustained its purpose of providing federal aid to those students in need.

The ESEA has maintained its important pieces even after accountability and school

choice were added into its revitalization as NCLB.

No Child Left Behind

The ESEA was reauthorized three times in five-year cycles. Then in 1980 the

ideology in the United States shifted from neoconservatism to neoliberalism with the

election of Ronald Reagan. This shift was highlighted by the neoliberalism ideas that

work to school programs should be created (Apple, 2000). The Neoliberalist argued that

students must receive individualized learning to prepare them for their future jobs. The

cookie cutter idea of education will lead to overqualified, unemployed Americans (Apple,

2000). Reagan began pushing for less federal regulation of Title I programs (Kennedy,

Birman & Demaline, 1986). Reagan pushed for the passage of the Education

Consolidation and Improvement Act. The ECIA pushed for Title I to be known as

Chapter I and for less federal government control, thus reverting the responsibility back

to state and local education agencies (McGuinn & Hess, 2015).

The seeds for NCLB were planted as the conversation shifted to accountability

and student achievement. The Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School

Improvement Act of 1989 refocused Title I to raise achievement standards for low-

income students by emphasizing advanced skills (United States Department of Education,

2014). It also created school-wide projects as well as program improvement plans.

School-wide projects altered local funds to match school-wide program funding

(McGuinn & Hess, 2015). This action permitted schools in need to implement more

programs.

The Reagan Administration's restructuring of ESEA created shortcomings in

many people's eyes. These deficits led to the creation of the Improving America's School

Act. This reform had three major changes (McGinne & Hess, 2015):

1) Added math, reading and language arts to be used to assess student

progress and provide accountability

2) Reduced threshold to implement school-wide programs from 75% to

50% poverty

3) Gave more local control so that federal and state governments could waive

federal requirements

This change was one of the last major shifts in education until NCLB in 2001.

Parts to No Child Left Behind

The next step for ESEA was the reauthorization under the new legislation known

as No Child Left Behind. This redesigning of ESEA into NCLB was the legislative

agenda of President George W. Bush (United States Department of Education, 2014).

The NCLB legislation promoted ESEA created programs, however these programs were

under the neoliberal ideas of more state/local control and more school accountability.

NCLB legislators wanted to create a more standards-based education reform

system by setting higher standards, but at the same time creating standards that could be

measured. The purpose of these actions was to improve individual success in education.

NCLB called for individual states to create basic skill assessment (New American

Foundation, 2014). These tools of measurement were to be given to all students at all

grade levels. If these assessments were given, the school would continue to receive its

federal funding. No national norm test was developed so states had to develop their own

tests and standards to be measured (United States Department of Education, 2014). These

tests led to the regurgitation of information so students and schools could reach

benchmarks. The idea of teaching of soft skills to students was never farthest from

happening than when No Child Left Behind was in effect. NCLB is one of the main

reasons many educators and families point to the lack of soft skills that employees require

(NCTE, 2014).

The development of this a NCLB test was important because it could affect funding and school population for any school receiving Title I funding from ESEA of 1965. Any school that received this Title I funding was required to show its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) (Rotherham & Dillion, 2007). This AYP simply meant that a class in a school, 8th grade for example, must perform better than the previous year's 8th grade class. If a school did not continue to make progress, several steps could occur (Rotherham & Dillion, 2007):

1) Misses AYP 2 years in a row -- School is labeled in need of improvement. The school has a two-year improvement plan. Students can choose to attend a better-performing school in the district if one exists.

2) Miss AYP 3 years in a row – Free tutoring and other supplemental educational services plus penalties from Step 1

3) Miss AYP 4 years in a row – School is seen as needing corrective action, which could result in replacement of staff, administration, curriculum and/or schedule.

4) Miss AYP 5 years in a row – Restructure school plan

5) Miss AYP 6 years in a row – Restructure plan implemented. Some examples of restructure plans: creating charter schools, closing the school, have state department of education run the school

6) The other portion of NCLB that was new to ESEA was school choice (United States Department of Education, 2015). If a school falls short of AYP for 2 years in a row, it must offer its students the opportunity to transfer to a higher-performing school in the district, free tutoring or after-school programs. It also

gave schools a chance to prove safe harbor. Safe harbor allows districts to

prove, even though they did not make AYP, that they had proficiency in the

subgroups in question (United States Department of Education, 2015).

The legislation also called for the state to provide highly qualified teachers for all

students. The states were responsible for setting the standards for each teacher along with

what standards students must obtain (New American Foundation, 2014). This action

provides that student standards will be uniform in the state with each student receiving a

quality education from highly qualified educators. These requirements led to the closing

of numerous schools, many of them predominatly African-American schools, which led

many educators to question the fairness and racial biases of these tests. The students were

sent to unfamiliar schools, which put them in unfamiliar surroundings. These students

seldom flourished and often withdrew or dropped out of school because their learning

styles and soft skills were not taken into account. These actions were in direct contrast to

Dewey's ideas in the Progressive Education Era (Dewey, 1938).

Effects of No Child Left Behind

 NCLB results were mixed at best. Proponents of the legislation point to data that

test scores were on the rise in reading and math (United States Department of Education,

2006). This data showed that more progress was made than the previous five years

(Chudowsky, Chudowsky & Koher, 2007) with 43 states either improving academically

or holding the same in all categories.

Opponents of the bill were very critical of two points. First, the data showed that

all groups were improving so the achievement gaps were not closing as was the original

ESEA intention. Secondly, teachers were accused of teaching to the test. Teachers were

seen as only providing information that would produce high-test results while skipping vital information that was not on the test. This type of evaluation was creating huge knowledge and soft skill gaps. A teacher teaching to the test was seen as the main reason students did not learn soft skills (Kohn, 1999). This lack of soft skills led to the rising problem employers face today when they try to hire students who were taught under this legislation.

This legislation was seen as innovative; however, due to the addition of common standards and assessments, this collaboration of federal, state and local governments was praised for creating an educational system to benefit the diverse population in our country. President Bush took the spirit of the original ESEA and with his unique leadership style was able to convince Congress to work together to produce legislation to raise achievement while closing gaps at the same time. While scores did rise, we are starting to see the problems in critical thinking, problem solving and communication in today's employees who were products of this time period. This lack of skills has educational leaders such as Alfie Kohn proposing a move back to the Progressive Education's way of learning. Kohn's proposed improvements to our education system will be explored, but first a look will be taken at the second factor causing a decline in soft skills in today's students. This factor is how technology is hampering the development of soft skills in today's student.

Alfie Kohn on the Importance of Progressive Education in Today's Schools

The ideas of the Progressive Education movement have come to the forefront in recent years because of the claims by employers that students do not possess the soft skills to be college and career ready. Alfie Kohn, one of today's leading Progressive

Educators, has been a voice against No Child Left Behind. Kohn is reintroducing much of the same ideals John Dewy set forth roughly ninety years ago. He believes the test-oriented education and traditional background of these schools is the leading factor for loss of soft skills in today's youth. Kohn has shown schools what Progressive Education should and should not be while outlining how to determine if a classroom is a progressive classroom or a traditional classroom (Kohn, 2008). Kohn believes if schools will follow the guidelines of what a progressive school should be while will instilling progressive actions in their classrooms, it will build the needed soft skills in students to make them college and career ready. (Kohn, 1996).

The first step in setting up a progressive school is to recognize the difference between a traditional school and a progressive school. He states all traditional schools are not just about memorizing dates and definitions. Some traditional schools might think they are progressive because they strive to help student learn and understand ideas (Kohn, 1999). The difference is that traditional schools have students that comprehend how the teacher has integrated or used the idea while a progressive school will have students analyze the ideas and show how they would integrate it (Windschitl, 2006). Schools also make the mistake of believing they are progressive because they are concerned about diversity and equality but do not carry those ideas over to the schools pedagogy (Kohn, 2008). Imagine using traditional teaching approaches to teach tolerance, diversity and equality. Yes, the school is progressive for teaching about these ideas but is traditional because of its methods. Kohn states that once educators realize your school is stuck in these traditional roles, the educator can examine what progressive schools possess and transform from traditional to progressive.

Kohn believes the best progressive school should include mentor-student relationships with hands-on learning. The schools do not have to be entirely immersed in the progressive movement to be a progressive school (Kohn, 2008) Schools can have formal lessons and uniforms but include the following elements. If these elements are part of a school, it is following the Progressive Education Movement started by John Dewey and continued by Alfie Kohn.

First, educators must attend to the whole child (Kohn, 2008). Kohn's ideas echo the same ideas John Dewy had proclaimed (Dewey, 1938). Dewy and Kohn believe you must accompany the teaching of hard skills with soft skills. This type of approach creates a holistic education for the child. Teachers should be concerned with a child's education but also focus on teaching them to be a good person. Second, the schools must instill a sense of community in their students (Kohn, 2008). Students are put in collaborative settings so they can get a sense of teamwork and critical thinking. This working together gives them a sense of community, which is lacking in the competitive traditional schools (Kohn, 2008). Third, educators must ask what effect does this lesson have on students' interest in learning (Kohn, 2008). These schools do less homework, grades and tests while giving the student more of a chance to explore and practice self-learning. Fourth, schools should strive for their students to have a deep understanding of topics (Kohn, 2008). The meaning behind this idea is not to say facts and skill don't but matter because they do, but they must have context and purpose to ensure the whole education of the child. Progressive Educators use projects and probing questions to stimulate self-learning in their students. This inquiry leads to active learning. Students in elementary and middle schools perform better when they must show initiative in their projects instead of doing

worksheets and reading from textbooks (Wenglinsky, 2004). This opportunity to show initiative as well as expressing their thoughts and ideas make the student more vested in the process. The students are more engaged as they become active learners. This freedom to be open also allows the student to feel their opinion matters. They truly believe their ideas are taken seriously and that they are part of the learning process (Kohn, 2008). Since each student and classroom will help the teacher develop the curriculum, no two classrooms will look the same. This process will ensure every child's learning needs are being met.

The pressure to perform well on standardized tests such as No Child Left Behind led schools to teach to the test instead of teaching soft skills to their students. The schools' teaching of facts and asking for regurgitation on these tests left little room for schools to teach students skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving or communication. Schools must answer the following questions to determine if they are teaching in a traditional or progressive school setting (Kohn, 2008):

1) Is the school committed to being educationally progressive or content with only being progressive in political and cultural realm?

2) Is teaching organized around problem-solving, critical thinking, projects and questions?

3) Is assessment driven with a community and collaboration vision, or are students measured with elaborate rubrics and grades?

4) Do administrators respect teachers' and students' autonomy giving them freedom to design lessons?

5) Are educators modeling life-long learners by teaching students to ask why?

6) Is the school progressive and collaborative in academic and nonacademic matters?

If the answer is yes to these questions, then the school may set up its classrooms

to resemble classrooms in the Progressive Education era. Kohn lays out the ways that a

progressive classroom should look. First, the desks and chairs should be arranged so

students can interact. The teacher must also have comfortable areas for learning as well

as activity centers (Kohn, 1996). Second, every inch of the walls should be covered. They

will display students' projects, signs and exhibits created by the students and information

about the people that spend time in the classroom (Kohn, 1996). Third, the teacher is

working with students, circulating. It should take a few seconds to locate the teacher

because they are working with students (Kohn, 1996). The teacher is talking in respectful,

genuine voice when working with the students or leading class discussions. Fourth, these

discussions are conversations between students. The students are speaking directly to one

another, using thoughtful exploration of each other's thoughts and asking as many

questions as the teacher if not more (Kohn, 1996). Lastly, the school projects a space

where people what to come. Students' projects line the hall; office staff is friendly;

school is clean and students are helping in the lunchroom, library and with other school

functions (Kohn, 1996). Kohn emphatically believes that if schools are run in this

manner, the whole education of a child will be accomplished. Once schools start teaching

this whole education again, the problem facing employers of students lacking soft skills

will be greatly reduced. Before exploring the next steps that must be taken to make

students College and Career ready while honing their soft skills, the second factor

hampering soft skill development which is technology and its effects on today's youth

must be discussed.

Technology and the Effects on Soft Skills

Another factor hampering soft skills that other generations did not have to battle is the advancements in technology. Students have smart phones, social networking, text messaging and video game systems all of which reduce the number of face-to-face interactions that students have on a daily basis. Employers are stating the lack of communication skills that job applicants show is increasing with each passing interview (McKay, 2005). American Psychiatric Association's research is showing how technology, especially messaging, is altering the students' brains.

Socialization is dwindling as teens spend more time behind a screen and less time having face-to-face interactions. Thirty-nine percent of Americans admit to socializing through messaging rather than talking to family and friends in person (Thompson, 2012) The American Psychiatric Association in their revised DSM V manual included a mental illness link to internet addiction called Internet Use Disorder (APA, 2012). This disorder explains how the brain is altered and becomes addicted to the Internet and messaging. Studies have shown that when the bell of a smartphone goes off, a small amount of dopamine is released not unlike that of the sensation addicts get from the use of cocaine or heroine (Walton, 2012). Students have show withdrawals when the internet is not available or loss in other pursuits such as jobs (APA, 2012). These withdrawals greatly affect their job performance and communication skills at work.

