

Lindenwood University

Digital Commons@Lindenwood University

---

Dissertations

Theses & Dissertations

---

Spring 4-2018

## An Exploratory Study of the Role of Soft Skills in the Training and Employability of High School Graduates

Felita Sharmett Williams  
*Lindenwood University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Williams, Felita Sharmett, "An Exploratory Study of the Role of Soft Skills in the Training and Employability of High School Graduates" (2018). *Dissertations*. 185.

<https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/dissertations/185>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses & Dissertations at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact [phuffman@lindenwood.edu](mailto:phuffman@lindenwood.edu).

An Exploratory Study of the Role of Soft Skills in the  
Training and Employability of High School Graduates

by

Felita Sharmett Williams

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

An Exploratory Study of the Role of Soft Skills in the  
Training and Employability of High School Graduates

by

Felita Sharmett Williams

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

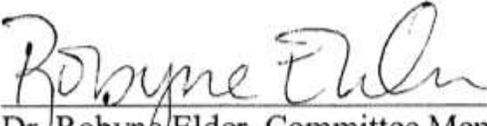
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Stephen Sherblom, Dissertation Chair

4-27-18  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Beverly Bonner, Committee Member

4-27-18  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Robyne Elder, Committee Member

4-27-18  
Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Felita Sharmett Williams

Signature: Felita S. Williams Date: 4/27/18

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to first acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This would not have been possible if God had not been on my side. This started out as an assignment that God had placed me on. I remember giving thanks to God when I finished my Ed.S. It was on a Sunday and I was leaving church and I heard the Holy Spirit say, “You are not done yet; there is another assignment that you must complete;” so back to the classroom I went.

Lindenwood has been home for me for several years and achieving this goal would not have been possible without the assistance of my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Stephen Sherblom, and committee members, Dr. Beverly Bonner and Dr. Robyne Elder. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your patience and support. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work with and learn from each of them, and I am very grateful for the guidance, support, and encouragement they provided throughout this journey. In addition, I want to thank Barbara Portwood, my dear friend for all the support and encouragement she gave me when I wanted to just give up. She has been a true supporter in this doctoral program for me.

I would like to give thanks to all the participants in this study for giving me unlimited access, spending countless hours answering questions and providing information. I give thanks to the parents and their children/students for participating in this study and sharing their lives with me. Without them this study would not have been possible.

Most importantly, I want to give thanks to my family, especially my Mama, Mary Broadnax-Smith for always encouraging me and telling me that I could do this and ‘God

has prepared your for such as task.’ I want to thank my girls (daughters), Ms. Alexandria and Ms. Sydnee for all their support and for allowing me to stay on course for the assignment that God placed me on. I would like to thank my entire extended family and my church family for all their prayers and encouraging words. I would like to thank my sister, First Lady, Sherri Harris and (Husband) Pastor Gerald Harris for their prayers and support. I would like to thank my team at work for all their support and uplifting words. Finally, I would like to give thanks to my BFFs, Beverly, Angel, Susie, and Ms. Ora. I thank you all for truly understanding me and my purpose in serving God. Our friendship has truly been tested and I appreciate you all for being patient with me. I thank you.

## **Abstract**

Research has shown that both educators and prospective employers agreed that students needed more than just ‘hard skills.’ Instead of focusing only on students meeting the academic requirements needed to graduate with a diploma, students also needed to work toward mastering social and emotional skills such as ‘soft skills.’ This study consists of five parts; (i) seeking information from employers associated with the target school; (ii) seeking information from parents of students in the target school; (iii) the researcher crafted intervention for students based on the literature on soft skills, (iv) the researcher completed intervention in two area churches, and (v) assessment of the outcome of the intervention in terms of greater student awareness of the importance of soft-skills and ability with soft-skills in their interactions.

This qualitative study inquired: (1) What soft skills are sought by the employers associated with the target school in their new hires? (2) What soft skills are being consciously supported in the home of the students? (3) What evidence is there that the intervention devised was successful at developing useful soft skills in the student engaged in the intervention?

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Soft skills versus Hard Skills.....	1
Background of the Study.....	3
Purpose of Study.....	4
Rationale.....	5
Terms that May be Unfamiliar to the Reader.....	8
Adjust the balance.....	8
Distance travelled.....	9
Hard skills.....	9
Soft indicator.....	9
Soft skills.....	9
Research Questions.....	10
Research Question 1.....	10
Research Question 2.....	10
Research Question 3.....	10
Limitations.....	11
Summary.....	11

Chapter Two: The Literature Review .....	13
History.....	14
The Montessori Theory.....	15
Social and Emotional Learning.....	17
Non-Cognitive Skills .....	19
Interpersonal Skills in the workplace.....	22
Four Career Paths Where Soft Skills Are Crucial .....	23
Business service industry.....	23
IT skills .....	23
Healthcare industry .....	23
Physician.....	24
Soft Skills Training.....	25
Problems with Graduates at the Time of this Writing .....	27
Transferable Skills .....	29
Can Soft Skills Be Taught?.....	31
Soft Skills Increase Academic Success.....	34
Summary.....	39
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	40
Review of Chapter .....	40
Purpose of this Dissertation .....	40
Procedure .....	40
Step 1 .....	40
Step 2 .....	41

Step 3 .....	41
Step 4 .....	41
Step 5. ....	41
Research Questions.....	42
Research Question 1 .....	42
Research Question 2. ....	42
Research Question 3 .....	42
The Research Context.....	42
Research Settings .....	42
Research Participants .....	44
Data Storage Procedures .....	45
Paper records.....	45
Audio records.....	45
Developing the Intervention .....	45
Evaluating the Intervention.....	45
Exhibit 1: Course, Competencies & Descriptions .....	46
Ability to maintain a good working relationship .....	46
Data Collection and Analysis Procedures.....	50
Observation Characteristics .....	51
Types of Soft Outcomes: Example of Indicators.....	52
Summary.....	53
Chapter Four: Results .....	54
Research Question 1 .....	54

Research Question 2 .....	54
Research Question 3 .....	54
Responses from Employers.....	55
Section 2: Responses from Parents.....	72
Responses from Focus Group I - Children .....	84
Responses from Focus Group I & II - Parents .....	90
Parent Pledge and Children Pledge: Results.....	98
Checklist for Positive Action: Results .....	98
Observation Characteristics .....	100
Summary .....	101
Chapter Five: Discussion & Reflections.....	103
Research Questions.....	103
Research Question 1 .....	103
Research Question 2. ....	103
Research Question 3 .....	103
Results.....	104
Research Question 1 .....	104
Research Question 2 .....	105
Research Question 3 .....	106
Unintended Effects.....	107
Recommendations for Future Research and Practice .....	108
Limitations of the Study.....	110
Conclusion .....	110

References.....	112
Appendix A.....	127
Appendix B.....	130
Appendix C.....	134
Appendix D.....	136
Appendix E.....	137
Appendix F.....	138
Appendix G.....	139
Appendix H.....	140
Appendix I.....	142
Appendix J.....	144
Appendix K.....	145
Appendix L.....	146
Appendix M.....	148
Appendix N.....	150
Vitae.....	152

## List of Tables

Table 1. PDK/Gallup Poll The expectations for Today’s Schools among the American Public .....	36
Table 2. Communication and Interpersonal Skills.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Table 3. Teamwork and Work and Work Ethics .....	47
Table 4. Flexibility and Adaptability .....	48
Table 5. Negotiate and Analytical .....	48
Table 6 . Observation Characteristics .....	51
Table 7. Types of ‘Soft’ Outcomes: Example of Indicators .....	52
Table A1. DSLSP Intervention Curriculum Assignments .....	127
Table B1. Observation Characteristics .....	130
Table B2. Types of "soft" Outcomes: Example of Indicators .....	131
Table B3. Professional Development Skills - Mastered .....	133

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Which soft skills are most critical for entry level positions? .....	58
Figure 2. How would you rank these soft skills in importance?.....	61
Figure 3. How important are work readiness skills to employers.....	62
Figure 4. How important are soft skills to your organization? .....	63
Figure 5. Are soft skills more important than hard skills?.....	63
Figure 6. Is it easy to teach applicants hard skills as opposed to soft skills?.....	64
Figure 7. Importance of child’s personal responsibility, initiative, self-management, and perseverance.....	76
Figure 8. Importance of children’s non-verbal skills.....	77
Figure 9. Child improved level of attendance.....	77
Figure 10. Child improved money management skills .....	78
Figure 11. Importance of self-confidence.....	79
Figure 12. Importance of child’s appearance.....	80
Figure 13. Child shown improvement in appearance and personal hygiene .....	82
Figure 14. Child improved attendance.....	83
Figure 15. Increased conversations about right and wrong behavior .....	89
Figure 16. Increased discussions about respect and responsibilities .....	90
Figure 17. Increased discussions about right and wrong behavior .....	96
Figure 18. Increased discussions about respect and responsibilities .....	97

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

There has been increasing focus on certain issues pertaining to urban youth, such as youth substance abuse, dropouts, and academic performance. Many urban youth and their families had social needs and emotional needs according to Hamedani and Darling-Hammond (2015), which created interrelated problem behaviors that were not then-currently successfully addressed, though frequently called the ‘missing piece.’

Barbarin (2002) stated that any persons closely related by blood could establish a home environment and provide nurturing for children. Mothers and fathers created connectivity by exposing children to varied experiences, increasing their knowledge, and providing the guided framework for their ongoing learning, according to the World Health Organization (2004). According to the Macomb Brain Injury Association of Michigan (MBIAM, 2009) and other researchers, during the first 2,000 days up to the first day of kindergarten, 90% of a child’s brain is developed (Early Childhood Mental Health, n.d.; First Five Years Fund, 2016; Frist, n.d.). Gadsdem (2002), supporting Barbarin (2002), argued that parents were the first teachers of their child’s development. The child’s brain develops faster in the first five years of life than at any other age, and the brain is the most defenseless to influence. The relationships that babies build with others and the world around them profoundly influenced their development and life path, stated Gadsdem (2002). Key stakeholders that typically played a major role in a child’s life were their parents; their community; and their early childhood educators. Soft skills development was integrally linked with positive reinforcement, the presence of which increased the chances of the child being ‘school ready,’ according to MBIAM (2009). Students, while being educated in basic reading, writing, and math, according to Johnson

(2013), had not had anyone help them with pulling together the analytical skills that put the basics to use. In developing non-cognitive skills, research suggested that parents were more capable of helping their children develop non-cognitive skills than anyone else. “Most efforts that are made by parents help children with their cognitive skills more in the earlier stages and with their non-cognitive skills in later stages in life,” said Robert (2014, p. 4). When one human interacted with another human, that was a skill called a soft skill (Lazarus, 2013). “Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job that students are train to do” says Schulz, (2008, p. 146). Employers want to select, retain, and be able to promote individuals who can show they are dependable, resourceful, and have good communication skills.

### **Soft skills versus Hard Skills**

Research showed that both educators and prospective employers agreed that students needed more than just hard skills (Raftree, 2011). Students who were taught social and emotional development (soft skills) at a very young age were able to exemplify growing abilities in the following areas: communication skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, analytical skills, flexibility and adaptability skills, strong work ethic, negotiating skills, and persuasive skills (Murden, 2012). This is not to say that technical skills and knowledge were not just as important, but technical skills could be taught on the job, whereas soft skills were not as easy to teach (National Career Service, 2015). Instead of focusing only on students meeting the academic requirements needed to graduate with a diploma; students also need to work toward mastering the social and emotional skills known as soft skills. Soft skills are the personal emotional attributes and character traits employers were seeking in the job market at the time of this writing. It is

important to realize that some soft skills were more important than others (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2001). Soft skills were the keys to educating for vast career opportunities.