The next factor that is hindering students' communication development is the loss of the ability to communicate with people in person. Students can communicate with family and friends at anytime from anywhere thanks to smart phones. The amount of cell phones in the United States has risen from 33.8 million in 1995 to 270.3 million in 2008

(Bullas, 2012). This increase in cell phones has taken a huge rise in teens in the United

States with 77% having a cell phone and 23% having a smart phone (Tippin, 2012).

Fifty-five percent of teens with cellphones admit to texting three to seven hours a day

(Pierce, 2009), which translates to 60 texts a day, and up to 400 texts a month (Dokoupil,

2012). This type of communication is problematic for two reasons. First, the lack of

personal contact with the person with whom they are talking. This anonymity makes

students feel more comfortable sharing private information, which they would never do

in person (Thurlow & Poff, 2011). This lack of knowing what is appropriate to say and

what is not appropriate to say causes problems in the work place when teens believe it is

appropriate to share personal information because they are accustomed to sharing such

information in their text messages on a daily basis. The second problem with texting is

the language that has been created with texting. Students find it hard to know when to

type text and when to type formally (Fieldman, 2011). Many teens' written

communication skills are worsening because they are sending emails and completing job

applications with their text shorthand which employers state is becoming a problem

(Fieldman 2011). The main problem facing employers is trying to retrain students to

break their technological habits. The lack of eye contact, the inability to know when to

share and when not to share information, not knowing the different expectations of being

online and offline, and using text shorthand in formal writing are why employers are

urging schools to address these issues and try to help students reverse this trend. (Schulz,

2008).

Next Step in College and Career Readiness and Honing Soft Skills

The United States Department of Labor has stated that Career Pathways is the next step toward filling the void of highly skilled and trained workers in America (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2014). This viewpoint has resulted in the United States Department of Labor joining with the Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education to provide students with postsecondary education and training to improve future employees' skills allowing for their advancement in the workplace (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2014). The interest of the Department of Labor and Education has spurred interest in Congress, which will be presented in the next article discussed.

Congress has established ideas on Career Pathways and what they believe their role should be in these programs. Congress reauthorized the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which included important changes to state planning processes and performance metrics which will make it easier to plan workforce development programs (McCarthy, 2014). The new law encourages states to explore and develop Career Pathways that will link education and employment opportunities while supporting students in acquiring the skills required to obtain a job in their field of choice (McCarthy, 2014).

Congress also supports funding additions for adult students. A provision to the Workforce Investment was added which provides opportunities for adult students who lack high school credentials to be able to obtain Pell grants. This provision requires these students to be enrolled in Career Pathways programs to receive these grants (McCarthy, 2014). These programs integrate students' basic education with college-level coursework that will lead the student to receive the industry-level credentials or certificates needed

(McCarthy, 2014). This program, when completed, will be the first step toward earning the credentials that the students need to obtain their desired advancement or position.

Critics must be addressed when dealing with Career Pathways. The main concern of critics is the irony of extending financial aid to students who never completed high school. The main type of person that this program can help is the dropout who had to leave high school to help his or her family. This dropout obtained a job in which he or she cannot now advance or be promoted from due to the employee not having the correct qualifications. This program allows them to gain these credentials without having to spend time and money on GED programs plus college. This type of student must pass a test showing his or her capability of passing college-level classes. Once this test is passed, he or she is eligible for the Pell Grant (McCarthy, 2014).

Business leaders desire students to have certain skills in work-ready communities. The employers list the "hard" skills as writing, math and science and state that these "hard" skills will always be important, but employers continue to say that there also needs to be a push by schools to train future employees to be proficient in soft skills. The following five soft skills are listed as the most important which tie very closely to many ideas John Dewy was championing approximately one hundred years ago (Holmes, 2014):

1) Collaboration – Students must learn to function efficiently and appropriately in groups and on projects. This skill enables them to learn to take constructive criticism and also teaches the student to be a valuable member of an organization.

2) Communication and Interpersonal Skills – This skill will enable students to learn to ask questions, be active listeners and make eye contact. Electronic devices are

destroying this skill, and it is imperative to reverse this trend. If students cannot

convey these qualities, it could negatively affect their performance in college and

job interviews.

3) Problem-Solving – Students must learn this skill to deal with various problems in

life. Students who have a difficult time adapting to new challenges can face many

problems in the workforce. This skill will allow them to face new challenges and

adapt to any situation.

4) Time Management – Students must learn to be self-sufficient in tracking their

time. This skill will allow them to complete more tasks at a more efficient pace.

5) Leadership – Students need to not only be a part of a group, but they also need to

know how to lead that group. This skill will require students to draw on their

"hard" skills such as knowledge and experience and their "soft" skills to provide

the qualities a leader must exhibit to get results.

The next important step in schools is introducing soft skills into a College and

Career Readiness program. This article's origins stem from a P-20 conference presented

by the University of Texas of San Antonio P-20 offices. The author, Ben Johnson, stated

in 1993 that he had no idea what P-20 was and had to ask. Once he learned that it was

preschool through graduate school, he saw the importance of soft skills. Johnson explains

that the most powerful information he discussed came from leaders of business and

industry in San Antonio. Marion Lozoya, manager from Toyota Manufacturing Texas

located in San Antonio, said education is like a doughnut shop where the customer picks

from limited selection. He said business and schools should work together to make

schools like a burger restaurant where you ask for what you want. Lozoya says schools

are preparing students for jobs that do not exist because we do not ask students what they

want or need (Johnson, 2013). Another leader explained that in interviews he is looking

for someone who can problem solve, reason, collaborate, communicate and think. He said

these should be considered the hard skills not soft (Johnson, 2013).

Johnson describes the job that Anne Shaw is doing with the 21st Century Schools.

She runs her organization on the idea that students need the critical skills mentioned

above such as critical thinking and problem solving skills, collaboration across networks,

adaptability, entrepreneurialism, effective oral and written communication, ability to

analyze information, curiosity and imagination (Johnson, 2013). These are the skills

businesses are demanding. This demand shows why these skills must be taught in schools

to assure that our students are college and career ready.

The problem companies are facing with students lacking soft skills is not a new

one. The problem can be traced on a roller coaster path from Plessy vs. Ferguson to No

Child Left Behind. This ride hit its peak during the Progressive Education movement of

the 1920s to 1950s when schools were adopting the ideas of John Dewey and teaching

the student not only the core subjects, but also how to become a contributing member to

society. This movement was sidetracked due to many factors of the 1950s from the

achievement gap brought to the forefront by Brown vs. Board of Education, the mistrust

caused by the launching of Sputnik and claims Progressive Education was a Communist

movement. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act set out to eradicate the

achievement gaps while providing means to help all students learn no matter their

socioeconomic backgrounds. This act evolved into No Child Left Behind. This act set up

a system where schools were judged based on how well students performed on a test.

This type of testing plus the advancement of technology has almost eradicated soft skills in our country. Thanks to educational leaders such as Alfie Kohn the ideas of Progressive Education along with College and Career Programs are helping create Career Pathways to teach students soft skills. The next section will explain how the researcher will determine if the employers are right about soft skills being inadequate in today's graduates, what factors are hindering soft skills development and what can be done to ensure that students are College and Career Ready.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Statement of the Problem

Employers have always been faced with the need of trying to find every advantage possible to make their businesses a success. They are currently finding that task increasingly more difficult because the new workers who are being released into the workforce of today lack the soft skills to be viable employees. The main focus of employers when conducting interviews has shifted from technical skills to whether or not future employees have communication, problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Christakas, 2012).

The claims of employers that job applicants are becoming increasingly less prepared each year is based on the reduction of the soft skills that applicants demonstrate (Jaschik, 2015). It is believed by today's employers that applicants have grown in hard skills such as work and technical knowledge, but they also believe that this growth has hampered applicants in the area of soft skills.

Two major conclusions have arisen due to this problem. First, employers believe that due to the proficiency of hard skills and the deficiency in soft skills, schools are focusing more on hard skills than the holistic education of the student (Jaschik, 2015). The second conclusion, which is contributing to the growth of the soft skills gap, is that future employees believe they are very capable in soft skills (Jaschik, 2015). Their confidence is conflicting with the beliefs of employers. These conclusions have led to the following research questions:

1) How do teachers perceive the current state of soft skills?

2) How do employers perceive the current state of soft skills?

3) What factors have contributed to the current state in soft skills?

4) What can be done to increase soft skills in today's graduates and applicants thus making them college and career ready?

Setting

The client that the researcher partnered with was McCracken County Schools. The schools are located in Paducah, Kentucky. The population of the county is 65,316 (census.gov, 2015). The poverty level of McCracken County is 16.7% with 86.9% having a high school diploma (census.gov, 2015). This number drops drastically when compared to the 22.5% of the population that holds Bachelor's Degree. This gap is one of the main reasons that a Career Pathways/Work-Ready Community program has been started in McCracken County Schools.

The work-ready community is taking data from the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate to target gaps in soft skills. These targets are used to help job seekers build their soft skills to make them college or career ready. The researcher worked with Heath Elementary School, Heath Middle School and McCracken County High School to determine what these schools can do to improve the soft skills of their students. This improvement in soft skills will help to strengthen their Maritime Career Pathway program.

McCracken County Schools consist of five elementary schools, two intermediate schools, three middle schools and one consolidated high school. The district is working with the maritime industry to create Career Pathways for students interested in that field. The district is looking for ways to create workers for the job market. This neoliberalist

approach is a shift from the idea of producing human capital to producing students ready for college or careers (Apple, 2006).

The problem with this shift is the employers' ideas that applicants are missing the soft skills needed to be successful (Jaschik, 2015). This study interviewed teachers and administrators from Heath Elementary School, Heath Middle School and McCracken County High School to determine why they believe employers are claiming that students are missing soft skills. The interviews also discussed what the educators believe can be done to rectify this situation.

Participants

The participants for this study were drawn from various populations. These populations were teachers and administrators from Heath Elementary School, Heath Middle School and McCracken County High School. Employers of local businesses in Western Kentucky fulfilled the other sample size for this study. The teachers were selected purposefully and randomly for focus groups while the employers were selected purposefully then used snowball sampling to gain more interviews.

The population of teachers involved Kindergarten through Fifth Grade for the elementary level who teach self-contained classrooms, Sixth Grade through Eighth Grade who are subject specialized for the middle school level and Ninth through Twelfth Grade who are subject specialized for the high school level. The selection criterion for teachers was that teachers must have two years' experience plus have their own classes. The researcher recruited teachers via personal invitation, email and website invitation. The consent form and letter were sent when a participant accepted the invitation.

The population of employers included employers from Western Kentucky. These employers included managers who work in training, hiring, human resources and general management from many different business and industries. The selection process was that certain employers were selected initially then other employers were selected by recommendation. The requirements for employers to be included in the survey were to select employers who interview job applicants as well as those employers who train new hires.

Sample Selection

The researcher sought the approval of Murray State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). When the IRB granted its approval, the researcher began randomly selecting teacher participants to be in the study. He individually selected the initial sample of employers, but he used snowball sampling to gain more employers' interviews. The process is outlined below:

1) Listed 1-20 for HES, 21-49 for HMS, 50 -150 for MCHS teachers alphabetically.

2) Used an internet random number generator to select 32 numbers.

3) Took the names and numbers and contacted the first 32 participants that represented a population of 6 teachers from HES, 13 teachers from HMS and 13 teachers from MCHS. An administrator from each school was also chosen to make the total of focus group members be 35.

4) If all 32 said yes, then proceeded with focus groups. If any say no, conducted steps 1-3 again to find more names.

5) Contacted employers for interviews.

6) When interviews concluded, asked employers if they could recommend anyone else to interview.

7) Used Snowball Sampling to gain more employer interviews.

Purposeful criterion sampling for this study was used to select the teacher participants. This type of selection is used in qualitative research to assure that a small sample size is selected with the purpose of the study in mind. (Creswell, 2009). This procedure allowed the researcher to ascertain a deeper understanding of the teachers' thoughts of the problem being researched. This type of sampling called for randomization, which helped to solidify the validity of this study. This validity was due to the fact that the researcher gained an accurate and random representation of the teacher participation pool (Creswell, 2009).

The purposeful random sampling was used for the teacher participation pool. The researcher looked at randomly choosing 20% of the 150 teachers at Heath Elementary School, Heath Middle School and McCracken County High School. This number resulted in 32 teachers being randomly selected. The 150 teachers were placed in alphabetical order with 1-20 being from HES, 21-49 being from HMS and 50-150 being from MCHS. A number was assigned to each name with the first one receiving a 1 all the way to the last name receiving a 150. A random number generator was used to generate 32 numbers. These numbers reflect 6 teachers from Heath Elementary School, 13 teachers from Heath Middle School and 13 teachers from McCracken County High School. These teachers were placed into focus groups of 6 members. One focus group was at Heath Elementary while two focus groups were at both Heath Middle School and McCracken County High School.

Once these participants were selected, the researcher emailed or met with each participant individually to determine his or her interest in participating in the focus group. Once the initial 32 random participants responded with their interest, the focus groups' invitations were sent if all 32 agreed. If any replied no, the process was repeated until the target number of 32 was reached. The verification of 32 participants allowed the researcher to move forward with the next step. The three principals were added to a focus group to make the total 35.

The researcher emailed an official invitation with consent form to each participant that agreed to participate in the focus group. The consent form was returned within 5-10 days of its reception. When all 35 consent forms had been returned, the researcher informed all participants of the location and time of their focus group. Any changes to the groups or times were made at this point. If no changes were needed, the focus groups proceeded as planned.

The second group the researcher sampled were employers in Western Kentucky. The employers were contacted by email to gauge their interest in this study. If the employers contacted are interested, a second email was sent to set up a time for an interview as well as to include the letter of consent that was collected at the time of the interview.

The sampling done for the employers was snowball sampling. Snowball or Chain Referral Sampling is widely used for qualitative research (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Some researchers believe that social networks and pacing can cause problems to the snowball sample (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This concern was not a problem in this study. the researcher simply asked employers who they believed would be willing to

help in this study once the interview concluded. The social status of the employers did

not affect the answers to the questions on soft skills. The pacing of when the researcher

contacted employers via this method did not have any bearing on the outcome of the

study.

Once the employers' answers were collected, the researcher coded the answers.

These answers were divided into major themes to address the research questions. The

same coding procedure was used for the answers from teachers' focus groups. This

process will be discussed more in the Data Analysis section of this study.

Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative research design when addressing this study,

which allowed deeper exploration of the topic through the experiences of the participants

(Creswell, 2009). The study looked at the complexity of the design and interaction

(Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher chose interviews and focus groups due to

the simple and personal design and interaction that they provided (Marshall & Rossman,

2011). This personal interaction allowed the researcher to examine the experience of the

participants so that he obtained the information needed to complete the study.

The interview and focus group questions were derived from the research

questions and literature review of the study. Marshall and Rossman set forth an excellent

example of data collection. This method, which will be discussed in the next section,

influenced the in-depth interviewing process. The types of data collection used were

focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The researcher designed the interview/focus

group questions, and he also administered the interviews and focus groups.

The researcher then used document review, interviews and focus groups to determine the teachers' and employers' thoughts and experiences on soft skills. These thoughts, experiences and answers were coded to see how they connected to the research questions of this study. It was appropriate to use self-developed instruments to collect data to answer these questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These instruments were qualitative in nature, which was the main reason this study and research design was conducted in this manner.

Data Collection

The researcher gained permission from the IRB board from Murray State University to complete this study. When this approval was granted, the researcher contacted Mr. Sutton, superintendent of McCracken County Public Schools, to inform him that the focus group process was beginning at Heath Elementary School, Heath Middle School and McCracken County High School. This initial contact was followed by an email to the three principals of the aforementioned schools to inform them of the study. This email also informed them that a focus group or groups on soft skills would be conducted with their faculty.

The researcher conducted the sampling process for the focus groups as outlined in the sample selection section. Emails were sent gauging the interest of those selected. When 32 positive responses had been acquired, emails were sent inviting participants to join a focus group. The participants received acceptance and consent letters both to be returned 5-10 days after they were received. The principals were added to a focus group on each level. There were five focus groups consisting of six to eight members. One

focus group was at Heath Elementary School while two each were at Heath Middle

School and McCracken County High School.

Focus groups seemed to be the ideal method because of their ability to generate a

wider variety of information (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These focus groups also

allowed for immediate follow-up and allowed the researcher to seek clarification

whenever possible (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The focus groups gave the interviewer

the ability to connect with varying types of people. This variety of people helped the

researcher to see how opinions differ in various groups.

Creswell (2009) states qualitative studies have various degrees of data collection.

The researcher believed that out of the numerous options set forth by Creswell,

interviews and focus groups remain the best options. Focus groups proved challenging

especially due to the tendency for them to easily stray from the subject (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher made it a priority to control the focus groups to maintain that they stayed

focused and on topic. The researcher asked a series of open-ended questions that centered

around the focus groups' thoughts and experiences on the following:

1) What are soft skills?

2) Are they taught in schools? If yes, to what extent?

3) Are they missing? If so, why do teachers think they are missing?

4) Are employers correct in their evaluation of today's job applicants?

5) What can be done to close the soft skills gap?

Before the focus groups started, the researcher discussed the conditions of the

focus groups with its members. He advised the participants that they could opt out of the

study at any time. The researcher also reminded the participants as mentioned in their

letter of consent that each focus group would be audio-recorded. The participants were numbered 1-8 to ensure anonymity. While the audio-recorder was going, the researcher took field notes to gauge the behaviors of the participants to each question. When the focus group ended, the researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim for the coding process. The field notes were connected to the transcript to put all opinions and answers into context. The participants were dismissed but reminded that they might be contacted for follow-up questions or explanations.

The second part of data collection was the interviews with area employers who interview, hire and train new hires. The researcher sent emails to these employers to see if they were interested in participating in the study. If they sent back a positive response, an email was sent to schedule a time for the interview. A letter of consent was included in this email. This letter of consent was collected before the interview started.. The interviews were conducted at the employers' place of business as a convenience to them.

The same process was used to begin the interview process that started the focus groups. The researcher explained to the participants that they have the right to opt out of the interview or study at any time. The participant was reminded that the interview would be recorded for accuracy. The researcher/interviewer made field notes of the interview. Once the interview concluded, the participant was asked to make suggestions for others to be interviewed. After a proper "thank you" is extended, the participant was reminded that they would be contacted to make certain that the transcription is accurate. This process included asking for clarification or follow-up questions to the interview.

The interview was transcribed verbatim, and the field notes were attached to each interview. Recording and observing the data allowed the researcher to determine the

sentiment of the employers' answers (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The recording also

added to the validity of the transcription.

The answers to each interview once transcribed were coded to start collecting data

to design the conceptual framework. This conceptual framework set the foundation for

the themes in this study. The coding process will be discussed in the Data Analysis

Section.

Data Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (2011) cited seven steps to the analytic procedure. The

first four steps were used in the researchers' data analysis. The first step discussed in the

data collection phase is organizing the data. The transcription of the focus groups and

interviews were the researcher's way of organizing data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Marshall and Rossman suggest many ways to conduct this organization, but the best way

for this study was to use the placement of different pieces of information on note cards

once the focus groups and interviews were transcribed.

The researcher immersed himself in the data, which is the second step (Marshall

& Rosssman, 2011). The best procedure to achieve this step for this study was the

constant comparative method. This method proved beneficial because new data was

flowing in, and it was compared to the old data. This comparison of new data to old data

is the basic principle of the constant comparative method (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

This method allowed the researcher to identify the basic themes in the focus groups and

interviews.

The next step was to create themes and concepts to build the frameworks for the study. Some initial themes or concepts that the researcher saw which might be concluded from future focus groups and interviews are the following:

1) What are soft skills?

2) Are soft skills lacking?

3) Whose fault is it they are lacking?

4) What can be done to correct the problem?

The data from the focus groups and interviews was coded to determine the themes with which they coincided (Marhsall & Rossman, 2011). Coding is the simple process of combing through the data to find themes, topics, ideas and concepts (Gibbs & Taylor, 2010). The researcher used open coding. This type of coding looked at concepts and categories in the data (Creswell, 2009) which the researcher used to build concepts or scaffolding to devise the conceptual framework of the study.

The first stage of coding was transcribing the data from the interviews and focus groups. The researcher placed the information on index cards and color coded them by the research theme/question that they best fit. Then he listened to the audio recordings several times to ensure the validity of the transcription. The teachers' and employers' experiences created different themes that are off topic, but they were guided to stay on the topic of soft skills.

When all the data was coded, the researcher put those ideas into different areas of major themes, which helped to provide an understanding of the data instead of a theoretical explanation (Jabereen, 2009). These themes for this study were developed and constructed through a qualitative analysis approach. This process provided a blueprint

that the researcher used as an aid to place the coded data into the correct themes. The process of how the assurance of the validity and accuracy of the coding was determined will be discussed in the next section.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity was ensured for the integrity of this study. The first step the researcher took to maintain these qualities was triangulation. The data was cross-checked from multiple data points from the data collection process. This cross-checking of data collected reinforced its validity and accuracy. The researcher had member and peer checking methods to authenticate the accuracy of the focus groups and interviews.

Member checking was used to check the validity of employers' interviews. The verbatim transcripts were sent to employer participants so they could check the transcripts. The participants checked their responses and communicated with the researcher whether or not the transcript were correct and accurate (Sandelowski & Givens, 2008). This collaboration made certain that the data collected is presented in a valid manner portraying the true thoughts and experiences of the employer.

Peer checking was used to eliminate any researcher bias (Chenail, 2009). Two processes are suggested when peer checking (Chenail, 2009):

1) A peer to eliminate bias interviewed the researcher.
2) Have a peer code with the same data and compare answers.

The researcher used the second option. The researcher contacted two peers to code the same sample data that he coded to ensure that he was accurately coding the interview/focus data. This peer checking also made sure that his bias was omitted in this process.

The researcher then delivered the findings in a narrative format. The use of narrative format allowed for quotes to be integrated when describing the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009). This formal approach allowed the reader to understand the setting, participants' thoughts and the role that the researcher took in the study (Creswell, 2012). It also made it easier to comprehend the problem, findings and recommendations of the study (Creswell, 2012).

The data collection and analysis phases were conducted with the same integrity, consideration, and accuracy that the thoughts and experiences of the participants were portrayed. The use of verbatim transcripts, codes, themes, and narrative results was used to eliminate any bias. The next section will discuss the findings from the focus groups and interviews.

The following two charts will describe the actual participants of teachers and employers. These groups' answers were used for data analysis purposes. The focus groups consisted of 35 teachers and principals across elementary, middle and high school. The focus groups were conducted at one elementary school, two at a middle school and two at a high school. The employers were interviewed on an individual basis. Fifteen employer interviews were conducted for this study.

Table 3

Focus Group Teacher Participants

Participant	Subject -Level	Years Experience
Participant 1	All - Elementary	22 years
Participant 2	All - Elementary	19 years
Participant 3	All - Elementary	21 years

Participant 4	All - Elementary	17 years
Participant 5	All - Elementary	4 years
Participant 6	All - Elementary	21 years
Participant 7	All- Elementary	7 years
Participant 8	Technology – High School	14 years
Participant 9	Special Education – HS	18 years
Participant 10	Special Education – HS	8 years
Participant 11	Math – HS	15 years
Participant 12	Art – Middle School	3 years
Participant 13	Special Education – MS	16 years
Participant 14	Engineering – MS	19 years
Participant 15	Math – MS	4 years
Participant 16	Language Arts – MS	3 years
Participant 17	Science – MS	19 years
Participant 18	Social Studies – MS	10 years
Participant 19	Math – MS	7 years
Participant 20	Math – MS	17 years
Participant 21	Social Studies – MS	3 years
Participant 22	Math – MS	8 years
Participant 23	Language Arts – MS	12 years
Participant 24	Reading – MS	21 years
Participant 25	Language Arts – MS	11 years
Participant 26	Reading – MS	8 years

Participant 27	English – HS	22 years
Participant 28	Librarian – HS	19 years
Participant 29	Guidance Counselor – HS	16 years
Participant 30	Math – HS	14 years
Participant 31	Guidance Counselor – HS	7 years
Participant 32	Reading – Student Teacher	0 years
Participant 33	Elementary Principal	4 years
Participant 34	Middle School Principal	2 years
Participant 35	High School Principal	20 years

Table 4

Employers Interviewed

Participant	Position	Industry	Employee/Owner
Participant 1	Human Resources	Construction	Employee
Participant 2	Human Resources	Fire Alarm Co.	Employee
Participant 3	Private Business	Service	Owner
Participant 4	Lawyer	District Attorney	Employee
Participant 5	Lawyer	Public Defender	Owner
Participant 6	Chiropractor	Service	Owner
Participant 7	Human Resources	Insurance	Employee
Participant 8	Vice President	Cellular Co.	Employee
Participant 9	Vice President	Health Insurance	Employee
Participant 10	Private Business	Construction	Owner
Participant 11	Lab Manager	Chemical Company	Employee

Participant 12	Preacher	Church	Employee
Participant 13	Preacher	Church	Employee
Participant 14	Vice President	Volunteer Agency	Employee
Participant 15	Vice President	Technology Co.	Employee

The above participants' answers were used to answer the study's research questions. These answers are analyzed in the next section to determine why teachers and employers believe today's prospective employees do not possess the soft skills to be successful in the work force.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction

The data analysis process consisted of 5 focus groups of teachers and 15

individual employer interviews. The focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded to

ensure accuracy. The researcher then transcribed each focus group and interview. The

information collected was coded into possible themes that could answer each research

question. These themes were then used to address the research questions developed for

this study. Each research question was addressed from a teacher and an employer point-

of-view. Their responses were used to answer the following research questions.

1) How do teachers perceive the current state of soft skills?

2) How do employers perceive the current state of soft skills?

3) What factors have contributed to the current state of soft skills?

4) What can be done to promote soft skills?

Research Question 1

How do teachers perceive the current state of soft skills? This research question

was addressed by conducting focus groups of teachers at the elementary, middle and high

school levels. This data analysis analyzed the themes to these research questions from the

teacher's perspective, then from the employers' perspective. The similarities and

differences of their answers are given in the discussion section. Their answers were used

to base the recommendations for the client. The following questions were asked to

determine teachers' views on soft skills in today's students:

1) How would you rank the following soft skills in importance: critical thinking, problem solving, oral communication, written communication, teamwork, leadership and work ethic?

2) Which soft skills do you think employers are looking for in today's applicants?