Just as ongoing cognitive skills development was important for school readiness, so was soft skills development. Skills such as self-regulation, persistence, motivation, and confidence were what Robles (2012) called soft skills. The benefits of developing soft skills were critical for fine tuning the student's attitude toward learning, said Hunter (2017).

Skills that employers were calling soft skills were skills that had been fine-tuned, perhaps over an extended period. These soft skills allowed persons to be able to do a number of things: communicate effectively, make good sound decisions, show strong commitment and flexibility, manage their time, meet deadlines, prioritize; demonstrate leadership skills, led by example; be a team player, able to offer constructive suggestions and listen with an open mind, and accept responsibility even when things were going in the wrong direction (Collet, Hine, du Plessis, 2015).

### **Background of the Study**

Lerman and Packer (2010) indicated that a chief testmaker was asked “why New York tested students’ ability to factor a polynomial but not to speak standard English, even though good verbal skills matter far more on the job to far more people” (p. 1). The test maker responded saying, “We can test factoring but not speaking” (Lerman & Packer, (2010, p. 2). There was a suggestion that many states in the United States wanted Algebra 2 to be a course requirement for graduating from high school. According to Handel (2010), many states placed more emphasis on Common Core State Standards than skills that prepared learners to succeed in the workplace at the time of this writing.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of soft skills in the training and employability of high school graduates with the intent of increasing support of those skills. This study consisted of five parts; (i) seeking information from employers associated with the target school; (ii) seeking information from parents of students in the target school; (iii) researcher crafted intervention for students based on the literature, (iv) researcher conducted intervention in an off-site location, through two area churches, and (v) assessment of the outcome of the intervention in terms of greater student awareness of the importance of soft-skills and ability with soft-skills in their interactions.

The second focus of this study was the state of soft skills development in students' homes. This study explored what parents knew about how to teach their children soft skills, and which skills they focused upon. The researcher sought parent involvement in this study through using surveys.

The researcher created an intervention for students and their parents. The intervention was conducted at two area churches during non-school time, as the school day was too full to accommodate adding this kind of focused intervention. The final stage of the study was an evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention through an examination of the types of soft outcomes and example of indicators (key work skills); the acquisition of key skills, such as team working, problem solving, numeracy skills, information technology; the acquisition of language and communication skills, such as completion of work placements, and lower rates of sickness related absence (attitude skills); increased levels of motivation and increased levels of confidence; recognition of prior skills, increased feelings of responsibility, increased levels of self-esteem, and

increased higher personal and career aspirations (personal skills); and improved personal appearance/present ability, levels of attendance, and personal hygiene; and greater levels of self-awareness; better health and fitness; greater levels of concentration and/or engagement and managing money; as well as an improved awareness of rights and responsibilities.

### **Rationale**

The rationale was the reason for conducting this study, and there were several. First, the educational system did a good job at teaching students the traditional core subjects, such as reading, writing, math, and science. These were hard skills that were both essential and valuable to perform well on a job. However, more attention has been focused on other skills that were also necessary for students to be competent – called soft skills. According to Sulphery (2015), these were non-technical, trans-disciplinary skills, personal qualities, and characteristics, which carried over into the workplace. These skills included, but are not limited to, being able to communicate, providing leadership, creativity, and being able to work in a team. To conclude, the majority of careers, including STEM careers, such as engineering required employees to demonstrate skills like these (Edutopia, 2013).

According to Pianin (2014), many employers were having problems with the fact that entry-level candidates were clueless about how to navigate an office setting. The Workforce Solutions Group at the St. Louis Community College found that more than 60% of employers said applicants lacked communication and interpersonal skills (as cited in Nunn, 2013, p. 2). Managers also said, at the time of this writing, new hires could not think critically and creatively, nor could they problem-solve or write well (Nunn, 2013).

The National Associations of College and Employers (NACE) said that when employers were asked which attributes they were looking for in new candidates, 77.8% chose leadership and the ability to work in a team structure as the most important (as cited in Gray, & Koncz, 2014, p. 2). The NACE report by Gray and Koncz (2014) also said stakeholders wanted potential employees skilled in communication and problem solving, and to exhibit a strong work ethic (p. 1). Furthermore, Pianin (2014) noted that jobs were going unfilled as a result of a shortage of candidates with soft skills, which hurt companies and employees. Many companies said that candidates were lacking in motivation, interpersonal skills, appearance, punctuality, and flexibility (Pianin, 2014). In this study, the researcher had a group of employers already associated with the school. These employers were given a survey and the researcher collected information from them through Survey Monkey.

Second, employers oftentimes said they could teach an applicant to do just about anything, but they could not teach the new hires how to have a positive attitude or common sense (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2001). Any employer's ideal candidate for hire would be the most talented and skilled of candidates, and preferably a new hire with a great attitude. However, it became increasingly difficult to find candidates who had it all. In lieu of this ideal candidate, what employers were faced with were a pool of decreasing talents where the right mixture of attitudes, culture fit, and skills were difficult to find in one person. According to Rakos (2014), when talent and skills were limited, employers must recruit for attitude and train for skill. "Having a positive attitude in the workplace can help with potential promotions. Employers promote employees who not only produce, but also motivate others in the workplace" (Rakos, 2014, p. 1.). When

employers employed new people, they either helped the companies make money or helped the company save money. No matter which position in the organization a new hire may assume, whether a manager who makes business decisions, receptionist who makes the first impression on customers, or a maintenance worker who makes the building a safe place to conduct business, the new hire must have a positive attitude (LDS Employment Resource Services, 2015).

Third, soft skills were well documented as important skills in the business literature (Lestus, 2013), and there was a growing recognition of the need for soft skills in any place of employment where an applicant was working with other people (Deloitte, 2009). When companies' yearly business objectives were being created, many CEOs, Presidents, and other business leaders were using this time to refocus on their company's innovation progress. According to Mroz (2014), it helped to focus on the full broadness of their employees' skill sets. Oftentimes, business leaders focused more on the highly technical skills they would like to cultivate, and overlooked the soft skills every workplace needed in order to become thoroughly innovative. Hard skills were the basic CORE skills, but soft skills were actually the more difficult skills to develop, maintain, and mature (Vanderkam, 2014). How do people learn and utilize soft skills? The American Management Association maintained that educators could teach them through supporting the development of the Four Cs: creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking (Mroz, 2014). These were the basis for "the transformative skills necessary for innovation to take root and grow in any organization" (Mroz, 2014, p. 2). The Four Cs were essential to prepare students for increasingly complex life and work environments in the 21st century.

Fourth, the role and benefits of soft skills in an educational setting was not adequately explored (Lake Research Partners, 2011). Nunn (2013) stated that by the time students showed up at an institution of higher education, they were socialized to a large extent. They came with habits, preferences, and behaviors deeply rooted in their personal experiences. Therefore, the likelihood that a college student would be able to demonstrate acceptable non-cognitive behaviors in class was more of a function of what they learned from their parents, K-12 education, and other experiences (Nunn, 2013 p. 2). Nunn agreed that soft skills could be taught. Furthermore, there had been some research and expert opinions in the effort to determine the specific soft skills to be implemented and used in the classroom setting. Based on Jain's (2009) research findings, seven soft skills have been identified and chosen to be implemented in institutions of learning. They are communication skills, thinking skills and problem solving skills; team work, life-long learning and Information Management skills, Entrepreneur Skills, Ethics, Professionalism, and Leadership skills (Jain, 2009).

#### **Terms that May be Unfamiliar to the Reader.**

**Adjust the balance** - defines soft indicators in terms of what they measure, and how people are using them. A soft indicator recognised the progress towards a hard outcome by gathering information about the soft outcomes (Pickerden, 2006-2007). In the same way Dewson, Eccles, Tackey, and Jackson (2000) stated, "There is interplay between indicators and outcomes, in that indicators are the means by which we can measure whether the outcomes have been achieved" (p. 2). Soft indicators refer to the areas of achievement which may indicate progress toward an outcome.

**Distance travelled** “refers to the progress that a beneficiary makes toward employability or harder outcomes, as a result of any intervention” (Dewson, Eccles, Tackey, & Jackson, 2000, p. 3). In addition and by definition, measuring distance travelled required assessing clients on at least two separate occasions to understand what changed (Blades, 2012).

**Hard skills.** According to Chaturvedi, Yadav, and Bajpai, (2011), “*Hard skills*” are “technical or administrative procedures related to an organization’s core business” (p. 2).

Skills, such as “Machine operation, computer protocols, safety standards, financial procedures, and sales administration” (p. 2). In other words, “*Hard skills* are the skills that are the occupational requirements of a job and other activities’ such as a whole set of technical skills inherited by a human being during a long span of time, “(Chaturvedi, Yadav, & Bajpai 2011, p. 1).

**Soft indicator:** A soft indicator recognizes the progress towards a hard outcome by gathering information about the soft outcomes (Dewson et al., 2000, p. 2). Soft indicators refer to achievement, which may indicate progress toward an outcome. The outcomes are from training, support, or guidance interventions. These soft outcomes may include accomplishments relating to interpersonal skills, organizational skills, analytical skills, and personal skills.

**Soft skills** - “Non-academic aptitudes that allow students to execute hard skills, like interpersonal communication, critical thinking, work ethic and creativity” (Indiana Youth Institute, 2012, p. 1). According to Abdullah-Al-Mamun (2012), “Soft skills have strategic roles in determining someone’s success in his work” (p. 327). He further stated,

“People with a solid command of soft skills can think on their feet, solve problems, lead a group through teamwork exercises, give critical feedback, motivate fellow employees, and set an example” (Abdullah-Al-Mamun, p. 327). Field (2003) also described non-technical skills and personal qualities required for successful professional practice as soft skills (as cited in Johnston & McGregor, 2005, p. 2).

The soft skills according to Lazarus (2013) were defined as “desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and positive flexible attitude” (p. 114).

When seeking employment, what makes one’s interview stand out from others?

According to Parsons (2008), it is the personality traits. Employers had high expectations and applicants full with spirit and enhances job performance (Parsons, 2008). Soft skills were not limited to one’s profession. Skills that were a person’s ability to perform a certain task were considered as hard skills (Parsons, 2008). Soft skills were communication skills (Arkansas State Department of Education, 2007; Magazine, 2003).

### **Research Questions**

**Research Question 1.** What soft skills are sought by the employers associated with the target school in their new hires?

**Research Question 2.** What soft skills are being consciously supported in the homes of the students?

**Research Question 3.** What evidence is there that the intervention devised was successful at developing useful soft skills in the students engaged in the intervention?

**Limitations**

One limitation was there were only so many participants that could participate in the study and they were recruited through two area churches rather than through the schools. Therefore the researcher had to accommodate their time schedule available from the participants. The researcher was limited in the measures used to evaluate any soft skill progress; and the general duration of the study was relatively brief.

**Summary**

There were certain soft skills more appealing to employers than other skills. Candidates with excellent soft skill were oftentimes more difficult to find than candidates without soft skills. An employee having soft skills was a necessity, and by increasing awareness about the relationship between soft skills and success in the workplace the new 21st century learner would be more empowered to succeed.

This topic was very dear to the researcher's heart, it is really about the researcher. How does a child, for that matter anyone overcome obstacles, such as their socioeconomic status, if they have no one that can teach them how to overcome? Sometimes in life people learn certain principles of how to do things, and what not to do, from our parents. Nevertheless, if a child has parents that do not know how to overcome SES themselves, how can those parents teach their sons and daughters how to overcome them? Some people struggle with basic reading writing, math, and science. They never learned how to read nor were they taught the decoding of phonics, so they find themselves trying to teach themselves. These students stop talking and just start listening and praying that if only they were able to listen, maybe they would be able to comprehend. Oftentimes many students find themselves with behavior problems, and

those problems may be because their cognitive skills and or non-cognitive skills were never developed; now these students find themselves in high school, getting ready to graduate, and transitioning to college. What does a learner, who did not get the proper necessary skills to succeed, do?