3) Based on students today, do you believe they have the soft skills to be successful in the work place?

3a) Why did you answer this way?

Question 3a was not on the original focus group questions but became essential as a follow-up question based on the teacher's responses.

Based on the teacher's responses the data produced the following themes:

1) Most important soft skills

2) Soft Skills Employers are looking for

3) Students do not possess the soft skills to succeed

3a) Explanation of teachers' perception why they believe students are lacking these skills

Ranking of Soft Skills

This category seemed very wide open when the researcher was putting together this study; however, once the focus groups were conducted the themes were quickly narrowed down and formed. Teachers' perceptions were mainly in line across the age groups (P-5, 6-8, 9-12) about which soft skills were most important. The first theme the researcher will look at is the ranking of soft skills. Teachers were asked to rank the following soft skills in order of importance: critical thinking, problem solving, oral communication, work ethic, written communication, leadership and teamwork. The table

below shows each soft skill and the number of first place votes it received. The data

analysis looks at the teachers' answers and which soft skill they rank first along with their

reasons for doing so.

Table 5

Soft Skill Rankings

Soft Skill	First Place Votes
Work Ethic	14
Oral Communication	7
Teamwork	5
Problem Solving/Critical Thinking	4
Leadership	3
Written Communication	2

Work Ethic

The teachers' rationale for these rankings centered on students having a good

work ethic. Many of the teachers who took part in the focus groups believed if a student

had a good work ethic then they could easily adapt and learn the other soft skills.

Participant 28 stated, "If you have good work ethic, than all of the other things really

don't matter. You might be a great thinker; but if you don't work, it does no good."

Participant 31 agreed with this idea by noting "If you have good work ethic, then all

others will fall into place. If you don't have the other traits, but have work ethic you will

work at getting better at the others." Participant 9 continued the ideas of the previous two

participants by stating, "I think work ethic is the most important for me. A lot of things can be fostered, but work ethic is one of those things that you either have or you don't."

This idea that work ethic was the most important soft skill was seen across the elementary and middle schools as well. Participant 1 expressed, "For me, the most important skill is work ethic. It drives the others." Participants 15 explained their beliefs by saying, "Work ethic is at the top of the list for me because if you are invested in work you will be able to improve the other skills to be successful." Participants 20 believes work ethic and initiative are the foundation of great soft skills and expressed this belief in these words, "Hearing my husband talk about employees, he wants work ethic and initiative. He doesn't want to have to tell employees to do something five times."

Work ethic was the overwhelming number one response to how teachers rank soft skills. This lack of work ethic was not a problem in the progressive education movement. The ideas of John Dewy not only taught students their core subjects, but also how to develop work ethic and the rest of the social skills that teachers believe are missing. The rest of this section will be dedicated to the other soft skills, their ranks and the teachers' responses that put them in the order in the Table 4. The next soft skill we will look at is oral communication.

Oral Communication

Oral Communication was the theme that most teachers agreed should be the second most important skill. Their explanations can be summed up in these words, "If you speak well, you can open many doors and be trained in the other skills." Participant 29 expressed "You can kind of hide written communication, but bad oral communication is hard to hide." Participant 28 agreed with this notion saying "When students go to

college or taker a jobs,it is really hard for them to be successful without good oral communication skills." Participant 8 believes "Nothing turns an employer off as much as someone who can't orally communicate."

The elementary teachers were the focus group that felt oral communication was a close second to work ethic. Some of the participants even ranked it above work ethic. Participant 2 was a firm advocate that oral communication was at the top of the list. They expressed, "I put oral communication at the top of the list. How you speak will be reflected in your writing. If you speak poorly, you will write poorly. These poor communication skills will lower your chances in an interview" Participant 14 noted, "You you must have the ability to communicate your ideas orally." Participant 18 put it into perspective by saying, "No matter where they work, McDonald's or Apple, they will have to communicate orally."

Though oral communication ranked second, it was still very important to teachers. Teachers fear that the lack of soft skills is tied to the students' dependency on hand-held devices. The research in this area agrees with the teachers' notions. The withdrawal of students when faced without an internet connection is greatly affecting their oral communication (APA, 2012). The rest of the soft skills were seen as important, but were ranked as the most important soft skill in much smaller quantities. Teamwork was the next highest ranked soft skill.

Teamwork

Participant 35 believed teamwork is the most highly ranked soft skill. Their ideas were expressed in their interview answers. "The motto of our school is Work Hard! Be

Nice! This motto teaches our students the importance of working together. When they work together, great things can be accomplished."

Teamwork was also seen as an important soft skill in the middle school. Participant 17 stated, "Teamwork is the most important because students have to learn to work together with others in school and at jobs." Participant 19 echoed this idea because "Students need to be able to get along with others professionally and socially." Elementary participants agreed "it was important, but not as important due to their job being to teach students individual soft skills." They saw this skill as being more important in middle and high school. The teachers that selected this soft skill said they believed it was more important in the job market than schools.

Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking

Problem solving was the soft skill next highest in the soft skill rankings. This soft skill received the majority of its ranking from the middle school participants. Participant 12 believes "Students must learn to problem solve on their own. If they don't, they will be the less attractive job candidates." Participant 13 agreed with Participant 12 saying, "If you can solve problems, you can do any of these other skills." Participant 15 explored this idea further by saying. "I think problem solving is the most important because you need to be able to figure out things and not always have someone else explain them to you. This independent thinking will include critical thinking skills too. "These ideas reflect some middle school teachers' opinions of students today. The majority of them believe their students are lacking problem solving and critical thinking skills. This lack of problem solving skills is affecting their performance in the classroom.

The teachers that picked this soft skill were very adamant this skill is the one that students must development to succeed in the business world. Teachers believed teaching students this skill essentially is the same notion as presented by John Dewey or Alfie Kohn. If a student can solve problems or critically think, they can develop any of the other soft skills.

Leadership

The next to last soft skill in this list is leadership. Most participants felt you didn't have to possess this skill to be a good employee. The consensus was there are good students and employees who do what they are supposed to do, but aren't leaders. These students and employers are still contributing members to their societies. A couple of participants said these students were silent leaders by being good examples. Participant 30 made the point, "You learn at every grade level to be leaders, but junior and senior years you realize a leader is more than just organizing and making sure group members get their work done." Participant 28 built on this response, "I agree that being a leader is about motivating and encouraging others to develop the group as a whole." Participant 3 believes you must have the mindset of a leader to be successful and expressed, "You don't have to be a rah rah leader, but your example of doing what is right can make you a leader."

Written Communication

The last ranked soft skill was written communication. The main theme in this section continued to center around the idea if you can speak well, you can be taught to write well. Participants 18 stated, "You have to be able to write well in today's world. If you can't write correctly, it will reflect badly on you and the company." Participant 3 was

very passionate that this skill should be ranked higher. This participant stated, "Written

Communication is not a turn on, turn off type of skill. Students must now how to write to

be successful." While most participants agreed this skill was important, it was far down

the list as the most important.

This soft skill was really a side note to oral communication. Most teachers

believed if a student knew how to speak correctly they would be able to be trained to

write correctly. A few teachers felt very strongly that this soft skill was just as important,

if not more important, than oral communication due to the fact it is seen on resumes

before the employer even talks to you. These rankings clearly showed how teachers

perceive soft skills, but they differed some when asked what soft skills they believe

employers are wanting.

Table 6

Teachers Perception on What Soft Skills Employers are Looking For

Soft Skill	Teacher Votes
Initiative/Work Ethic	12
Problem Solving/Oral Communication	8
Teamwork	5
Leadership	4
Flexibility	2
Likeability	2
Commitment	2

The above table shows what soft skills teachers believe employees are looking for in today's prospective employees. This section will look at each skill and the thought of the participants. The theme of Work Ethic/Initiative once again came in as the number one skill.

Work Ethic/Initiative

Participant 18 said, "I truly believe employers want someone who will work hard and not stand around. I am constantly asked as a reference, "How does this person work?" Participant 24 agreed, "I think initiative and problem solving go hand and hand. If you don't have problem solving, you won't take initiative because you won't feel confident to do anything on your own." Participant 25 echoed these thoughts; "Employers want people that do the job without having their hand held." Participant 24's thoughts led right into the second soft skill teachers believe employers want, which is employees who can solve problems and be able to communicate those results to their colleagues.

Problem Solving/Oral Communication

Participant 24's thoughts clearly show a connection between problem solving and initiative/work ethic in the last section, which proved a good starting point for this section. Participant 21 believes problem solving is the clear-cut top skill that employers are looking and states, "Problem solving is important because you need to be able to figure out problems and not always have someone else do it for you." Participant 14 sees it a little bit differently, "Employers want employees to be self-sufficient and solve problems, but I believe oral communication is just as important. It does no good to figure out the problem if the employee can't tell anyone." Participant 12 sees it the same way

"You must be able to communicate orally with your co-workers; once you get all the information you will be able to solve the problems." This idea of problem solving and communication is a direct correlation to what teachers perceive to be important life skills both for them and employers.

Teamwork

The next skill teachers believe employers are searching for is someone who is a good team member. Participant 10 explained, "Teamwork is essential to being a good employee." Participant 4 thinks, "Employers are looking for good fits, someone who can work with their team and be successful." These teachers don't believe you have to be a leader to be a good teammate which is in direct contrast to those teachers in the next section that believe employers are looking for employees with leadership skills.

Leadership

This skill was seen as what employers are looking for by a few teachers. Participant 5 felt, "Employers are looking for someone to take charge and lead in their organization." Participant 23 stated, "My spouse wants leaders because they are the ones who take the initiative and get things done." Some teachers felt employers choose leaders after they are hired. Participant 15 said, "Employers look for leadership potential and mold those employees into leaders after they are hired."

Flexibility, Likeability and Commitment

The last three skills were only stated by a couple of teachers, but were excellent suggestions that the researcher wanted to add to this section of the study. The first being commitment. Participant 2 said, "Kids quit when things don't go their way. Employers want employees that show up do and their job--not show up and quit." Participant 20 said

likeability plays a part in being hired and stated, "I think you have to be likeable. I feel if

you can't get along with others, it will be hard to be successful. We see smart kids that

can't work with others all the time." The last skill mentioned was flexibility. Participant 7

explained, "Employers want employees that can go with the flow and be flexible.

Flexibility makes the job go smoother." These ideas are compared to what employers said

they wanted in prospective employees in the discussion section. The next section will

deal with whether teachers believe students possess the soft skills to be successful.

Potential Success of Students in the Work Place

When teachers were asked if students possess the soft skills to be successful in the

work place, the answer was a resounding no. Some participants felt that question was too

broad because the answer should be based on the individual student but when asked in

general, 30 said no, while the other 5 felt it was too difficult to answer the question with a

simple yes or no because it depended on the student. Since the overwhelming answer was

no, the follow up question became, "Why did the teachers feel that way?" The answer

produced two themes--entitlement and the notion that "everyone is a winner."

Entitlement

The elementary teachers felt it was too difficult to determine if students can be

successful in the work place of the ages they teach. They do see students demonstrate the

sense of entitlement that could be a precursor to not being successful in the work place.

Participant 4 stated, "Everything is done for them at home; we try to talk to parents to

allow their students to do things on their own." Participant 6 added, "We want kids to

learn from mistakes. If they mess up, they mess up." Participant 2 believes there is an

underlying reason for this entitlement and gave this explanation, "Family dynamics have

changed to keeping kids happy. This change affects how they develop socially."

Participant 8 agrees, "Students believe they should be catered to; entitlement is a huge

problem with today's students." Participant 9 noted, "Entitlement leads to lack of

compliance. Students think some of the rules don't apply to them." Many teachers target

such educational reform programs like Kentucky Education Reform Act and No Child

Left Behind as the reason for students' difficulty dealing with failure. Participant 25

noted, "Students would not fail in the NCLB program, we were to make sure every child

was to succeed. This created an "everybody's a winner" mentality." Participant 19

explained, "Students began to believe they were entitled to success, whether they

deserved it or not. They couldn't handle it when they didn't get it."

Teacher's believe the entitlement of students has gradually gotten worse over the

last three to five years. They feel students don't have to develop soft skills because they

are given what they want. These ideas led to the second theme of why teachers believed

students weren't ready for the workplace. This theme is the "everybody's a winner"

mentality.

Everyone is a Winner

This theme was seen to spread across all ages. Participant 26 expounded on the ideas

mentioned at the end of the last section. "Kids are not allowed to fail. I say let your kid

fail early and be there to console them." Participant 18 and Participant 26 agreed on the

idea, "Let your child take care of the hard things; be there to comfort them; but don't do

everything for them." Participant 20 felt the "everyone is a winner" mentality is creating

students who can't deal with failure. They noted, "I have students who cry and redo tests

when they make a 97/A because that is failure to them. They can't handle real failure."

Participant 24 added, "There are winners and losers, but you have to learn from your

losses and get better." Participant 13 stated, "If we keep giving everyone a trophy,

students won't learn to succeed."

Teachers believe we need to focus on soft skills much like John Dewey and Alfie

Kohn did, but don't know when it can be done. Participant 15 spoke for many of the

teachers by saying, "I would love to focus on these skills, but I am judged on test scores

not soft skills." These thoughts bring up valid points that will be discussed in Research

Question 4 – How can schools promote soft skills? The next section will deal with

Research Question 2 – How do employers perceive soft skills in today's students and

graduates?

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 dealt with how employers perceive soft skills in today's

students and graduates. They were asked three similar questions as the teachers with a

follow-up question after question 3. Those questions are as follows:

1) How would you rank the following soft skills in importance: critical thinking,

   problem solving, oral communication, written communication, teamwork,

   leadership and work ethic?

2) What soft skills are you looking for in prospective employees?

3) Based on the applicant pool applying to your company, do you believe today's

   applicants have the soft skills to succeed?

3a) Why do you feel this way?

Ranking Soft Skills

The main four soft skills the employers felt were important can be seen in the table below.

Table 7

Soft Skills Importance as Ranked by Employers

Soft Skill	Employers' Votes
Work Ethic	6
Oral Communication	4
Problem Solving/Critical Thinking	3
Teamwork/Chemistry	2

The other two skills, leadership and written communication, were seen by employers as skills they could teach and foster the growth of them in their new employees. They did not see these two skills to be as important as the ones listed in Table 6.

Work Ethic

The first soft skill this study analyzed is work ethic as almost half of the employers rated this soft skill as the number one skill they are searching for in an employee. Participant 15 stated, "The one skill we search for is work ethic. It has seemed to become a lost skill. Whenever we see someone with this skill, we offer them the position on the spot." Participant 10 added, "I believe we can teach the other skills, but work ethic is something we want in our construction workers." Participant 3 believes much of the same ideas and explained, "If their references say they are a hard worker, that gives them a good shot of working for me." Participant 5 builds on this notion, "I

believe work ethic far outweigh the others. Employees must be hard workers; I can teach

the rest." Participant 9 also felt they could teach the other skills but had these thoughts on

soft skills, "If students don't know how to work hard by the time they graduate, it will be

hard for them to learn once at a job." Participant 6 sums up this section well by saying,

"Without work ethic, you will have troubling advancing. If you don't have the drive to

show up and excel at your job, you will not make it." Participant 1 added, "This skill

cannot be seen in an interview. It will be found through references or after they are

hired." Participant 9 agreed with this assessment, "We can't determine if interviewees

will show up or improve their job performance until after they are hired. If they don't do

these things, it will be hard to sustain any job."

These participants stress the importance of work ethic and its integral connection

to success in the business world. The employers felt much like the teachers that if

students have a positive work ethic they can be trained to do most any job they are

looking for them to do. The employers' stressed, though, that it is very difficult to gauge

this soft skill until the student is hired.

Oral Communication

The next skill employers ranked as most important for prospective employees to

obtain success was oral communication. Participant 4 disagreed with those employers

that said other soft skills are the most important. They believe oral communication is

what a successful employee must have and made this statement, "I want an employee

who is a people person. They can learn the rest, but someone who is able to communicate

will be successful in my line of work." Participant 2 agreed, "In the construction industry,

you must be able to communicate with others. If not, the project will be a disaster."

Participant 1 backed this claim, "If my employees can't communicate with other industries, buildings don't get built. Oral communication is the backbone of soft skills that make employees successful."

All these employers stood firmly in the fact they believed oral communication is the foundation on which all other soft skills were built. Employers' discussed how they believe this skill is more important due to the dealings their employers will have with the public. They believe good written communication will come from good oral communication.

Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking

The next soft skill which employers ranked number one was problem solving and critical thinking. These employers concluded these two skills could not be separated. Participant 14 said, "For the volunteer work we do, we need outside the box thinkers. They must be able to come up with inexpensive solutions to the problems we face." This participant's work in volunteering with the homeless and drug addicts, call for their workers to find innovative ways to deal with age-old problems. It is imperative they be problem solvers. Participant 9 wants employees who are problem solvers and stated, "In the insurance world we need people that can solve problems that find the best solution for the company and our customers."

These employees did suggest work ethic and communication were important but come slightly behind problem solving and critical thinking. Employers, while they felt these skills were extremely important, believed problem solving/critical thinking could be developed for specific jobs, but students needed excellent work ethic and oral communication to be successful in every job.

Teamwork/Chemistry

The last two soft skills that a couple of the employers ranked as the most important soft skill were teamwork and chemistry. Participant 8 expressed, "In the corporate world, teamwork is the key to our success. We look for prospective employees that can work with others." Two other participants, 12 and 13, said chemistry along with competency and character are what they look for in their employees. Participant 12 explained, "It is very hard to teach chemistry or character; but when we see it, we know they are the right fit." Participant 13 agreed, "Teamwork, relationships, chemistry is a big part of what we do. If you are highly relational, people will be patient while you learn your job. These relationships will build trust and success in employees." These rankings are compared and explored in greater detail in the discussion section. This next section compares teacher and employer's perceptions.

What Soft Skills are Employers Looking For

This next section asked employers to explain what they are looking for in potential employees. The list had a few similarities to teachers but offered different skills and was based on industry preference in some cases. The list included multiple mentions of such soft skills as character, humility, work ethic, communication and problem solving. New skills were introduced which included competency, chemistry, loyalty, etiquette and results. This section will analyze the employers' reasons for looking for each of these skills.

Character

The two participants from a local church focused on their 3 C's of competency, character and chemistry. Participant 13 believes, "If a person has good character, they

will be worried about doing a good job." Participant 12 agreed with this thought but added, "A person with good character will show humility and be willing to learn the job." Participant 10 concluded, "Any applicant that has a strong character will work hard to achieve the other soft skills." These employers expressed why character might not be the most important to other employers; they do look for it in every future employee.

Their ideas were based on their industry. They pastored a church and felt character is one of, if not the most important, component to being successful. They expressed how much they look for it in a number of their answers. The pastors gave example questions on how they look for character in interviews.

Humility

The next skill employers said they looked for an in future employee was humility. Participant 14 said, "It is very important to find employees who can admit when they make a mistake. They don't make excuses or break down. They take accountability and fix it." Participant 6 added, "We are seeing less and less of graduates who take responsibility when they make mistakes." Participant 8 stated, "Not only do we want employees that can make mistakes, but we also want them to have the courage to admit when they don't know something."

This humility is getting harder to find according to the data collected. Many employers blamed the "everyone is a winner" mentality which the teachers stated as well. Employers stated entitlement and "everyone is a winner" mentalities make it almost impossible to find good employees these days. They did state the employees are there, but it is much more difficult to locate them.

Work Ethic

The next skill employers stated they looked for was work ethic. This skill was ranked as the most valuable skill, which is why many employers stated they looked for it in all their future employees. Participant 10 said the two skills they looked for most is character and work ethic. They said, "If an employee shows work ethic plus character, they will be a valuable employee for years to come." Participant 6 looks for work ethic in all future employees as well. "If you check their references and background, you can find out their work ethic. How you treat others and where you are from will shape this work ethic. If I hear good things about those things, I know they will be good employees" Participant 15 had two areas they looked at as most important and work ethic was the first; "If I can find hard workers, the rest will take care of itself." Many employers ranked this soft skill as number one just like many teachers. The data clearly shows work ethic is important to employers as well as what they are looking for in prospective employees.

Problem Solving/Critical Thinking

A couple of employers said a skill they look for in prospective employees is their ability to solve problems or critically think. Participant 3 makes a great point when they stated, "I seek problem solvers not problem seekers. References help determine in which category they fall. We also give them different scenarios in interviews to test these skills under pressure." Participant 14 stated this skill was important and reiterated the same thought, "We have to be innovative to help our clientele. When the money isn't there, we need employees that can help our projects succeed, not hinder them." Problem solving is a huge part of what employers are searching for in today's employees.

Oral Communication

Oral communication figured predominantly in the ranking question as well as what employers are looking for question. Participant 1 stated "As I said earlier, in the construction business the cornerstone of our business is communication. I try to determine these qualities in the interview process." Participant 2 expressed how integral communication was when they stated, "We want our employees to be able to have presentation skills, writing skills and use their oral communication skills to solve conflicts. If they can't, our projects don't get built." Participant 7 said, "We need employees that are good communicators. They talk with customers and medical personnel on a daily basis. They must represent our company in a professional manner and how they communicate affects that." Participant 11 agreed but put a little different spin on the topic by saying, "We deal with deadly chemicals. Our employees must be able to follow instructions, both orally and written; if not, the results will be disastrous." These examples show just how important communication is with today's employers.

Loyalty

This next soft skill was not included on the original list and was a recommendation of an employer. This skill was loyalty. Participant 3 noted, "I look at past employment. "How long did they stay there? Why did they leave? We try to stay away from self-promoters and job-hoppers." This skill was an excellent addition to the list. This researcher will add loyalty as well as etiquette and results as choices for future research participants to rank. The next skill that was introduced was etiquette.

Etiquette

Participant 15's second soft skill they look for in prospective employees is etiquette. They believe, "Employees sometimes don't know the appropriateness in

business settings. A lot of this appropriateness can be determined in job interviews and can be taught in trainings." This skill is an important one and with proper training the researcher agrees most employees can learn the proper etiquette to display in a work environment.

Results

The last answer is not necessarily a skill but was worth including in this study. Participant 9 said, "I look at their results. I check past job performances and ask them to talk about their success. If they can articulate this success with humility and without generalities, I look to hire them." This answer, as stated earlier, is not a skill but is a unique way to determine other skills such as work ethic, oral communication and humility. The next section will analyze the employers' perspectives of whether prospective employees possess the necessary soft skills to succeed and their rationale for their answers.

Employers' Perceptions on Prospective Employees and Their Soft Skills

The majority of employers felt future employees lacked the soft skills to be successful in their company. Eleven employers stated no when asked this question; 2 said some do, some don't, and it depends on the person. Two employers said the majority does, but broke them down into age categories. Two different themes arose in the answers of employers who stated no. The first theme dealt with their idea that schools focus too much on content and not enough on soft skills. The second theme was schools and society worry too much about creating feel good zones and making sure everyone is a winner.

Not Enough Focus on Soft Skills

Participant 12 stated, "There is a major disconnect between theoretical and practical application in schools. Schools talk about soft skills but give little chance to work on or build them." The idea many employers perceive is schools are worried about test scores, but test scores don't give students the skills to be successful in the work place. Participant 6 made this idea clear when stating, "I can teach my employees the knowledge they need to know; but if they don't have the soft skills to succeed by the time they apply for jobs, it will be too late to find a successful career." Participant 10, who is married to an educator, expressed disagreement with our educational system. They believe, "Schools should be mixing soft skills into every class and every subject. There is a room to teach communication, work ethic and character along with social studies, math, and science."

These ideas by employers connect directly to John Dewey's holistic education of our children. We must educate the whole child not just fill their brains with hard skills. Employers want employees that are well rounded and have soft skills. These skills are what progressive educators tried to instill in students until events like Sputnik and Brown vs. Board made math, science and closing achievement gaps more important. These areas became the reason for the Elementary Secondary Education Act and No Child Left Behind, which made standardized testing more important than soft skills.

Entitlement/Everyone is a Winner

This theme is much like the teacher's ideas in Research Question 1. Participant 15 stated, "Most prospective employees come to job interviews believing they are entitled to the job. They have never failed and expect the job to be given to them like a trophy." This lack of failure is an alarming concern for employers. Participant 10 sees, "This everyone

gets a trophy mentality is slowly eroding work ethic. They work less and less and are still

rewarded. There are little consequences for failure so it is hard for them to understand

failure at their jobs." Participant 14 agrees with Participant 10 and says it is "Due to the

downward trend in job applicants, soft skills and the belief they are entitled to rewards for

little work." Participant 5 thinks, "Students believe their personal beliefs should be heard

in all decisions. This notion interferes with their job performance." Many of these

employers are fearful of what the "everyone is a winner" mentality has done to their

potential employee pool. Even the two employees that expressed positive answers did so

with stipulations.

Participant 11 believes 30-55 year olds have most of these skills while 18-29

"struggle with most soft skills." Participant 7 thinks for the most part employees show

these skills, but "oral communication may lessen over the next 10 years thanks to

technology and social media."

It was interesting to see even the two employers who expressed positive answers

still saw entitlement issues in younger generations. The next Research Question explored

the ideas of teachers and employers on what is hindering the development of soft skills in

prospective employees. The data showed much of the same ideas by teachers and

employers. They did not see many approaches building up soft skills but numerous ones

that are hindering their development.

Research Question 3

The question that was asked of teachers and employers is, "What factors have

contributed to the fall of soft skills" This question built on the data collected from the

focus groups and employer interviews. The answers to the question, "Do graduates have

the necessary soft skills to be successful in the work place?" was used to create the

themes for this question. Both groups answered no to this question in a resounding

fashion. Teachers and employers were then asked, "What factors are hindering soft

skills? and "Is it P-12's fault these skills are faltering?" This section will analyze teacher

and employers' answers in separate sections, then compare the similarities and

differences in the discussion section of this study.

Teachers were asked, "What is hindering soft skills development?" and "Does the

lack of development fall solely on P-12? or "Do other factors come into play?" The main

themes for this hindrance in soft skill development were technology, entitlement/instant

gratification, and lack of parental support. This section will analyze the teachers'

responses in each of these themes.