One advantage of teaching soft skills was recognition of a greater ability with the increasingly diverse workforce and understanding their varying beliefs and customs. As a whole, most employers believed that if a person was eligible to work, then that person had common sense expectations. Employers were saying, 'I cannot teach you how to have moral ethical behavior. I cannot teach you how to be kind to others, or how to motivate yourself or how to be a team player, or how to be a team leader, or how to problem-solve and be creative.' These were skills that an employer generally could not and would not teach. Those types of skills were what defined a person; however, and promoted the hire-ability in the 21st century.

## **Chapter Two: The Literature Review**

The literature review for this study provides background information for understanding how to enable learners to develop soft skills and explains why soft skills give learners an edge. It also provides warrant for putting this research study into the available literature, regarding interventions to address those factors that affect inner-city learners. The literature shows that inner-city learners tend to lack the soft skills needed for successful transition into the workplace.

According to Nishi (2013), soft skills were habits that were refined over time, more so than inherent traits. The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP, 2009) reported many employers placed a premium on soft skills, and many were struggling to find new employees who possessed these desirable traits. Employers wanted people that had integrity, were responsible, showed a good self-image, could express themselves through effective communication skills, and had followership ability (Symonds, 2011). In addition, employers were looking for applicants with people skills, such as a sense of humor, self-discipline, creativity, flexibility, and which are intuitive and could see the 'Big Picture' (Symonds, 2011). A poll released in June 2008 by the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) concurred with that assessment (as cited in Office of Disability Employment Policy [ODEP], 2008).

What makes a new graduate stand out from equally qualified competitors, however, is evidence of the 'soft skills' needed in the workplace. As a result, employers also looked for extracurricular activities, such as playing on a team,

doing volunteer work, or leading a professional student organization, because it was these types of activities that taught the soft skills that students might not learn in the classroom (Mackes, 2013). The lack of soft skills could cause major problems and setbacks with academic success and employability success (ODEP, 2013).

### **History**

According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004), in the absence of soft skills, which were associated with social and emotional competency, children could not develop cognitive skills. Parents' primary job was to prepare children to someday 'leave the nest'. According to Murden (2012), parents had a great deal to worry about concerning their children achieving independence. Among workers aged 25 and older who graduated high school but did not attend college, the unemployment rate was 5.1% in August 2017, the same as a year earlier. Unemployment rates for workers with less than a high school diploma were 6.0% in August 2017, which was down from 7.3% in August 2016 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017, p. 1). As of August 2017, the unemployment rate for college graduates was 2.4% and 5.1% for high school graduates for August 2017 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017, p. 1).

Social and emotional development was imperative for a child's productive future in the workforce. During early childhood, children began to engage with the world around them (Cohen, Onunaku, Clothier, & Poppe, 2005 National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). This process often took

place largely through children's interaction with their parents or caregivers within the home and community.

During this process, children learn to recognize and express their emotions, to share with others, and they began to develop their own sense of self-confidence and trust. These were vital aspects of early brain development that supported later learning and well-being (Miller, 2008).

Many branches of social science established the importance of a stable home environment for nurturing children (Barbarin, 2002). Mothers and fathers created connectivity, within which they exposed children to varied experiences, increasing their knowledge and providing the guided framework for their ongoing learning (Barbarin, 2002). Gadsdem (2002) pointed out that parents were a child's first teacher.

During the first five years of a child's life, brain development was of central importance. That process was faster than at any other age and the brain was the most defenseless to influence. The relationships that babies built with others and the world around them profoundly influenced their development and life path (Gadsdem, 2002). Children's parents, their communities, and early childhood educators' roles in a child's soft skills development were integrally linked with positive reinforcement, which increased the chance of the child's school readiness and supported successfully transitioning to adulthood and workplace responsibilities.

### **The Montessori Theory**

Dr. Maria Montessori had a vision of world peace beginning with the education of the child. She believed in educating the whole child by enhancing all their abilities and using all their senses (as cited in Montessori Training, 2014).

Montessori developed her philosophy of education based upon actual observations of children. Children passed through sensitive periods of developing early in life, called the 'absorbent mind' (Montessori Training, 2014). She stated that through observation children naturally and spontaneously learned from birth to 6 years of their development (Montessori Training, 2014).

According to Montessori Theory (2015), children were particularly receptive to certain external stimuli. Furthermore, a teacher that was Montessori trained could recognize and take advantage of these highly perceptive stages through the introduction of material and activities specially designed to stimulate the intellect (Montessori Theory, 2015).

According to the Montessori Training (2014) website, the Montessori classroom had a specific use and purpose. In the environment, which was prepared, there was nothing that the child could not see or touch. The furniture and equipment were all scaled down to the child's size and were within easy reach. Within the classroom setting there was an atmosphere which was respectful and full of joy. Also, within this enriched environment freedom, responsibility, and social and intellectual development were fostered (Montessori Theory, 2015).

The teachers from Montessori were trained facilitators in the classroom to assist with this independent environment. They were always looking and ready to assist and direct the child. The main purpose was to stimulate the child's enthusiasm for learning and to guide them without interfering with their natural desire to teach themselves and become independent (Montessori Theory, 2015).

“Never help a child with a task at which he feels he can succeed” was one expressions of this guiding principle (Montessori Theory, 2015, p. 1). When educators fostered a caring school environment and taught core social skills, a virtuous cycle developed in which positive interactions begat more positive interactions (Edutopia, 2011).

The foundation principles and concepts of Montessori theory could be applied across all ages. The main principles were independence, observation, following the child, correcting the child, prepared environment, and absorbent mind. It was within these concepts that the reasoning behind why things were such as they were in a Montessori environment, were found.

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

When teaching the soft skills, an integral part was educating the whole child. When children were sharing honestly, with thoughtful words, and concerned listening, they would feel like they were being cared for (Edutopia, 2011). The goal was to help teach children how to be empathetic caring people, and in order to do that there was a need to create a supportive trusting environment where they could feel safe and thrive. That was the ideal learning environment. Social and emotional learning (SEL) was described as the process through which humans learned to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors (Edutopia, 2011). SEL educators and researchers believed that by integrating SEL into schools, educators could

teach students critical life skills, which would not only help their personal development but also assist in their academic performance (Edutopia, 2011).

In Schulwerk Orff's approach, a child participating in an Orff classroom did not feel the pressure of performing; children began with what they did instinctively which was play (Calvin-Campbell, 1988). While Orff and Montessori did not specifically address the different facets of the child's intelligence, both processes encompassed all the human capacities. Gardner's (MI) Multiple Intelligences Theory was not only helpful in the realm of education, but in all relationships in life (Calvin-Campbell, 1988). Gardner's Theory stated learning took place by the seven intelligences, which were visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and logical-mathematical. As one became familiar with these theories, it was obvious they shared a common goal of educating the whole child (Gardner, 1983).

Plato wrote about education in *The Republic*; he proposed a holistic curriculum that required a balance of training in physical education, the arts, math, science, character, and moral judgment (as cited in Edutopia, 2011). According to Plato (Edutopia, 2011), citizens of good character were produced by maintaining a sound system of education and upbringing. Preparing children to be responsible, productive, caring, and engaged citizens was a timeless pursuit that continued to be the goal of education, at the time of this writing.

**Non-Cognitive Skills**

“Oftentimes your most persistent, self-disciplined, adaptable, and reliable students and professionals outperform those students with higher cognitive abilities,” according to Robert (2014, p. 1). Robert (2014) explained that non-cognitive skills were skills which were other than primarily cognitive. Primarily cognitive tasks included memory, attention, planning, language, and thinking skills. Non-cognitive skills, on the other hand, encompassed persons’ emotional maturity, empathy, interpersonal skills, and verbal and non-verbal communication (Robert, 2014, p. 1).

In the workplace, employees that could effectively demonstrate non-cognitive skills tended to be more promotable, which led to higher pay and decreased incidents of risk behavior amongst other employees (Harms, 2004). Furthermore, children with non-cognitive skills were more likely to succeed academically and they often demonstrated a more adventuresome side of themselves, according to Cameron (2013). Skills that were taught for a specific job were called hard skills. Those types of skills typically helped employees in one type of workplace; for an example, hard skills for working in an automobile manufacturing industry or working as a welder. Whereas, non-cognitive skills, which were soft skills, helped employees in all types of employment industries, (Harms, 2004).

With attention to developing non-cognitive skills, research showed parents were more competent at helping young children develop non-cognitive skills than anyone else. Parents helped children with their cognitive skills more than anyone in those earlier stages of growth and with their non-cognitive skills in later stages in life (Cameron, 2013). It was particularly important to remember that as the child grows in age their non-

cognitive skills change as the child matures through their life (Cameron, 2013).

Likewise, the non-cognitive skills were much easier to develop in adolescence than cognitive skills; the “non-cognitive skills partially exist in one from birth and [are] based off family intervention” (Harms, 2004, p. 2). Furthermore, the non-cognitive skills could be developed both through studied learning and through reiteration performance (Cameron, 2013; Harms, 2004).

According to Postlewaite (2006) non-cognitive skills that were essentially valued by employers were skills that applicants could demonstrate and master, such as interpersonal skills, negotiation skills, and communication skills. Students who were still pursuing their education could increase their participation in non-academic and social events which could help these students develop more non-cognitive skills. For example, schools offered sports, student government, drama clubs, and other extracurricular activities which provided students opportunities to develop and master their non-cognitive skills (Harms, 2004).

A family’s background was a strong influence on children’s educational outcomes. Families with higher socio-economic status (SES) academically outperformed those families from lower SES, according to Hsin and Xie (2012). Still there was a considerable number of questions that remained in reference to the role of non-cognitive skills in status attainment. Though it was “commonly accepted that non-cognitive skills, like cognitive skills, mediate the intergenerational transmission of family advantages or disadvantages, it is far from clear that non-cognitive skills mediate the effects of family SES in the same manner as cognitive skills” (Hsin & Xie, 2012, p. 3). The family SES may influence children’s educational outcomes because a higher family SES meant more

potential resources that could be expended to promote children's education. In economics the resources explanation was popular (Becker, 1993; Mincer, 1974) because it was accepted that parents had an intrinsic unselfish interest in their children's socioeconomic wellbeing and purposely invested their monies in their children's education. The parental investment played a massive part in interventions to increase non-cognitive skills. Parents' investment in their children may come in a variety of forms, such as parents purchasing goods and services, like school supplies and books, recreation and entertainment activities, and private lessons and tutoring. Time to spend on one's children was another resource, such as assisting with homework and getting the child to school on time, which affected attendance and afterschool events (Kaushal, Magnuson, & Waldfogel, 2011).

It was not yet clear to what extent cognitive abilities were determined by genetics versus environment, but one may say these two forces interacted in certain ways which shaped one's cognitive abilities (Nisbett, 2009; Plomin, deFries, & Loehlin, 1977). Studies showed the most important period for cognitive skills to be developed was early to middle childhood (Harms, 2004). During the early childhood period, high SES families enhanced children's math and verbal development by offering greater material (Kaushal et al., 2011). The children's advantages in hard skills went on to positively influence a variety of achievement outcomes, which included children's educational attainment, said Farkas and Vicknair (1996).

Family socioeconomic status background affected children's academic achievement. The indirect effects of children's non-cognitive skills were wide-spread, from leadership and perseverance (Gutman & Schoon, 2013). Outcomes depended upon

an individual's own behavior and action and aspirations and expectations (Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006).

### **Interpersonal Skills in the workplace**

There was a lot of research on the importance of soft skills for people's professionalism, for their manners, and for their self-awareness – all things important in the shaping of leaders that allowed them to shine (Dunn, 2004). Furthermore, attitudes, such as a sense of adequacy to complete specific job tasks, and practical business communication skills help to minimize mistakes, saving time and money (Dunn, 2004).

Hansen and Hansen (2010) reported “listening, verbal, written, and interpersonal abilities as necessary workplace skills” (p. 1). Hansen and Hansen (2010) reported these skills among the key needed skills. The cost of miscommunication contributed to lost productivity, which according to Catt, Miller, and Hindi (2005) could not be directly estimated. At one time, educators and employers thought hard skills alone were plentiful for job success, but according to Lazarus (2013) the job market admissible skills were being replaced with high standards. Among the higher standard was what may be call ‘soft skills’ - the cluster of personality traits, social graces, and personal habits that mark each to varying degrees (Lazarus, 2013, p. 114). Educators felt that more communication skills, such as proofreading, listening, and speaking with external customers, and more interpersonal skills for management needed to be added to content curriculum. In conclusion, being able to have productive relations with

others and the skill of collaboration were needed to negotiate and collaborate as a member of a team (Outten, 2014).

#### **Four Career Paths Where Soft Skills Are Crucial**

**Business service industry:** Educators attested that employers always articulate the importance of soft skills in any Business Service Industry (Alshare, Lane, & Miller, 2011; Catt, Miller, & Hindi, 2005; Maxwell, 2003). In the context of discussion concerning restructuring courses to improve business communication skills, Alshare, Lane & Miller (2011) suggested, “Business communication courses should focus on the quality of the content and be more specific about particular skills that provide students with more employment opportunities” (p. 187).

**IT skills:** In most instances customers did not communicate understanding, and that made it necessary for the IT professional to understand what the dialect of the customer was, so that applicable communication could occur (Alshare et al., 2011). Furthermore, Alshare et al. (2011) said, “This is true even when the list includes the hard skills necessary to perform a specific job” (p. 188).

**Healthcare industry:** In the health care industry, it was easy to see that health care leaders were beginning to place equal or greater emphasis on soft skills. Furthermore, Lazarus (2013) indicated that soft skills could be difficult to teach, and some would even argue that they were hereditary.

**Physician:** There were five critical soft skills for physician leaders, and they were leadership, communication, professionalism, appearance, and etiquette, according to (Lazarus, 2013).

More corporations around the globe recognized that to gain competitive advantage they needed to be hiring the best people for the job and ensuring they worked as a team, taking calculated risk, articulating and acting on strong beliefs, and being held accountable for their results (Lazarus, 2013). Leadership was a privilege, but it carried responsibilities organizing around a purpose (Lazarus, 2013).

Communication skills were important to everyone, which was why so many job postings asked for candidates with strong written and verbal communication skills (Lazarus, 2013). There were a variety of skills needed for communicating to others and learning how to decode the information from others (Lazarus, 2013). A cluster of soft skills constituted being professional - appearance, body language, style, attitude, and general demeanor were all part of professionalism. A welcoming attitude, sincerity to others, and a pleasant demeanor could uphold your career path (Lazarus, 2013). Finally, knowing and observing the correct business (social etiquette) was a skill that must be cultivated if one was serious about developing a career (Cassidy, 2006). Having good manners, being polite, having good conversational skills and proper attire were all components of business social etiquette (Mayne, 2017).

### **Soft Skills Training**

A number of employers and a fair number of job training providers maintained that effective workforce development for low-income people of color was primarily an issue of soft skills preparation (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2001).

The Anne E. Casey Foundation (2001) defined soft skills as the ability to interface and behave relevantly in the workplace. Soft skills could include everything from attire to dialect, communication styles, and level of incitement.

The Anne E. Casey Foundation (2001) maintained that because employers' value judgments of the soft skills of then-current or possible workers were unfailingly subjective, it was hard to measure. The possibility of racial discrimination could enter into such judgments. Employers used soft skills training as a screen to show bias, according to the Anne E. Casey Foundation (2001). Due to competitive pressures, it was found that the higher incidence of unemployment among Black men was partly due to employers demanding and emphasizing the value of soft skills, which these men did not demonstrate (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2001). "Employment discrimination, of soft skills, is a real factor" (Anne E. Casey Foundation 2001, p. 17).

In some educational pathways students were not only receiving diplomas at graduations, they were able to earn certifications for different disciplines. One researcher indicated "that a comprehensive career and college readiness bill passed by the General Assembly authorizes the Governor's Office of Workforce Development to establish certification in soft skills" Downey (2011,

p. 7). Downey (2011) mentioned such skills as “punctuality, ability to learn, appropriate business attire, and the ability to work as a team” (p. 7). This was tried because “many employers complain that their interns have no idea how to answer the phone, dress for an office setting, work in a group or greet clients” (Downey, 2011, p. 7). Additionally, Downey (2011) stated “such skills should not be to replace what is going to be done at home, but if it is not being done at home, there is a role that educator must take to make sure the workforce is prepared” (p. 7). In other words, if industries could not find workforce in Georgia, they would be forced to recruit from North Carolina, Florida, or Alabama (Downey, 2011).

As a matter of fact, one of the first pieces of advice given to teens as they arrived at the Decatur office in “revealing outfits or sagging pants” was “you can either work or you can be fashionable” (Downey, 2011, p. 7). With some students graduating high school unable to read on grade level or perform basic math, critics argued that schools did not have time to instruct students in workplace niceties, instruction that ought to occur in the home (Downey, 2011).

One of the simplest definitions for what hard and soft skills were came from management coach Klaus (2008), author of *The Hard Truth About Soft Skills: : Workplace Lessons Smart People Wish they'd Learned Sooner*. “Hard skills are the factual and technical talents that workers bring to their jobs, soft skills represent their ability to get along with colleagues, sell their ideas, get to work on time, problem solve and motivate others (Downey, 2011, p. 7). Everson, a former state representative and then executive director of the

Governor's Office of Workforce Development, emphasized that "soft skills have an economic impact both on individuals and the state" (as cited in Downey, 2011, p. 7).

### **Problems with Graduates at the Time of this Writing**

Journalist with the Saint Louis *Beacon*, Baugher (2013), reported that employers found applicants 'soft on Soft Skills.' In addition, Baugher (2013) spoke with Meyers, Regional Vice President of Operations for Rehab Care, and she stated that young graduates were falling short in knowing how to work as part of a team, engage in conflict resolution, and just overall communicate (Baugher, 2013). Students, at the time, were coming out with good levels of competence in their skill sets and what they were trained to do, but there was a breakdown when it came to taking that knowledge and translating it into successful outcomes at the worksite. According to Baugher (2013), the theme echoed by hiring managers and human resources professionals around the area was that they often found a pool of potential employees well-educated in the technical aspects of their field, but lacking in the soft skills, especially the ability to communicate (Baugher, 2013). Vice Chancellor for Economic Development and Workforce Solutions at St. Louis Community College, Nunn stated, "The largest single area of deficiency identified by area employers is lack of communication and interpersonal skills and nearly three-fifths of more than 1,200 local companies surveyed called it a shortcoming in applications they see" (as cited in Baugher, 2013. p. 3). Kennedy, talent acquisition leader for Savvis, a Century Link Company, agreed with Nunn. His study that surveyed enterprises with workforces of a few employees to a few thousand, found that a dearth of

technical skills finished seventh with just over 40% of employers saying poor communication skills were a hiring concern (Baugher, 2013).

The Professor of Management Science and Dean of College of Business Administration at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, Wormer agreed that only 29% of employers said job seekers lacked math abilities, and only 26% said computer skills were a problem (Baugher, 2013). Meyer believes formal learning should play a part in solving the communication issue. According to Baugher (2013), Meyers said it needed to start with education, not at the college level but within elementary and high schools. Vice Chancellor, Roderick Nunn suggested that soft skills far outpaced the technical skills when you ask employers about the shortcomings of job applicants (as cited in Baugher, 2013).

However, communication skills were often learned in the home and community over a long period. Soft skills could be hard to inculcate in college. They were very difficult to teach if to a student enrolled for a one-year certificate program or even a two or four-year program. Bad habits were hard to change, if they were in place for a lifetime. It was important for parents to recognize that and make sure their children were getting requisite types of interactions that required them to communicate, have good interpersonal skills, and understand group dynamics and teamwork (Baugher, 2013). Additional soft skills that employers talk about include a positive attitude and personal warmth (Symonds, 2011). It did, however, put the guilt on parents for the lack of soft skills that the generation of young learners exhibited. Nevertheless, it did not change the fact that many employers, which were the stakeholders, were still facing some facts. The candidates transitioning from high school or college that would be entry-level full-time

workers were clueless about the fundamentals of the work place (Baugher, 2013).

Developing young people's skills for work was a must as a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2012) report argued that “the economic crisis continues to squeeze budgets and push up unemployment worldwide” (p. 1). The report revealed “the urgent need to invest in skills for youth aged 15 to 24, and laid out steps that governments, aid donors, and the private sector must take to redress the severe lack of skills, especially for the most disadvantaged young people” (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2012, p. 1). Some governments were creating jobs but neglecting to ensure that all young people learn the most basic skills, said Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO (2012). According to UNESCO (2012), “many young people, and young women in particular, need to be offered alternative pathways for their education” (p. 1). “Countries that do invest in young peoples skills find it is a smart move,” according to UNESCO (2012, p. 1)

### **Transferable Skills**

Transferable skills were qualities that could be transferrable directly to the work place (Lestus, 2013). Skills such as self-confidence, teamwork, leadership, and experience of other cultures were basic transferable skills, and these qualities were important for the workplace (Policyx, 2014).

When students were making the transition from high school to the work force, students needed to know how to explain their skills. These students came with hard skills and soft skills, but according to Lestus (2013) “transferable skills are a significant part of the value you bring to an employer, so it is important to identify and describe them” (p. 43). Students wanted to create a list and explain their hard skills and soft skills and by

doing so, it would help employers understand what qualifications were transferrable (Lestus, 2013).

Employers were seeking soft skills from new hires, such as having exceptional communication skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, and being able to be a great team player (Lestus, 2013; Pulliam, 2008). In addition, Lestus (2013) and Pulliam (2008) were referring to those types of skills as easily able to apply to any type of industry setting, and they were valuable to all employers. According to Klaus (2008) if new graduates wanted a good chance at finding work, they needed to become familiar with those desired succeeding skills and be proficient with them.

According to Lestus (2013),

Transferable skills, unlike job-specific skills are those skills you use in nearly every job. These skills are integrated into your workday and can be used across different fields but rarely stand out as obviously as skills that are easier to quantify.” (p. 42)

Similarly Lloyd and Kennedy (1997) stated employers knew that they would have to train their new employees on specialized job duties, but at the same time employers did not have the time to train every academically qualified applicant on these basic transferable skills. “Employers are seeking applicants who are well-rounded , versatile workers who exude a positive professional demeanor,” according to Pulliam, (2008, p. 2.). Applicants needed to have the ability to use transferable skills, such as effective communication, problem solving, decision making, and interpersonal skills (Lestus, 2013; Pulliam, 2008). According to Andrews and Higgins (2008), post secondary and secondary schools were required to graduate highly skills graduates who were able to respond to every change

and complex needs of the contemporary workplace. According to Harms and William (2004), skills called transferable could be defined as skills developed in one setting, which could be transferred to another setting. Often times, this skill could be generic, soft, or key skills (Harms & William, 2004). These skills were fundamental for effective performance, not only in the work environment, but in life itself.

Employers were expecting educational institutions to embed generic or employability skills more fully into their curricula (McGann, 2010). The importance of institutions embedding these skills was so their graduates could be aware of the necessary skills they just acquired during their developing years, and so they could be given the opportunity to develop such skills even further Chadha (2006). In addition, developing demand was placed by education at a national (Higher Education Authority, 2004; Irish Universities Association, 2005; McGann, 2010) and international level (European Commission, 2003) on the employability of graduates, in which the development of transferable skills was a major fundamental.