Technology

The thought that technology was hurting soft skills could be seen across all grade

levels. Participant 1 stated, "Technology is leading to a lack of social interaction which is

harming relationship skills." Participant 4 said. "You have to take the phone away and

tell children they are done for the night. I read a tongue in cheek article that in ten years

there will be a college course called eye contact." These participants were both

elementary teachers, which paints a frightening future for employers if this trend is

starting in elementary school. Middle school teachers see it as well. Participant 15

expounded this idea by saying, "I saw a group of students at the mall. They sat there for

45 minutes never saying a word. I asked why were they there if they weren't talking.

They said we are texting each other." Participant 18 agreed, "Students have conversations

with texts now. They don't use oral communication, that is how technology is killing soft

skills." Participant 17 said, "It is harming critical thinking and problem solving as well; if you don't know something, you Google it. We don't have to retain information." Participant 27 said they see academics and soft skills failing due to technology. They explained, "Cutting and pasting has made students lazy and weakened their written communication skills."

These examples tie directly to the information provided in the technology section of the literature review. That information explained students are having withdrawals from their phones (APA, 2012). This withdrawal hinders their development of soft skills due to their reliance on their phones. They also are losing personal contact by communicating solely through social media (Dokovpil, 2012). Teens are also seeing written communication worsen as they text symbols, emojis and shorthand (Fieldman, 2011).

Entitlement/Instant Gratification

This theme comes from students lacking humility and thinking their ideas and actions are always in the right. Participant 2 stated students have a "false sense of confidence due to never being corrected." Participant 8 agreed, "The entitlement thing rises again. I can't ask a student to do something and expect a yes, and the student just does it." Participant 9 says, "Every child gets a trophy so they can't cope with failure. Students in AP calculus class believe they should get an A because they have always gotten As in math. Most that believe this aren't A students."

Many of these teachers believe much of the downfall started with Kentucky Education Reform Act and No Child Left Behind. The students that went through KERA are having children who went through NCLB. The teachers feel both of these programs

force fed information to make students successful on standardized tests while soft skill

develop was ignored.

Lack of Parental Support

The last area in which teachers expressed that soft skills were facing obstacles

was the lack of support from today's parents. Participant 3 stated, "I believe this lack of

soft skills stems from home life. Parents give in because it is easier to have technology

babysit them then teach them how to act appropriately." Participant 5 explained, "My

students make suggestions when told No. They are always like OR I can do this. They do

that at home so they think it should work at school." Participant 15 thinks, "The fall of

the family time is a big factor in hindering soft skills. Families do their own thing and

don't really communicate much anymore." Participant 14 believes "I don't think there is

a lot of support at home. I think parents think it is our responsibility to teach these skills,

and they don't worry about reinforcing what we teach." Participant 18 told a story "A

student didn't like a grade, went to the bathroom and texted Mom. Mom called me

complaining. Why not tell the student to handle it?" Participant 27 echoed these thoughts,

"Parents don't teach kids how to deal with problems using their soft skills because they

do everything for them."

Most of the teachers interviewed believed it is partly P-12's fault for pushing

these skills to the side, but it is equally the parent's responsibility. They believe the

parents don't see it this way, and this lack of support from home is contributing to the

downfall of soft skills. Teachers felt parents should help educate the whole child much

like Alfie Kohn said in the literature review. Kohn expressed that schools and parents

should try to teach students to be good people as well as teaching them a sense of community (Kohn, 2008).

Employers' Perceptions on What is Hindering Soft Skills

Since the majority of employers said they felt students and graduates lack the soft skills to succeed, they were asked to explain what factors they see are hindering soft skills growth. Asking the question, "What do you see as the contributing factors to the downfall of soft skills?" The three areas employers saw causing soft skills' downward trend was technology, entitlement/lack of patience and low expectations.

Technology

The first area of data analysis of employers' beliefs on what hinders soft skills is that of technology. Participant 2 explains, "The majority of interaction online is extremely casual which is eroding soft skills especially communication." Participant 6 agreed but looks at technology from another angle and stated, "Kids have been raised with devices in their hand. The latest study I read said Americans have an 8 second attention span. The lack of focus is killing soft skills." Participant 1 sees technology as a double-edged sword. They explained, "Technology has both helped and hindered the ability of today's youth to develop their soft skills. It has helped by giving them a great resource for information, but hindered them because it gets rid of face-to-face communication." Participant 11 raised an excellent point about technology in this statement, "Work ethic is diminished in younger generations as they have more alternatives to work to occupy their time. Social media and games become more important than school or work." The next two participants raise questions about technology that directly tie into our next section of entitlement. Participant 5 feels,

"Social media allows people to state their opinion without consequences. It creates an "I am always right so you shouldn't disagree" mentality." Participant 3 builds on this ideas by stating, "Social media has created an alternate reality. I sincerely believe respect and appreciation for authority has fallen because of it.""

These ideas expressed by employers are directly in line with the ideas expressed by teachers in this study and the data on technology hindrance in the literature review. These thoughts showed how employers believe another problem has arisen with today's students. The last two participants' thoughts gave a great lead in to the next section on entitlement.

Entitlement

Some employers believe the downfall of soft skills is the entitlement that students gain either from their home life or schools. The employers' thoughts also led to two other areas of this theme, which is lack of humility and lack of patience. Participant 14 believes, "The students want results right now; and if they don't get it, problems arise. They also put blame on someone else when something goes wrong. They feel entitled for their wants and show little concern for others." Participant 8 stated, "It is very difficult for this generation to understand the concept of a promotion. You don't get promoted because you want it or your buddy got one. You get it because of your work." Participant 10 sees the entitlement mentality causing lack of patience in today's worker. They said, "Student want instant gratification. They want to move up the ladder for higher pay but don't want to put the time in to learn the skills to move up." Participant 7 believes "Students feel entitled because "everyone is a winner" mentality. They don't develop the will to succeed because success is just handed to them." This data connects to the

teachers' thoughts on this theme, which will be explored in depth in the discussion section.

Low Expectations

The last theme in this section deals with employers seeing schools set low expectations for students, which causes them to not fully develop soft skills. These low expectations teach the students to do just enough to succeed. Participant 9 explains "My son gets a rubric for each assignment, and he does just enough to get an A. This attitude carries over to the workplace where he does just enough to keep his job." Participant 15 agreed, "Students learn to do enough to get the grade they want. This is a learned behavior that makes them say, "I am just going to do enough at work not to get in trouble." Participant 12 stated, "Education keeps plugging knowledge, knowledge, knowledge, and employers are crying out - NO!! Teach them soft skills." Participant 13 added, "Schools teach them how to succeed on a test. They learn enough to do well on a test, but they are losing valuable time learning soft skills."

These ideas on low expectations make a logical transition to Research Question 4 on what can be done to improve soft skills. Research Question 4 asked, "What could be done to help develop soft skills in our schools?" These problem themes lend a starting point to device strategies to improve soft skills.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question asked, :What could be done to improve soft skills in prospective employees? Teacher data was gathered by asking two questions:

1) Can soft skills be taught?

2) What can be done to promote the development of soft skills?

These two questions derived the following themes from teachers: transformational teaching, class to teach these skills with integration in all classes and at home, limit technology and teaching students it is okay to fail and how to cope with failure.

Transformational Teaching

Participant 27 stated, "I believe if we teach these skills plus our content we will give each student a much better education. We can transform them into a leader by giving them the skills to succeed." This idea ties to Alfie Kohn's idea of educating the whole child (Kohn, 2008). This belief teaches when teaching a student one must integrate hard skills with soft skills to transform a student into a successful person much like Participant 27 noted. Participant 18 said, "If we transform these students by giving them knowledge and soft skills they will be successful, but they will also know how to deal with failure." which is the theme of the next section.

Integration/Teaching Students it is Okay to Fail

The idea that students need to learn this soft skill was an unanimous theme among teachers. The teachers gave three different ideas on how to accomplish this goal:

1) Create a class to introduce skills to students but fully integrate a skill a week or month into each class.

2) Teach students it is okay to make mistakes or fail.

3) Create soft skills activities that require home involvement.

Participant 1 stated "Students need to be introduced to these skills at an early age. Introduce one of these skills from the list every year in elementary school, then have a class in middle and high school to review those skills." Participant 8 thinks "Schools should write a curriculum to teach these skills, with guidelines given to each

teacher. This curriculum and guidelines would be enforced by the administration."

Participant 14 believes, "Students have to be taught these ideas at school. Students can

pass any test we given them but can't do an oral project or job interview because they

can't communicate or are sick with worry of failure." Participant 18 echoed these

sentiments, "Let kids fail; help them learn from it and move on." Participant 24 noted,

"We have to get home and parents involved. We have to have their support. It will not

work if the only place students learn soft skills are at school. Home has to play its part."

Participant 17 added, "Parents have to get on board; so many times we teach these skills

then are undermined when the student gets home because the parents or guardians feel

these skills are not important."

Technology

The last area teachers believe that schools can help stop the hindrance of soft

skills is limiting technology. They believe this limit of technology should be done at

home and school. Participant 26 says, "It is very easy to give students assignments to be

done on-line. This ruins human interaction. We should be using technology for team-

based, group assignments to foster soft skills." Participant 10 agreed but saw a problem,

"I think we should use more student interaction, but if we limit technology at school, then

it needs to be limited at home. It defeats the purpose if they go home and spend 4-6 hours

on electronics." This limiting of technology connects to earlier notions by teachers that

while technology is good, it can hinder a student's soft skill development.

The teachers' thoughts gave the researcher the data to make recommendations on

how to develop soft skills. The main priority is to create a curriculum that will teach soft

skills, coping with failure, limiting technology and soft skill components to work on at

home. An in-depth view of this program will be explored in Chapter 5. The next section

will show what employers believe needs to be done to advance soft skills in prospective

employees.

Employers' Thoughts on How to Improve Soft Skills

The major themes put forth by employers on what schools should do to develop

soft skills was integration across the curriculum, mentor programs and teach soft skills at

every level including humility and coping with failure. These ideas line up with the

majority of teacher's proposals with the mentor program being slightly different.

Integration

The first idea employers had was total soft skill integration in all classes.

Participant 12 took the stance, "I don't think making a class works. Those classes are

seen as a joke and not a lot of effort is put into them. Integration if done right will be a

much better option." Participant 13 agreed, "Creating a class seems like the best and

easiest option, but give them real world problems after a unit. Teach them to not put

conflict in emails or everyday skills they will need in all classes." Participant 1 stated,

"Schools should provide opportunities for each student to lead, write, listen, speak and

organize. This will make students successful later in life." Participant 11 wants schools to

put students in the position where they have to use these skills. They said, "have students

teach concepts without technology to ensure a better understanding of the material."

Participant 8 stated, "Give them more leadership challenges where each person is

responsible for others' success. They fail/you fail mentality teaches great teamwork."

Participant 7's solution was outside the box but very intriguing "Give them internship

like roles. Connect them with industries they are interested in and let them work on real

problems for the company. Have them recommend solutions to these problems." This

idea can also be see in the next theme, which is mentorship.

Mentorship

One of Kohn's main points is to have mentor-student relationship. Participant 12

has a great idea to foster these relationships, "This idea of mentorship offers somebody

who is further advanced and can give wisdom while students are almost forced to relate

to someone in a field they in which they are interested." Participant 13 added to this idea

by saying, "College could give students credits for mentoring high school students. High

schoolers could mentor middle schoolers. Middle schoolers could mentor elementary

kids. Each group could show the younger group how to be successful at the next level."

Participant 10 expressed, "Schools should be bringing in people from different

professions to work with students. Students could then shadow their mentors. We have so

many resources in our community that schools simply aren't tapping into." Some

employers' thought these ideas of integration and mentorship would be in conjunction

with classes at all levels to teach soft skills. Those employers thought a class would work

on two conditions

1) It has a written curriculum to follow

2) It had total integration in all classes and grades in the school.

Participant 6 stated, "My suggestion is to have a class that helps students figure out what

they want to do. Show them the importance of happiness and loving your job."

Participant 7 added, "I wish I had a class that would have prepared me with the skills I

need to be successful. I focused on short-term goals and not long-term ones. A class that

does both would give students a leg up on success." Participant 14 sees this class as the

perfect place to "increase the focus on personal responsibility, accountability. Not only teaching them the skills to be successful, but also the ability to admit mistakes and deal with failure." Participant 2 says, "This class will hold students to a high standard and teach them there are winners and losers. Not everyone can win all the time. Students need to learn that is okay." Many of the recommendations were the same as the teachers. The similarities and differences of each groups' answers for the four research questions will be explored in the next section.

Discussion

This study dealt with the perceptions of teachers and employers and their ideas of why students were lacking the soft skills to be successful in the workplace. Participants were chosen from an elementary school, two groups from a middle school and two groups from a high school along with 15 employers. A qualitative approach was taken to gather the data. This data was coded to develop themes. The themes' similarities between teachers and employers were remarkable. The opinions were extremely close, but the disconnect between education and industry is causing these soft skills to be on a downward spiral. This section will look at the similarities and differences of teachers' and employers' thoughts on perceptions of soft skills, what is hindering soft skills and what can be done to promote soft skills.

Research Questions 1 and 2

This section will compare the perception of teachers and employers on soft skills, teachers' and employers' rankings of soft skills, what soft skills employers are looking for and why are prospective employees lacking these soft skills. The first part of this section looks at what soft skills teachers and employers believe are the most important.

Teachers and employers both chose work ethic and oral communication as the top two soft skills they believe students need to develop. These two skills were also the ones teachers and employers said employers are looking for in prospective employees. Employees also included problem solving. The next section will explain why teachers and employers think these skills are important as well answer why they believe employers are looking for these skills.