The link between students' academic studies and what was wanted in the work place were two different things. According to Harms and William (2004) many students were aware of these transferable skills and their relevance, but a huge number of students were just not making the connection.

### **Can Soft Skills Be Taught?**

Nishi (2013) made the comment that employers oftentimes said, "I can teach my employees how to do just about anything, but I cannot teach them to have a good attitude or common sense" (p. 1). The soft skills that were appealing to employers were across the board and were often more difficult to find than hard skills. Similarly, studies of

cognitive and non-cognitive skills and SES within the family agreed that traditional high school or college settings did not focus on interpersonal skills, leaving poor and minority children who grew up without a support system at a considerable disadvantage (Farkas & Vicknair, 1996). Most high schools encouraged their educators to focus on test scores, the multiple choice assessments, teaching students how to take a test, and just basic academic factors, leaving the less tangible developmental opposition and opportunities by the wayside for after graduation (Johnson, 2013).

According to Nunn (2013), the real reason new college graduates could not be hired was a lack of non-cognitive skills. Even within the St. Louis Workforce it was reported that more than 60% of employers said recent applicants lacked communication and interpersonal skills (Nunn, 2013). We know the stats so what can we do about preparing these new graduates? Can soft skills be taught?

Socialization is a lifelong process of acquiring the skills necessary to become functional members of one's society, and both sociologists and anthropologists embraced the notion that it could be done, even if one started at a disadvantage (Nishi, 2013, Nunn, 2013). Our educational systems did a wonderful job with teaching our students how to read, write, and learn math, science and hard skills that were essential and valuable to perform well on the job. Our educational system also helped with providing students with different pathways of acquiring practical skills needed to find jobs (Hansen, 2014). Our educational systems also did a wonderful job of teaching students how to write a resume and how to write flawless cover letters (Nishi, 2013), and well as teaching students how to interview for a particular job; and our educational systems provided internships so that students could learn more about various pathways of employment opportunities (Klaus,

2008). Our educational systems even provided our educators with ex-termships, so that our educators could assist with teaching the curriculum more effectively (Conrad & Leigh, 1999). Nevertheless, even with all these highly cognitive skills and knowledge, these adults were coming to career counseling, because they were not able to find suitable work and they were uncertain as to why they could not find or hold down employment (Nishi, 2013).

Soft Skills that employers sought the most could be quite complex in terms of traits and habits. Employers sought applicants that were confident in themselves. According to Confidence Building Training (2014), an employee that lacked confidence undermined their ability to do their best; an employee who could build confidence enables themselves to work at their fullest potential, it freed them from unnecessary doubts or insecurities that may inhibit their performance (Confidence Building Training, 2014). Another non-cognitive skill that employers were seeking was new hires that could show flexibility. According to Greenstone & Looney (2011), applicants that were able to accept change in the job; be able to change tasks to meet immediate needs; and be able to adjust their time based on new priorities, and exemplify flexibility. Another similarly sought out soft skill was the character trait of honesty. According to Division (2014), new employers that could exemplify honesty and integrity could leverage those soft skills toward professional growth within any industry. Also coupled with the above non-cognitive skills for the workplace, the new Millennials brought to the workplace optimism, along with professional etiquette. These skills must be developed so they could enhance a career, not derail it (Lleras, 2008). Another simple and sought out soft skill that was hard to come by was the non-cognitive skills of common sense. According

to Nishi, (2013) employers valued an applicant that had good judgement and could exemplify sound practical judgement, based on experience rather than theory.

According to Nunn, (2013), “By the time students show up at an institution of higher education, they have been socialized to a large extent; they come with habits, preferences and behavior deeply rooted in their personal experience” (p. 4). Nearly the majority of students could demonstrate acceptable non-cognitive behaviors in class, it was more of a function of what they learned from their parents, K-12 education, and other experiences, said (Nunn, 2013). Non-cognitive skills could be taught, simply by raising the awareness of soft skills. Our educational systems must raise the awareness by addressing soft skills, communicating and reinforcing behavior expectations of the school and workplace, and by doing so, the likelihood of graduates entering the workforce with improved interpersonal skills (Cameron, 2013; Conrad & Leigh, 1999; Dewson et al., 2000).

### **Soft Skills Increase Academic Success**

There was still some confusion regarding where to draw the boundary around soft skills. According to Dpharmarajan, Pachigalla, and Lanka, (2012), often times there was a fine line between soft skills and hard skills. The term soft skills could be a field of reference or a topic in one area, but may come under the hard skills in a different area (Dpharmarajan, Pachigalla, & Lanka, 2012). These skills that were called soft skills varied from culture to culture, place to place, and industry to industry. According to Softskillsindia, (n.d.), India was soon to be facing a severe work force shortage. In the last decade previous to this writing, there was a tremendous growth in the economy and it was driven by the growth of the service sector and particularly fueled by industries, such

as IT services, ITeS, retail, and hospitality, travel, and financial services. According to Dpharmarajan et al. (2012) “persons can receive a certificate by taking a course in Soft Skills but no institution or individual can certify if a person really has Soft Skills because it has to be practiced” (p, 3). The effects of soft skills could be felt when skills were put into practice by people (Gerstein, 2014).

According to Wagner (2014), as defined by business leaders in their own words, skills for the 21st Century were the following: critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration across networks and leading by influence; agility and adaptability; initiative and entrepreneurship; effective oral and written communication; accessing and analyzing information; and curiosity and imagination. Some still asked why soft skills were so important. According to Dpharmarajan et al. (2012), soft skills were essential and added a finishing touch to hard skills. These skills were technical requirements for a professional, and students underwent rigorous training in college (p. 1). Teachers and trainers should take individual responsibility in the training process, as they have a greater influence as they spend time with these students (p. 1).

For instance, according to Calderon (2013), most Americans believed that in then-current school systems, schools should be teaching soft skills, and more than three out of four adults strongly agreed that K-12 schools should be teaching critical thinking and communication skills to children. By the same token, Americans’ views on what schools should be teaching were in the same direction as the opinions of employers, educators, and young people themselves (see Table 1). All were then calling for students to be better equipped to analyze information, communicate effectively, and to collaborate with

diverse people in a global work environment to solve complicated problems (Gerstein, 2014).

Table 1.

*PDK/Gallup Poll The expectations for Today's Schools among the American Public - Today's schools should . . .*

Today's schools should.	% Strongly agree
Teach students critical thinking skills	80
Teach students communication skills	78
Teach students how to set meaningful goals	64
Know how to motivate students	61
Teach students how to collaborate	57
Forster students' creativity	58
Promote students' wellbeing	54
Build students' character	51

*Note:* May 7-31, 2013 PDK/Gallup poll

According to Gerstein, (2014) a majority of people said that student success depended on mastering content in core subjects, such as math and reading. The success of students also depended on more than knowledge of core content (Sommerfield, 2011). Skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and other soft skills, as well as student physical and social wellbeing, were also necessary for future success in higher education and in the workplace (Wagner, 2014). According to Calderon (2013) educators did teach some soft skills, but in a covert way.

In then-current schools educators were teaching soft skills and character education by having students raise their hand to talk, having students walk in a straight line, having them refrain from pushing, and to say please and thank you (Gerstein, 2014). Soft skills and character education skills were classified as social-emotional skills (Gerstein, 2014).

When looking at education beyond academic knowledge, educators should take on the responsibility of teaching and or training students in the area of soft skills, because educators had a major influence on the development of their students' soft skills (Durlak, 2010). If educators embedded the training of soft skills into hard skills courses that would be very effective and an efficient method of achieving both, and an attractive way of teaching a particular content and an enhancement of soft skills.

Schulz (2008) agreed with Dpharmarajan et al. (2012) that basic questions about soft skills were not easy to answer, because the perception of what were soft skills differed from context to context (p. 147). "On top of it the understanding of what should be recognized as soft skills varies widely" (Schulz, 2008, p. 147). Some industries rated soft skills based on the type of employment, because it varies from job to job. For example, a project manager may see it as "Nice to have," whereas civil Engineering felt it was a "Must to have," according to Schulz (2008) (p. 147).

According to the Indiana Youth Institute (2012) report, "SoftSkills: Beyond Academic Success," programs that were proactive about soft-skills development may have a great impact on their success (p. 3). Furthermore, researchers concluded that America's skills deficit problem was not solely felt in terms of a lack of college access; but it was also said that youths without soft skills were not having the experiences necessary to succeed beyond the typical high school classroom, according to Indiana Youth Institute (2012, p. 3.).

For the best possible outcome, education institutions and youth programs must address not only academics, such as math, science, and English, they must also address social, emotional, and physical development (Diamond, 2010). Children with positive

social skills were more likely to have higher self-esteem, also to have genuine relationships with their peers, and achieve more academically in school (Moore, 2011). If taught, “promoting this type of development can lead to desirable outcomes, including increases in academics,” said Durlak (2010, p. 4).

Lippman and Keith’s (2009) Child Trends study compared college readiness, workplace readiness, and youth development benchmarks for high school graduates; it was found that many of the skills required for workplace and college success were absent from college readiness literature, including career planning, previous work experience, decision making, listening, integrity, and creativity. Also, both postsecondary and workplace readiness relied on a set of social skills and character attributes that must be incorporated as a natural aspect of a students’ abilities, including self-awareness, self-control, and intentionality (Conley, 2008). In summary, “Research agrees that non-cognitive factors such as commitment to school, long-term goal setting, and social support are necessary for college success” (Sommerfield, 2011, p. 19).

Many students who were graduating from high school and beginning college did not finish college (Indiana Youth Institute, 2012). The National Center of Education Statistics (2010) stated that by the time these new graduates were in their mid-twenties, only four out of 10 Americans would have obtained either their associates or their first professional degree, and degree acquisition rates were lower for young people of color. Employers also reported that nearly half of their entry-level employees were inadequately prepared and lacked work ethic, basic communication, and critical thinking skills. Likewise, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (2011) concluded that business leaders recognized that soft skills were important, yet less than two thirds felt that most of their

colleagues possessed these skills. Also, the National Center of Education Statistics (2010) reported that more than 53% of employers said their companies were facing a higher challenge in recruiting non-managerial employees with skills, such as basic communication, ethics, and critical thinking, and the proper education that their companies need.

### **Summary**

A review of the literature revealed it was not enough to be highly trained in hard skills or technical skills. Technical skills may get a young person's foot in the door, or open some doors; however, soft skills, such as professional work ethic, a positive attitude, knowing how to work as a team player, and know how to communicate effectively were essential for employment maintenance. Research showed that soft skills increasingly became the preferred skill-set of the work force, at the time of this writing.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

#### **Review of Chapter**

This chapter describes the methodology the study used. The purpose of the dissertation and the research questions will be restated in the context of the methodology. Chapter Three describes the research model and procedures used, including the population and sample sizes, along with data collection and analysis procedures.

#### **Purpose of this Dissertation**

The purpose of this study was to articulate the role of soft skills in the training and employability of high school graduates to a group of current high school students, with the intent of supporting an increase in those skills, or at least a heightened awareness of them.

This study consists of five parts: (i) seeking information from employers associated with the target school, (ii) seeking information from parents of students in the target school regarding their parenting practices to teach and support soft skills in the home setting, (iii) the researcher crafted intervention for students based on the literature, (iv) the researcher conducted intervention in an off-site location, through two area churches, and (v) assessment of the outcome of the intervention in terms of (i) greater student awareness of the importance of soft-skills and (ii) ability with soft-skills in their interactions.

#### **Procedure**

The following steps were followed in completion of this study:

**Step 1.** The Principal Investigator (PI) completed collecting information from area employers through Survey Monkey.

**Step 2.** The PI completed collecting information from parents regarding what soft skills were being consciously taught and supported in the homes of their children.

Parents and their children participated in the Developing Soft Skills Program Intervention Curriculum and were given a survey via Survey Monkey; and both parents and their children participated in the focus groups.

**Step 3.** The PI then used information from the Literature Review regarding soft skills to craft an intervention to remediate and supplement high school students.

**Step 4.** The intervention was conducted at two area churches during non-school time, as the school day was too full to accommodate adding this kind of focused intervention.

**Step 5.** The final stage of this study was an evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention through the following: Assessing the outcomes of the intervention in terms of (1) greater student awareness of the importance of soft-skills and (2) greater student ability with soft-skills in their interactions with others. The skills that examined were the same skills founded for the 21st century, at the time of this writing. Skills, such as interpersonal capacities, working creatively with others, communicating clearly, and collaborating with others, were among the skills students should learn as they progress from preschool through postsecondary.

This study consisted of an intervention for teaching parents and their children soft skills. There were three samples; Group I recruited from a small local non-denomination church; Group II recruited from a small local non-denomination church, both parents and their children; and the Group III population of different employers. Groups I and II

participated in a focus group, (Appendix F and Appendix G). Group III was sent the survey via Survey Monkey.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study.

**Research Question 1.** What soft skills are sought by the employers associated with the target school in their new hires?

**Research Question 2.** What soft skills have been consciously supported in the homes of the students?

**Research Question 3.** What evidence is there that the intervention devised was successful at developing awareness of the importance of soft skills and even the development of soft skills when the students engaged in the intervention?

### **The Research Context**

According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2009), a sample study should be as large as the researcher can obtain with a reasonable expenditure of time and energy. In a qualitative study, the number of participants was usually somewhere between 1 and 20 (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2009, pp. 102-103). The participants recruited for this study were parents with children within the home setting who also attended one of two area churches hosting the intervention. Other participants represented different businesses from various occupations associated with the local high school. The actual numbers of participants were from Focus Group, 19 children; from Focus Group II, 30 parents; and from different businesses, 33 participants.

### **Research Settings**

The research was conducted at two non-denominational Christian churches located in North St. Louis County. Both churches agreed to allow the researcher to

conduct her study with church members with school age children. The first site, Church A, was the larger of the two sites. This church had approximately 165 members. Church A had been there approximately six years, as of this writing. The number of members had slowly declined over the past several years. Interviews were conducted in the pastor's office between the PI and one parent at a time. The PI interviewed 11 parents in Group I and interviewed 12 parents in Group II. Also, the PI surveyed parents from both Groups via Survey Monkey and conducted a focus group with both Group I and Group II parents.

Church A was an outreach ministry. It was located in the Glasgow Village neighborhood, which was in St. Louis, North County, Missouri. Its borders were highway 270 to the North, Chambers Road to the South, Riverview to the East, and Lilac to the West. Glasgow Village was a neighborhood of 2200 residents, with 87% African American. The community as a whole lived below the poverty level, with an average annual household income of \$14,000.00 and an average household size of 5.5 persons. The average educational level was around the 11th grade, and the community had a relatively high average teen pregnancy rate.

The second site, Church B, was the smaller of the two sites. This church had approximately 70 members and the membership was slowly increasing. At this location, Pastor and First Lady saw a need to assist their parents with a program of teaching soft skills to their members with children. The First Lady approached one of the church members with whom the PI was visiting and they talked about promoting the researchers' intervention. This led to an invitation from the church for the researcher to use their members as a pilot for the intervention. All interviews were conducted in the pastor's office between the PI and one person at a time.

The non-denominational church mission was to Effectuate Change in a Global Community. Based on the most recent demographics and census, Florissant's population was 52,303, of which 69% was White, 26.8% was African American, and the remaining 3.9% was from other races, or of two or more races. Eight percent of the community socio-economic lived in poverty. The average household income was \$51,415 yearly, the average household size was 2.42, and the average family size was 3.00. The members who attend this non-denominational church had an average age of 38 years old. This church had been in existence for approximately two years, as of this writing.

### **Research Participants**

There were 19 participants in focus Group I and 19 participants in focus Group II. Group I participants were members from a small local non-denomination church. Parents and students participated in an eight-week intervention training session run by the PI. The PI met at the Group I church on Tuesdays for one hour and 30 minutes. Group II participants were members from a mid-sized, local, non-denomination church with different nationalities. Parents and students also participated in an eight-week intervention training session. The PI met at the Group II church on Wednesdays for one hour and 30 minutes.

Group III was a selection of employers from different career pathways. The population of possible employers consisted of all employers who participated in having students complete their internships and or job shadowing. Different staff members had agreed to facilitate introductions for the PI, and as many participants as possible were sought from this group. These employers represented 16 different occupational pathways in which students had completed internships/job shadowing.

**Data Storage Procedures**

**Paper records:** The PI collected and stored all material from participants in a two-drawer file cabinet in the PI's home office. After the completion of the dissertation, data will be destroyed after the federally required three year waiting period.

**Audio records:** Data was retained in a locked two-drawer file cabinet, stored in the PI's Home Office and after completion of the dissertation; data will be destroyed after the federally required three year waiting period.

**Developing the Intervention**

After collecting information from local pastors and area employers, the PI crafted an intervention to remediate and supplement parents and their children with soft skill training. Skills found from 21st century skills, such as students being able to communicate effectively; numerous interpersonal skills, such as working creatively with others, being able to communicate clearly, and collaborate with others; communicate new ideas to others effectively; being open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives; incorporate group input and feedback; and the processing and interpreting of both verbal and nonverbal information.

**Evaluating the Intervention**

The final stage of this study was an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Developing Soft Life Skills Program Intervention Curriculum. The Developing Soft Life Skills Program Intervention consisted of competencies and descriptions included in the section entitled, "Exhibit 1 Course, Competencies & Descriptions. Each course in the Develop Soft Life Skill Program (DSLSP) curriculum was designed to ensure that parents and students acquired or developed specific competencies. The competencies for the

eight weeks of one hour and 30 minute sessions of SB Skills Builder series are displayed on Tables 2 through 5. There was a list of assignments that participants had to master; the speakers presented at each session; participants had to journal and write reflections after each session.

**Exhibit 1: Course, Competencies & Descriptions**

Each course in the DSLSP curriculum was designed to ensure that parents and children acquired or developed specific competencies. The competencies for the eight one-hour and 30 minutes Skills Builder (SB) series appear in Tables 2 through 5.

Table 2

*SB week 001 & 002 – Professional Development IA & IB – Communication and Interpersonal Skills*

Competencies	Description
Team Building	Ability to understand group dynamics and work effectively
Business Etiquette	Ability to apply accepted business etiquette in dining and other situations
Business Ethics	Ability to build trust and internalize honesty and integrity
Effective Communication	Ability to communicate more effectively
Small Talk	Ability to turn script for small talk and other occasion
Communication	Ability to put away technology away completely
Distraction	
Verbal Communication	Ability to communicate clearly and effectively
Effective people	Ability to maintain a good working relationship

Table 2 displays competencies and descriptions for Communication and Interpersonal skills. Competencies include team building, business etiquette, business

ethics, effective communication, small talk, communication distraction, verbal communication, and effective people.

Table 3 displays competencies for Teamwork and Work Ethics. Competencies include collaboration and teamwork, respecting and helping others, sharing, participating, value of diversity, and refraining from gossip.

Table 3

*SB week 003 & 004 – Professional Development - IIA & IIB – Teamwork and Work Ethics*

<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Description</b>
Collaboration and Teamwork	Ability to have the skills to work together as a team and foster a collaborative atmosphere during negotiations
Respecting	Ability to respect the opinions of others
Helping others	Ability to team help each other
Sharing	Ability to offer ideas and ...
Participating	Ability to contribute to a project
Value Diversity	Ability to understand the importance of a diverse workplace
Refrains from Gossip	Ability to not participate in destructive about others and their peers

Table 4 displays competencies for Flexibility and Adaptability. Competencies include what is taught or learned, dealing with change, adapting to change, and being flexible.

Table 4

*SB week 005 & 006 – Professional Development IIIA & IIIB – Flexibility and Adaptability*

<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Description</b>
Taught or learned	Ability to change or be changed in any circumstance
Dealing with change	Ability to be persisted in the face of difficulties
Adapt to Change	Ability to adapt to varied roles, responsibilities
Be Flexible	Ability to deal with positive with praise, setbacks and criticism

Table 5 displays competencies for the Negotiate and Analytical category.

Competencies include problem handler, collecting information, process, dealing with problems, and active listening.

Table 5

*SB week 007 & 008 – Professional Development IVA & IVB – Negotiate and Analytical*

<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Description</b>
Problem Handler	Ability to identify a problem and create a solution
Collect Information	Ability to analyze data from information collected,
Process	Ability to create a set of steps to implement a process for the outcome
Dealing with problems	Ability to give examples of problem-solving that works
Active Listening	Ability to listen actively to the other party during a debate
Emotional Control	Ability to keep his emotions in check during the negotiation

In meetings scheduled with all the parents that were members of these two churches, the PI explained to the parents that if their children/students wanted to participate in the study they had to have their parents' permission; however, even if the parents said 'yes' children/students still could decide not to participate. But when the children/students volunteered to participate in the study, the researcher asked the participants to participate in the following:

The Intervention (DSLSP) curriculum was designed to ensure that students acquired or developed specific competencies (Exhibit I Course and Competencies). There were several activities, such as: BE Fun, Let's Speed Date; Role Playing, Speaker; BE Accountable, speaker, Role play; BE Accountable, Creating a Student Absence Form; BE Flexible, Role Playing; Be Charming, BE Engaging, Be Thoughtful assessments with Reflection; Role Playing, BE Charming, BE Humble, BE Gracious, BE Authentic, BE Appreciative, and BE Thankful activities with assignments; BE Creative Activities 9-16, Speaker, Thank You Notes; BE Better Activity, Students and Parents create their own BE Words; BE Better Activity, BE The Type of Person You Want To Meet; BE Better, BE Organized Activity; BE Motivated Keep Going No Matter What Activity; BE Positive, The M&M Game; To BE Impressive You just have to BE Activity Reflection; The Cursive Handwriting and Generational Issues Activity; The Conversational DECK Activity; The Summarizing of Short Articles Activities; Role Playing Activity; The Video Analysis Activity; the Omitting Offensive Language Activity; The Appearance Red Carpet Activity; The Worth Ethic and Human Relations on the Job Annoying Habits Activity; The Why was I Fired Activity; How do you make a Good Impression, Speaker Activity, Manners on the Job; The Door Opening, What to Do Speaker Activity; How do

you Chew? Speaker Activity; How to Introduce Self, Speaker Activity; Good Grooming Habits Activity; and Dress to Get a Job Activity. These are activities that will address all the competencies.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

In Group I (Parents & Children), participation involved (a) filling out a survey regarding the importance of soft skills being emphasized at home (10 minutes); and (b) if willing, parents and students were invited to participate in a focus group with others who participated in the intervention.

In Group II (Parents & Children), participation involved (a) filling out a survey regarding the importance of soft skills being emphasized at home (10 minutes); and (b) if willing, parents and students were invited to participate in a focus group with others who participated in the intervention.

In Group III (the employers), participation involved (a) filling out a survey regarding the importance of soft skills for your business, and (b) if they were willing, participating in a focus group with other employers. The survey took no more than 10 minutes to complete, while the focus group took an hour.

Both Parents and Children took a Pledge (Appendix C & D) to be participants in the Intervention of Developing Soft Life Skill Program personal journey to:

- 1) Invest in their academic success and future by setting goals and working toward achieving their goals.
- 2) Inspire in possible career opportunities by building relationships and networking that can help both secure a better future, and

- 3) Ignite their potential by making decisions with positive consequences and outcomes.