Work Ethic

Teachers and employers both believe work ethic is the most desired soft skill. Teachers expressed that this skill drives the other soft skills. Employers thought this idea as well saying this skill far outweighs the others. Employers believed if an employee has work ethic most of the other skills can be taught. Teachers also noted that if a child is invested in a job they will perform better. Employers saw work ethic as a lost skill. They stated it is hard to get employees invested; but when they do, the teachers' idea is proven right. The employee who is invested performs much better than the one who isn't. The last theme shows teachers believe that work ethic drives initiative. Many teachers discussed how students with good work ethic could take initiative and complete assignments on their own. Employers explained how this theme carries over to the work place. Employees with the initiative and work ethic will advance much quicker in the work force.

The first area that must be addressed when teaching soft skills is what exactly are they? Soft skills are seen as a combination of interpersonal and social skills (Dixon et al., 2010), which show our work ethic, personality traits, communication skills, teamwork and creativity (Schulz, 2008). These skills were presented in a study of where employers

believed students were falling short in these areas (Jaschik, 2015). This student showed

how employers were giving graduates low scores while graduates believed they were

prepared.

Oral Communication

The other skill teachers and employers deemed important was oral

communication. Teachers believed if someone can't communicate it will be a detriment

to them in college and job interviews. Employers reiterated this theme that by saying

interviews could hide many flaws, but oral communication is not one of them. Employers

and teachers both stated if a student shows good oral communication it makes them more

likeable and people show more patience with them when they are learning the other

skills. Employers thought problem solving and critical thinking skills were important but

noted if you can't communicate your solutions then it doesn't do much good to have this

skill.

Communication was a major area in the study on where employers felt students

were lacking (Jaschik, 2015). Employers are asking educational institutions to work on

verbal and written communication to help students develop these skills (Jaschik, 2015).

Another researcher said simply getting a summer job could teach work ethic and oral

communication (Christakis, 2012). The researcher explains how doing a summer job can

take you from a sub-par entry-level worker to viable employee just by learning work

ethic and communication skills at a summer job.

Do Students Possess the Soft Skills to be Successful

The other question that determined teachers' and employers' perceptions of soft

skills is "Do they believe students possess the necessary soft skills to be successful in

today's workforce?" The overwhelming response was no. The follow-up question to this answer was asked for then to explain why they said no. The answers was soft skills are not being taught in schools, and the idea that everyone is a winner is creating a sense of entitlement.

The teachers and employers could agree that these skills need to be taught in school, and they are not. The reason for this lack of soft skill curriculum was different between the two groups. Teachers explained with the demands of testing and requirements of core curriculum it is nearly impossible to add the extra time to teach soft skills correctly. Employers argued it is just a lack of focus and commitment of the schools. They believe schools could use activities to integrate these skills while teaching the core content, but teachers worry the content won't be learned if you focus on soft skills. This way of thinking mirrors the move from Dewey's progressive ideas to the ESEA and NCLB. Both groups can agree these skills need to be taught in school even if they can't agree on how to do them.

The second theme teacher and employers believe is contributing to the lack of soft skills is the idea that "everyone is a winner." Teachers expressed their concern because students don't know how to cope with failure. Employers agreed this mentality carries over to the work force because they can't accept they failed. Employers also explained that today's employees expect to be promoted whether they deserve it or not. Teachers see the same thing. They told of students who believed since they always received A's they should get an A in the class whether they did the work or not. Both groups connect this sense of entitlement to the mentality that we don't hurt anyone's feelings by making everyone a winner and giving them a trophy.

The Progressive Era taught two essential lessons. First, students' abilities were promoted (Koliba, 2002). Second, the student's ideas, interests, needs and cultural identity were taken into account. This allowed the schools to not only teach the core curriculum, but also develop the soft skills because students were engaged in something with which they felt a connection (Koliba, 2002). The introduction of federal legislation such as ESEA and NCLB signaled a move from developing the whole child to just focusing on core curriculum. This teaching to the test created more gaps in soft skills (Kohn, 1999).

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 built on teachers' and employers' perception that students are missing soft skills. The study then asked both groups their opinions on what they considered to be hindering the development of soft skills. The teachers and employers both stated they felt technology and entitlement were causing this obstacle. The groups also thought lack of humility and lack of patience was being caused by the entitlement. This answer did provide the largest gap between the opinions of the two groups.

Technology

Many teachers see technology as a necessary evil. It allows the teachers to take students places they never thought imaginable. It is a library of the world at their fingertips; however, it has cut down on oral communication. Tools such as cut and paste are deteriorating written communication. It is also contributing to plagiarism and cheating among students. Employers agreed especially on the notion of oral communication. They expressed the lack of eye contact and verbal skills are being diminished due to today's

youth use of social media. Also, employers felt students sometimes put inappropriate things in work emails because they lack the proper etiquette because of social media.

Students have almost an addiction to their phones. Researchers have found that a bell of a smartphone can release the same amount of dopamine addicts get from cocaine (Walton, 2012). Employees become more worried about emails and text messages than their actual work. This lack of focus is directly tied to work ethic. The other soft skill it is affecting is communication. Students are losing the ability to verbally communicate as well as a loss of written communication. Students would rather text their friends than talk to them (Dokoupil, 2012). This leads them to writing shorthand and text lingo to save time and characters which bleeds over to resumes and formal writing (Fieldman, 2011).

Entitlement

The hindrance of entitlement, lack of humility and lack of patience were seen by both groups, but they expressed different reasons for these obstacles. Teachers believe schools get little support from parents. Parents undermine soft skills that are taught at school by not helping to promote them or letting kids have unlimited technology when it is limited at school. Parents also fight the battles for the students instead of teaching them how to handle those situations on their own. Many parents give students what they want right away, which creates an "I want it now" mentality that students express at school. Teachers believe all these factors create the entitlement, lack of humility and impatience of today's students.

Employers can see this point but argue schools have low expectations as well. The employers point out that schools socially promote students without passing core classes. They give bonus points or make sure kids pass or get the grade they want. It makes it

hard in the real world when they aren't given these luxuries. They agree students lack

humility, lack patience and seem entitled, but they stated schools play a larger part in

creating this problem than they would like to admit.

Alfie Kohn, one of today's leading progressive education proponents, believes if

schools will offer a holistic education this sense of entitlement will vanish. He believes

having students analyze problems and figure them out instead of giving them the answers

will lead to the students developing a sense or worth and accomplishment (Kohn, 2008).

These feelings will help the student learn how to achieve success instead of expecting

success to be given to them. Kohn also believes schools must instill a sense of

community into their students (Kohn, 2008). This sense of community will create

employees that will work with one another to achieve the goal not expect those in charge

to give it to them.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked teachers and employers what can be done to promote

and teach soft skills? Teachers felt a class should be created to teach these skills. The

class would then tell each teacher in the school what skill they were working on, and the

entire school would work to fully integrate that skill. Employers agreed in total

integration but felt a class would be more of a problem than a solution. They believed the

students would not take it seriously. The employers also felt the school should do more

mentor programs with older students and business leaders. Teachers want to give students

less technology time and more time using soft skills. They felt teaching the whole child

would transform them into leaders by giving them the skills they need to be successful.

The employers agreed with this idea but said the mentor program could accomplish this same goal. The last point made was students need to learn how to fail and how to cope with it. Both groups said students must be taught we all make mistakes and sometimes we lose. They need to learn both of these things are okay and how to deal with each one. These ideas are explored more in the conclusion section of Chapter 5, which will discuss recommendations for the client.

The idea of mentor programs ties directly to Kohn as well. He believes the best schools include mentor-student relationships with hands on learning (Kohn, 2008). Kohn's ideas plus the ideas mentioned by employers on this topic form an excellent foundation for a mentor program to be recommended for McCracken County Schools. The next idea of teaching the whole child is another progressive education idea supported by John Dewey and Alfie Kohn. They believe you must accompany the teachings of hard skills with soft skills (Dewey, 1938). This education teaches them not only the core curriculum, but also the soft skills to be successful in life (Kohn, 2008). The idea of students learning how to fail can be seen in Kohn's ideas as well. He believes if you teach a student community, sense of accomplishment and how to be a good person along with the core curriculum the student will be able to handle failure, learn from it and succeed (Kohn, 2008).

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

The idea behind this study was to determine why employers' are claiming employees are lacking the necessary job skills to be successful. The study was done to find the answer to this question so the researcher could provide a plan to McCracken County Public Schools to ensure their students don't fall into this category. This study gave insight to the thoughts of the teachers and employers in the community. This data once coded produced valuable themes that allowed the researcher to construct recommendations that if done by the client will help their students develop the soft skills to be successful.

Recommendations

This section recommends the steps McCracken County Public Schools need to take to provide sufficient soft skills training for their students. These recommendations will focus on work ethic, curriculum for the schools, community relations and support from the students' homes.

Work Ethic

The first recommendation deals with work ethic. One of the themes concluded work ethic is the most important soft skill. Teachers and employers also determine students have trouble dealing with failure. This recommendation connects directly to the results from the focus groups and employees. Both groups expressed this quality was the one that seems to be missing in the majority of today's graduates. It will require the district to make a board policy or have each individual school make a site base policy, which will set forth a plan to deal with failures and missing assignments. The schools will be asked to devise a plan based on their schedule of classes where students would spend

lunch and their advisor/advisee class time working on missing assignments. The idea behind this recommendation is to teach students responsibility, as well as there are ramifications from not completing your work. These ramifications can be seen in a school or a job. They students will see if they don't complete assignments, time will be lost with friends at lunch. The lesson can then be connected to a job. If they don't complete assignments at a job, it won't be lunch detention it will possibly lead to termination. These connections will teach them the correct way to exhibit work ethic in their careers.

The next recommendation for work ethic is middle schools should follow the high school lead in what happens to students when they fail a class. This recommendation directly ties into the employers and teachers belief that graduates have trouble dealing with failure. Many times when a student fails a class in elementary or middle school they are socially promoted to the next grade. This social promotion teaches them there are no consequences for failing. This idea also contributes to their lack of ability to cope with failure. This lack of learning catches up to them when they get to high school because their work ethic is lacking. When they start failing a class in high school, they say, "Oh, well; I will just fail and move on like I always have." The problem is there is no social promotion in high school. These students become a statistic and eventually drop out of school. The recommendation suggests when a student fails a class in middle school that they repeat that class and give up an elective the next year. Students in elementary schools would give up specials to help receive tutoring in the areas they are failing. This idea will then help students see the consequences much earlier when they fail a class. It will also help them to learn the skills they need to be successful in school and the work place.

Curriculum

My next recommendation is to create a curriculum for elementary, middle and high schools. There is not a cookie cutter program that would teach these skills so it is best if McCracken County Public Schools creates one that will fit its district. The recommendation calls for the district to create a committee consisting of the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, a principal or assistant principal from each age level (P-5, 6-8, 9-12), a Board of Education member, middle and high school students, parents and employers from the community. This committee would devise a curriculum that is to be taught in grades 1st-5th, 8th and 12th grades. This class would teach life skills such as resume writing, technical writing, oral communication and etiquette for job interviews, emails and phone as well as budgeting. It would also teach a different skill such as work ethic, leadership, communication, teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking every month. The class would provide lessons and strategies to all teachers in how to integrate the skill of the month into their lessons. If the class is working on oral communication, then the entire school would integrate these strategies in their class to help develop these skills. It will be the job of the committee to devise what skills they deem important and are to be taught. This recommendation will give the school and the community a say in developing the skills they believe are missing. The teachers and employers interviewed were very adamant about certain skills they believe graduates need. This recommendation will give them the power to create a curriculum that will instill these skills in future employees.

Mentorship

The next recommendation is to set up two types of mentorship. First, the district should use students from Murray State University and West Kentucky Community and Technical College to mentor high school students. These college students would help with teaching high school students how to study, how to choose a major and basic soft skills to survive college. High school students could return the favor for middle school students and middle school students could mentor elementary students. Each level could teach the level below them strategies and soft skills to succeed in the next step.

The College and Career class should also have students set up a mentorship with employers in their interested field. This program would be like a mini internship. The students could not only shadow the employer, but also work at their company or place of business. This job shadowing will allow the students to make an informed decision on whether or not they really want to pursue that career. Business leaders would love to help our students; the district just has to ask. This recommendation gives business leaders a direct pipeline to their future employees. They will be able to take a hands-on approach in training their employees in the skills they deem important.

Parental Support

The last recommendation is for the committee to devise part of the curriculum to be done at home with the student's family. One question the client asked is "Where does parental support and home life figure into this study?" The teachers provide the data to this question. Teachers believe students today are sheltered which is part of the cause of the breakdown of soft skills. This curriculum would devise tasks the student must work on at home. These skills would include manners, etiquette, having family dinner with no

cell phones, brain games to work on, and critical thinking. The parents and employers on the committee would be integral to the success of this recommendation. They could provide strategies and skills that they believe could be worked on in the home. The schools could have soft skills nights for the parents and teach them strategies to help develop different skills at home. The parents would be working with the school instead of against it in teaching students to have humility and how to cope with failure. This recommendation answers a question asked by the client. Mr. Sutton wanted to know how home involvement helps or hinders soft skill development. This study shows its influences are as great if not greater than the school's influence. This recommendation gives strategies to help schools involve parents and guardians in this process in order that soft skill development can be accomplished in school and at home.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation was the research was related to the Western Kentucky area. This problem seems to be a national one; but due to the client being local, the research stuck to interviewing local teachers and business owners. The literature supported this problem in other areas of the country, but the interviews were mainly in Western Kentucky. This limitation was a small one as the data was still abundant enough to develop appropriate answers to the research questions.