**Observation Characteristics**

Table 6 displays observation characteristics of the DSLSP curriculum, which include the characteristics of work ethics, flexibility and openness, communication skills, teamwork, critical thinking, and positive attitudes.

Table 6

*Observation Characteristics*

DSLSP

- Learned the Characteristics of strong work ethics, Professionalism.
- Learned the Characteristics of accepting constructive feedback.
- Learn the Characteristics of coping under pressure
- Learned the Characteristics of developing effective strategies for managing their time; able to balance time to study; time for leisure; and time for job.
- Learned the Characteristics of showing up with smiles on their faces; wanting to be there.
- Learned the Characteristics of flexibility and open for change.
- Learned the Characteristics of self-confidence; candidates who showed inner sense of assuredness
- Learned the Characteristics that show candidates are always prepared.
- Learned the Characteristics of improved communication skills; ability to write; ability of read; and the ability to speak clearly.
- Learned the Characteristics of positive teamwork; candidates’ ability to work in diverse environments; and able to get along fairly well with people.
- Learned the Characteristics of critical thinking and problem solving; candidates who are accountable for problem that may occur.
- Learned the Characteristics of positive attitudes; always willing to do their very best, and not give up.

---

*Table Notes:* (DSLSP) Developing Soft Life Skills Program

**Types of Soft Outcomes: Example of Indicators**

Table 7

*Types of 'Soft' Outcomes: Example of Indicators*

Types of Soft Outcomes	Ex: Indicators that will be evaluated	Researcher- Implementation of Intervention and evaluating Distance Travelled
Key work skills	Team working, problem solving, numeracy skills, information technology;	Trainer/Assessor
	Language & Communication skills;	Trainer/Assessor
Attitude Skills	Completion of work;	Trainer/Assessor
	Increased level of motivation;	Trainer/Assessor/Parents
	Increased Levels of confidence;	Trainer/Assessor/Parents
	Recognition of prior skills	Trainer/Assessor/Parents
	Increased feelings of responsibility;	Trainer/Assessor Parents
Personal Skills	Increased levels of self-esteem;	Trainer/Assessor/Parents
	Higher personal & Career aspirations;	Parents
	Improved personal appearance;	Trainer/Assessor/Parents
	Improved level of attendance-evaluated by parents	Parents
	Improved personal hygiene-evaluated by parents	Parents
	Greater levels of self-awareness	Trainer/Assessor
	Better health & fitness	Parents
	Greater levels of concentration and/or engagement	Trainer/Assessor
Practical Skills	Ability to complete forms	Trainer/Assessor
	Ability to write a CV	Trainer/Assessor
	Improved ability to manage money	Trainer/Assessor/Parents
	Improved awareness of rights & responsibilities	Trainer/Assessor/Parents

Table Notes: These are examples of soft indicators of travelled distance.

Table 7 displays outcomes of the DSLSP curriculum and examples of indicators that the outcomes have been reached, specifically for the categories of Key Work Skills, Attitude Skills, Personal skills, and Practical Skills.

### **Summary**

At the conclusion of the study, the PI was able to analyze data gathered to determine the graduates workplace competencies, academic competences, the personal effectiveness competences, and Parents Methods for Developing Soft LifeSkills in themselves and their children. Both parents and children signed their pledges.

Each participant received a Rubric Checklist for Positive Actions (Appendix E)

Each participant received feedback on how well students were communicating, verbally and non-verbally; feedback on students' interpersonal skills; feedback on team work – how well they were able to work as a team player; feedback on their analytical skills – how well they could problem solve with less direction; feedback on their flexibility and adaptability skills; feedback on their work ethics; and feedback on negotiating skills.

The then-current job situation dictated why acquirement of these soft skills was of such importance. In the economic world at the time of this writing, more teaching and coaching was required in the cutting-edge of technology and a competitive - edge that singled individuals out as the top candidates for positions over others with similar qualifications and comparable rated skills. Students enhancing their knowledge, perfecting their personal trails and developing employability skills was what would make one stand out from all the rest. Educators and administrators needed to encourage both parents and students to improve their stills in the area of soft skills.

### **Chapter Four: Results**

The purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to explore the role of soft skills in the training and employability of high school graduates, as evaluated by a sample of local employers; (b) to gather data about the current state of soft skills developed in students' homes; and (c) to create an intervention and teach both parents and their children soft skills. There were three samples: Group I was a sample of parents and their children who were members of a small, local non-denomination church; Group II was a sample of parents and their children who were congregants at a different local non-denomination church; and Group III was a population of employers who hired young people. The intervention was taught to both parents and their children in both Groups I and Group II, and both groups were asked to participate in a focus group. While the researcher did collect some information regarding the effectiveness of the intervention from parent reports of changed attitude or behavior in their children, a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention was not a focus of this study.

**Research Question 1.** What soft skills are sought by the employers associated with the target school in their new hires?

**Research Question 2.** What soft skills have been consciously supported in the homes of the students?

**Research Question 3.** What evidence is there that the intervention devised was successful at developing awareness of the importance of soft skills and even the development of soft skills when the students engaged in the intervention?

The research conducted was a qualitative method study and participants responded to questions in a survey format and later took part in a focus group. The

questions in the focus group were open ended, in line with a qualitative approach, while the survey submissions gathered through an online source (Survey Monkey) were a mix of forced-choice items and open-ended questions. The employer survey consisted of 11 questions, and was sent to 55 potential participants, of whom 33 responded. This gave the researcher a 60% response rate among Group III participants – representing businesses that hired students.

The PI reviewed the raw data for each question, and engaged in a process of clustering, which is referred to in the phenomenological research approach as ‘phenomenological reduction’ (Creswell, 2007). The process used involved sorting the data by the terms used by the participants. This process led to a high number of categories, so a second more careful and interpretation-based iteration was necessary to bring the categories back to a manageable number. This process of clustering research findings with similar meaning into common themes was also a steady part of the data analysis. Finally, after clustering the data and a process of interpreting responses to the 11 questionnaire questions asked of all 33 respondents, the PI described what was found in the following section, organized by analytic code.

### **Responses from Employers**

The study’s first Research Question addressed the employer perspective on desirable soft-skills regarding employees. The PI conducted a qualitative analysis of the employers’ answers to the questionnaire, collecting similar responses into themes regarding what participants thought were the most important soft skills in potential candidates for hire. Quotes were organized by the PI’s interpretation of what the different employers’ responses were.

The first theme was Communication, and it came in response to the PI asking what soft skills these employers sought in their new hires. One employer mentioned, 'if I had to rank the skills that I thought was important they would be communication skills, social skills, having common sense, and be able to think critically.' Another employer agreed, but his ranking was somewhat different. This employer said, 'communication would be first then comprehension, navigating challenges, perseverance, able to problem solve, managing time and finally having great leadership abilities.' Whereas, another employer mentioned, 'new hires should have professional communication skills,' such as being curious, polite, and exhibiting professional dress and behavior. Another employer mentioned, 'being able to effectively communicate with those around you.' In addition, he mentioned, 'employees being able to control their language usage.' Another employer described soft skills this way: 'Soft skills are skills that enhance communication, etiquette, basic knowledge of what is appropriate and what is not and being able to accurately perform basic duties that require comprehending and understanding what is being asked of the employee.' Other employers mentioned, 'communication, problem solving, critical observation and professionalism.' Finally, in the area of communication, another employer mentioned, 'Communication is the main key, but having adaptability and teamwork skills, being a great team player, and being able to problem solve.'

The second theme was Interpersonal Skills. From the employers' perspective this was central. One employer said that the 'number one skill that employees must have is interpersonal skills.' He believed that his organization 'can teach or help develop the other skills that are also important, but having interpersonal skills were his main important skill.' Another employer echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that job

candidates and employees must have interpersonal skills. Another participant mentioned being good with interpersonal relationships and related this to social skills. This employer mentioned that ‘skills needed in the workplace, apart from content-specific skills, deal with personality, and a person’s character and social ability.’ Finally, in the interpersonal skills category another employer mentioned, ‘From an employer perspective, I define soft skills as an employee having a nice personality, just simple as that.’

The third theme was about being a Team Player. Many employers deemed it very important to be able to work with others. One employer said, ‘Being able to work effectively and communicate effectively, that is what makes a great team player in my opinion.’ Whereas, another employer mentioned ‘interacting effectively with other people is key.’ In addition, as another employer put it, ‘soft skills are how you relate to coworkers or the organization as a whole.’ He also mentioned, ‘Employees who are able to look at the bigger picture for the company sake and not their own personal sake’ was very impressive to him. Another employer said that his organization preferred applicants with great team player skills, more so even than those able to communicate well. Another employer reflected, ‘Soft skills refer to skills more fundamental than and beyond academic skills i.e. skills related to working with other people.’ Another thought ‘soft skills are skills that employees need to interact with others.’ One other employer mentioned that they searched for normal interaction with others as politeness; having consideration for others’ needs, and working together to solve problems; those types of skills were what their organization deemed worthy. Finally, in this sub-category of team

player, another employer defined soft skills as ‘how an individual handles social interaction with their peers, co-workers, and others.’

The PI found there were other comments mentioned that were not in any sub-category, but still worthy of mention. One employer mentioned valuing the soft skills ‘punctuality, teamwork, communication skills, problem solving, and conflict resolution skills, and in that order.’ Whereas, another mentioned, ‘soft skills that are very important, [and] are one’s mental abilities to promote a finished/completed goal.’ Another emphasized ‘employees being able to do daily duties or common tasks.’ Another employer described, ‘Soft skills are personal attributes including a person’s work ethic, and oral/written communication skills; being dependable and accountable, along with having team player skills.’ Finally, another employer mentioned, ‘Soft skills are something an individual possesses that applies to any situation.’

On the employers’ questionnaire, the PI asked the employers which soft skills were most critical for entry-level positions. The PI found the following:

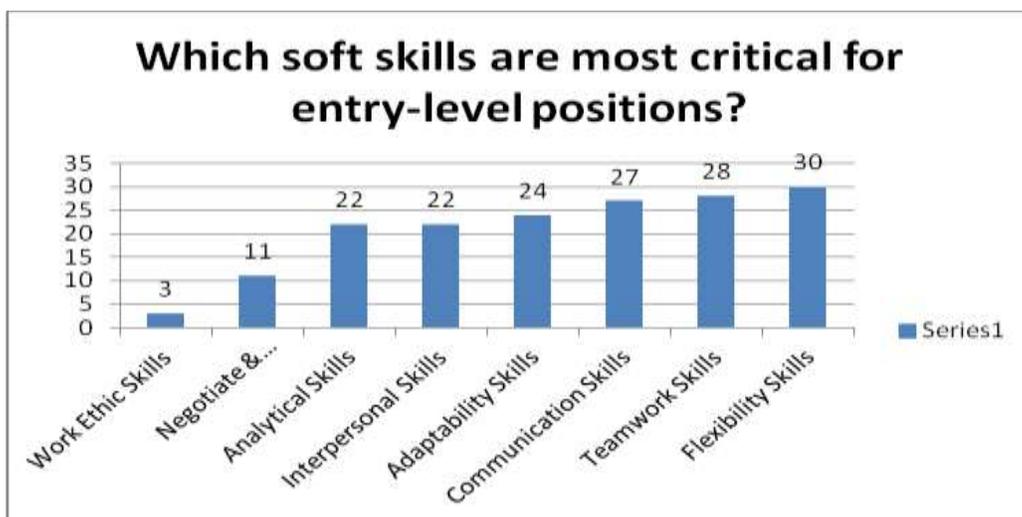


Figure 1. Which soft skills are most critical for entry level positions?