The second limitation was the focus groups and interviews focused on teachers' and employers' perceptions. These groups gave their opinions on whether students had the necessary soft skills to be successful. They also discussed what factors they believe are hindering the development of soft skills. The literature showed that students believe they possess these skills at a much higher rate than their teachers or employers. The scope

of future research should include the opinions of students on why they believe they possess these skills.

Recommendations for Future Research

The recommendations made here need to be evaluated every year. The researcher recommends the district needs to create a position where someone evaluates the effectiveness of these programs every year and gives the board of education a detailed report in three-year cycles. The Director of Soft Skills would hold these same focus groups and interviews to see if the teachers and employers' attitudes have changed toward soft skills. The director should use that data to see if the programs are working or if they need to be adjusted to the concerns of those interviewed.

Surveys should be given to students and parents or guardians to discover their thoughts on the programs. These surveys could also give input if these two groups have suggestions to improve soft skills or the program teaching them. The input from teachers, employers, students and parents/guardians would be a great indicator of the success or failure of the program. This data could be used to see which idea would be more effective in continuing the integrated curriculum across all content levels or mainstream the ideas into one class where students are taught these skills through training exercises in the school and in the business world.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find why soft skills are missing in today's prospective employees. These answers were used to devise a plan to enable McCracken County Public Schools to create a program to eliminate this question in their district. The district should use the data provided by teachers and employers when determining what

soft skills are important, what employers are looking for, what is hindering soft skills and how can the district promote soft skills when they devise the program.

This data allowed the researcher to see the ideas between teachers and employers were not that far apart. The recommendations give in chapter 5 will bridge the gap between the two groups. The findings have shown that schools will focus on creating a curriculum that will help students develop work ethic and be able to deal with failure in the business world. This curriculum will incorporate not only schools working on this program, but also involve parents and guardians to help develop these skills in their children. Mentoring and transforming students can be accomplished with both groups working together on the committee that creates the curriculum for the schools.

This study traced back the ideas of soft skills to before the turn of the 20th Century. This idea of students developing soft skills was nothing new as the literature illustrated the ideas and teachings of John Dewey. Dewey's ideas of teaching students these skills in spite of segregation were a main part of his beliefs. The country then took many turns from 1954 to 1969. Brown vs. Board put more focus on desegregation than learning soft skills. Then with the launch of Sputnik the schools' main focus was teaching math and science so America could win the space race. This victory came in 1969 with America placing a man on the moon. The country then turned to creating legislation to set directions and parameters for learning. The Elementary Secondary Education Act and No Child Left Behind set the tone for schools through the early 21st century. Soft skills were forced to take a back seat so schools could teach common core curriculum. The idea of soft skills is coming full circle as researchers and soft skill proponents such as Alfie Kohn are piggybacking on employers' call for students to be soft skill efficient.

This study looked at why teachers and employers felt these skills were missing. Focus groups and interviews gave the researcher the needed data to see their thoughts on why they are missing, what factors are hindering soft skills and what can be done to correct the program. This data allowed the researcher to make recommendations for their client on how they can address this issue so their students will be soft skill efficient when they graduate.

This study is an excellent indicator that employers see soft skills every bit as important as hard skills. The soft skills strengthen and many times serves as the foundation for hard skills. This study shows it is the responsibility of P-12 to develop and hone these skills. The recommendations and strategies presented in this study will help McCracken County Public Schools accomplish these tasks.

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Appendix A: Employer Recruitment Correspondence

I am e-mailing you this correspondence because I am in the process of conducting an educational research for an education doctoral degree program I am pursuing at Murray State University, and you were randomly selected as a prospective participant. My study is to investigate employers and teachers' perspectives of the nature of soft skills that employers consider relevant employability skills. Soft skills are the nontechnical skills that everyone needs to be successful in the work setting, for example, problem solving and critical thinking.

If you are interested in becoming a participant, you must meet the following requirements:

- Employers who interview job applicants
- Hire new applicants
- Train new hires

Your participation is strictly **voluntary**. That is, you do not have to participate in the study if you do not wish to do so. Your name or other identification will not be revealed throughout the process of the study. You can also withdraw from the study if you choose without any explanation or suffer any negative effect.

(I am attaching a letter of invitation and consent form for your review. Please read the details carefully before deciding whether to participate. You may direct any questions you may have regarding the study or any other concerns to me. The consent form is not required to be signed at this time.

Thank you,

 Brian Schooley, Researcher

Appendix B: Employer Consent Form

Teacher responsible for study: Brian Schooley   Supervisor(s) of study: Dr. Brian Bourke   Date: December 2016 - May 2017   Study Title: Why is Soft Skills Missing in Today's Job Applicants

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted through Murray State University. This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this research study or not. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of this study is to determine why employers have stated soft skills are missing in today's job applicants. Specific areas of interest will focus on the current state of soft skills in today's applicants, how soft skills are perceived by applicants, what factors have contributed to current state of soft skills and what can be done to increase soft skills in today's graduates and applicants to make them college and career ready.

2. WHAT WE WILL ASK THE EMPLOYER TO DO:

If you agree to this study you will be asked to:

- Participate in a face to face, telephone, or video interview with researcher

- This interview will be audio-taped

- This one interview session will last approximately one hour

- Provide verification of collected data by reviewing transcript of interview

4. RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: No risks are anticipated for the participants

5. BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: Benefits for participating include helping the employers to determine strategies to improve soft skills. This data will also help schools to understand how to better prepare students for their entry into the job force.

6. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: All research participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw or deny the study at any time, without prejudice or penalty, should you object to the nature of the research. You are entitled to ask questions and to receive an explanation at any time during participation.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY: No names or personal identifiers will be used in the sharing of results outside of school officials, parents of participants, and the participants.

8. WHOM TO CONTACT: Dr. Brian Bourke at (270) 809-3588 or bbourke@murraystate.edu

Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.
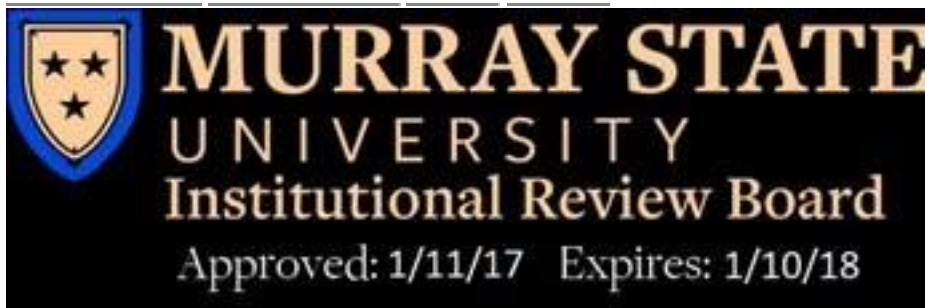
The dated approval stamp on this document indicates that this project has been reviewed and approved by the Murray State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. Do not sign or agree to participate after the expiration date on the stamp. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the MSU IRB Coordinator at (270) 809-2916 or msu.irb@murraystate.edu.

The researcher may audio-tape the focus group (circle response and initial). You must agree to continue participating.

YES NO

_____ Signature of Researcher Date

_____ Signature of Participant Date

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY Institutional Review Board Approved: 1/11/17 Expires: 1/10/18

Appendix C: Teacher Recruitment Correspondence

I am e-mailing you this correspondence because I am in the process of conducting an educational research for an education doctoral degree program I am pursuing at Murray State University, and you were randomly selected as a prospective participant. My study is to investigate employers and teachers' perspectives of the nature of soft skills that employers consider relevant employability skills. Soft skills are the nontechnical skills that everyone needs to be successful in the work setting, for example, patience and self-control.

If you are interested in becoming a participant, you must meet the following requirements:

☐You have a validate teaching certificate

☐Two years teaching experience in their own class (

(Your participation is strictly **voluntary**. That is, you do not have to participate in the study if you do not wish to do so. Your name or other identification will not be revealed throughout the process of the study. You can also withdraw from the study if you choose without any explanation or suffer any negative effect.

(I am attaching a letter of invitation and consent form for your review. Please read the details carefully before deciding whether to participate. You may direct any questions you may have regarding the study or any other concerns to me. The consent form is not required to be signed at this time.

Thank you,

 (Brian Schooley, Researcher

Appendix D: Teacher Consent Form

Teacher responsible for study: Brian Schooley   Supervisor(s) of study: Dr. Brian Bourke   Date: December 2016 - May 2017   Study Title: Why are Soft Skills Missing in Today's Job Applicants

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted through Murray State University. This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this research study or not. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to determine why employers have stated soft skills are missing in today's job applicants. Specific areas of interest will focus on the current state of soft skills in today's applicants, how soft skills are perceived by applicants, what factors have contributed to current state of soft skills and what can be done to increase soft skills in today's graduates and applicants to make them college and career ready.

2. WHAT WE WILL ASK THE TEACHER TO DO:

If you agree to this study you will be asked to:

Participate in one focus group

This focus group will be audio-recorded

This focus group will be used to collect data on educators' thoughts on soft skills and how they can be improved

Teachers will be asked to review transcripts of the focus group to validate the data collected

 4. RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: No risks are anticipated for the participants

5. BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: Benefits for participating include helping the employers to determine strategies to improve soft skills. This data will also help schools to understand how to better prepare students for their entry into the job force.

6. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: All research participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw or deny the study at any time, without prejudice or penalty, should you object to the nature of the research. You are entitled to ask questions and to receive an explanation at any time during participation.
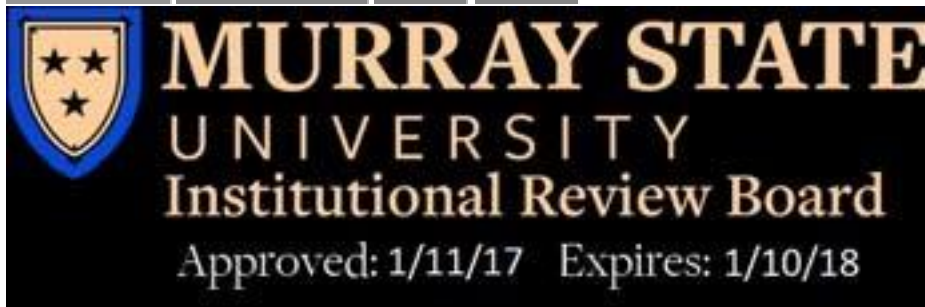
7. CONFIDENTIALITY: No names or personal identifiers will be used in the sharing of results outside of school officials, parents of participants, and the participants.

8. WHOM TO CONTACT: Dr. Brian Bourke at (270) 809-3588 or bbourke@murraystate.edu   **Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.**   The dated approval stamp on this document indicates that this project has been reviewed and approved by the Murray State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. Do not sign or agree to participate after the expiration date on the stamp. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the MSU IRB Coordinator at (270) 809-2916 or msu.irb@murraystate.edu.   The researcher may audio-tape the focus group (circle response and initial). You must agree to continue participating.

YES NO

_____ Signature of Researcher Date

_____ Signature of Participant Date

Appendix E: Employer Interview Protocol

Employability skills include both hard and soft skills. Hard skills are considered intellectual skills, while soft skills are considered problem solving, personality traits and social skills. In this interview I am interested in your perception of the relevant soft skills that you consider when selecting and recruiting prospective employees.

1) What are the relevant soft skills you look for in prospective employees?

2) How would you rank the following soft skills in importance: critical thinking, problem solving, oral communication, written communication, teamwork, leadership and work ethic?

3) Based on the applicant pool applying to your company, do you believe today's applicants have the soft skills to succeed?

4) What factors do you believe have contributed to the rise or fall of soft skills?

5) How would you recommend secondary and post-secondary schools help develop these skills in their students?

6) Do you believe soft skills can be taught? If so at what levels?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your participation was invaluable. I will forward to you a verbatim transcript of the interview and ask that your review it, make the necessary corrections of your thoughts and experiences, and return to me within 10 days of receipt.

Appendix F: Teacher Protocol for Interviews

Employability skills include both hard and soft skills. Hard skills are considered

intellectual skills, while soft skills are considered problem solving, personality traits and social skills. In this interview I am interested in your perception of the relevant soft skills that you consider when selecting and recruiting prospective employees.

1) What are the relevant soft skills you think employers are looking for in today's applicants?

2) How would you rank the following soft skills in importance: critical thinking, problem solving, oral communication, written communication, teamwork, leadership and work ethic?

3) Based on today's student, do you believe they have the soft skills to be successful in the job force?

4) What factors do you think have contributed to the rise or fall of soft skill in today's applicants?

5) Do you believe it K-12's fault? Why or why not?

6) Do you believe soft skills can be taught?

7) How do you think K-12 can help teach students soft skills?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your participation was invaluable. I will forward to you a verbatim transcript of the interview and ask that your review it, make the necessary corrections of your thoughts and experiences, and return to me within 10 days of receipt.