Among the eight soft skills listed, the employers ranked the most critical soft skills needed in an entry-level position in the following fashion: The Flexibility Skills ranked first, with 30 employers indicating that their new hires on any entry-level should have flexibility. The second most critical skill needed was Teamwork; 28 employers thought new hires should exemplify great teamwork skills. The third most noted soft skills ranked by employers was Communication Skills. There were 27 employers who thought having great communication skills, both verbal and written, was important for new hires. The next soft skill, mentioned by 24 employers as being useful for entry-level positions was Adaptability. The fifth and sixth soft skills deemed critical for entry-level employees by 22 employers were Analytical Skills and Interpersonal Skills. The seventh soft skill, mentioned by 11 employers, was the ability to Negotiate and Persuade. Finally, there were three employers who felt that the soft skill most crucial for new hires was a great Work Ethic.

In question number four from the employers' questionnaire, the first code was Communication Skills, and it came in response to asking which soft skills they found most lacking in job applicants. One employer mentioned that 'the soft skills most lacking in job applicants could be rank ordered as communication skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, analytical skills, flexibility skills, work ethics skills, and negotiate & persuasive skills.' Another employer thought, 'Communication skills and interpersonal skills were the most lacking.'

While employers mentioned communication skills as if there was one generalizable set of such skills, society lacked one universal set of communication skills. People functioned with local society norms on communication that did not transfer to

universal communication skills. There were six employers that all agreed that communication skills were lacking, and four employers complained about interpersonal skills; which had some overlap with communication skills.

Another employer echoed that, emphasizing that communication skills, interpersonal skills, team-building skills, and flexibility skills were greatly lacking in new applicants. These employers mentioned also that communication, interpersonal, analytical, and work ethic skills were lacking. Whereas, others agreed there was a lack of communication skills and teamwork skills. Another employer stated, 'communication, work ethics, and adaptability skills.' Another echoed, but added, 'communication, interpersonal, flexibility and adaptability.' This other employer ranked 'communication, teamwork skills, analytical skills and interpersonal skills' as those most frequently needed, but not exhibited, by applicants.

The second most common thing missing in job candidates was Work Ethic. In this category, many employers mentioned that the soft skills most lacking were 'good work ethics and interpersonal skills.' Another employer paired 'work ethics and communication skills.' Whereas, other employers mentioned, 'work ethics skills, communications skills, interpersonal skills, and teamwork skills were the most lacking in new applicants.' Others mentioned, 'work ethics skills, teamwork skills and analytical skills.' Finally, many echoed the sentiment that 'many applicants lack in work ethics, communication skills and interpersonal skills.'

The third most frequently mentioned lack in job applicants was Interpersonal Skills. The PI defined interpersonal skills as skills needed to communicate effectively with others or a group of people. One employer 'spoke about the lack of interpersonal,

analytical, work ethic, and communication skills.’ Another employer ranked the skills lacked as ‘Interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, and work ethics skills and she mentioned, those skills are what is needed to perform well in my organization.’ Another mentioned results of skills lacking in ‘Interpersonal, communication and teamwork, which is why employers are asking who are teaching these skills to our applicants?’ Another employer echoed that she frequently saw a lack in the following abilities: ‘interpersonal, communication and adaptability.’ Finally, regarding being able to communicate effectively, another employer mentioned, ‘Interpersonal skills, communication skills, teamwork skills and work ethics are all lacking in job applicants.’

The final common lack in job applicants was Teamwork. The PI defined teamwork as the process of working collaboratively with a group of people in order to achieve a common goal. One employer mentioned, ‘New applicants lacked in effective teamwork and work ethics.’ Another employer reported, ‘teamwork, flexibility skill’s, adaptability, work ethic, and negotiate & persuasive skills were all lacked and needed.’ Finally, others echoed and mentioned teamwork skills, work ethic skills, flexibility skills, and finally ranked communication skills as skills that applicants lacked, though they thought all applicants needed these skills.

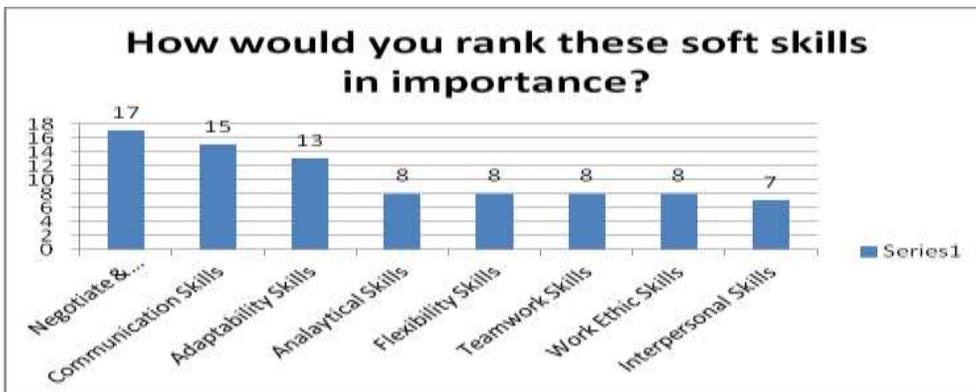


Figure 2. How would you rank these soft skills in importance?

Question five from the questionnaire asked employers how they would rank these soft skills in importance from one to eight. The PI noted that 33 respondents ranked the following soft skills in importance. The category of Negotiate & Persuasive Skills had 17 respondents who thought these soft skills were the most important skills for their employees to have. The category of Communication Skills had 15 respondents who said they ranked communication skills first as their most important soft skill. The Persuade Skills and Negotiate Skills both are used to communicate; these are subsets of Communication Skills. The third category was Adaptability Skills. There were 13 respondents who said they ranked adaptability as the most important soft skill to have. The remaining categories - Analytical Skills, Flexibility Skills, Teamwork Skills and Work Ethic Skills, and Inter-personal Skills - all ranked considerably lower.

Question six from the questionnaire inquired of employers how important Work-Readiness skills were to employers.

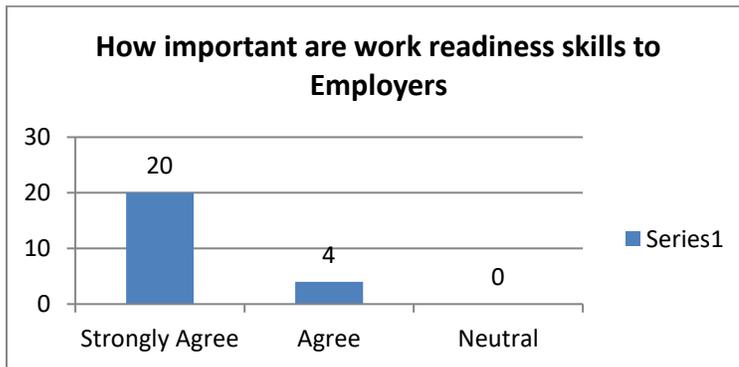


Figure 3. How important are work readiness skills to employers.

The PI defined work-readiness skills as skills and education that prepared the employee to be ready to do the job required. Here are the findings from employers who were asked how important work readiness skills were to employers. There were 55 respondents, and 67% responded that work readiness was very important for the success of their

applicants, with another 30% of the employers mentioning only that work readiness was important.

Question seven from the questionnaire asked employers - how important are soft skills to your organization?



Figure 4. How important are soft skills to your organization?

There were 36 employers who answered this survey question, and 25 of the 36 respondents maintained that soft skills were very important for employees to possess in their organizations. Nine more employers mentioned having soft skills in their organization as important. Only one employer out of 36 respondents rated having soft skills as neutral in their organization and one employer responded that having soft skills was not important in their organization.

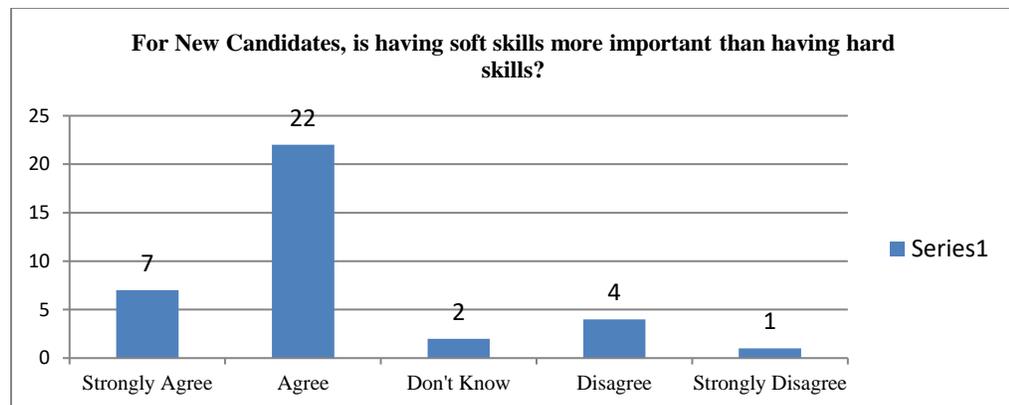


Figure 5. Are soft skills more important than hard skills?

Question eight from the questionnaire asked employers if having soft skills was more important than having hard skills. There were 36 employers who answered this question, and seven employers out of the 36 indicated they strongly agreed that coming with soft skills was more important than coming with hard skills. There were 22 other employers who indicated they agreed with that statement. There were two employers out of the 36 respondents who indicated they don't know in answer to this question. There were four employer out of 36 respondents who indicated that they disagreed that having soft skills was more important than having hard skills in their workplace. Finally, one employer out of the 36 mentioned they strongly disagreed that having soft skills was more important than having hard skills in their organization.

Question nine from the employers' questionnaire asked, is it easier to teach hard skills than soft skills?

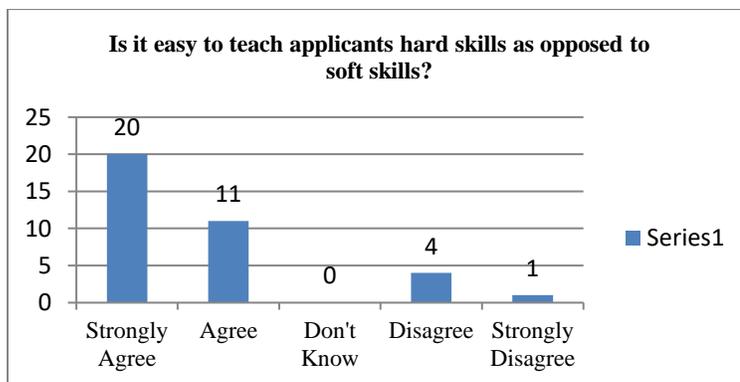


Figure 6. Is it easy to teach applicants hard skills as opposed to soft skills?

There were 36 employers who answered this survey question, and 20 out of the 36 who responded strongly agreed to being able to teach hard skills more easily than soft skills. There were an additional 11 employers who marked that they agreed with that statement. There were zero respondents who indicated they don't know about the relative difficulty of teaching hard or soft skills. There were four out of 36 respondents who

indicated that they disagreed that teaching hard skills was any easier than teaching soft skills. Finally, there was one employer who indicated they strongly disagreed that teaching hard skills was easier than teaching soft skills.

Question 10 of the questionnaire asked employers in what way they thought job shadowing was important for students. The clustering and coding process of the data allowed a report of the following findings: The first code was titled, job training. One employer mentioned, 'Job shadowing allows students to work in the job field which allows them experience.' Another mentioned that this would 'expose them to a preview of what the job requires and let them know if they are interested before fully investing in the role.' Another employer mentioned, 'Students get opportunity to see what happens in the job.' While another employer mentioned, 'Job shadowing is important because students need to be able to see the job performed as they can know how it should be done and the entire job offers.' In addition, another mentioned that 'job shadowing can help students understand the 'big picture' of a job and what is required beyond the hard skills.' Another employee echoed and mentioned, 'It gives student's real world opportunities to see what skill sets are needed in the workforce.' Whereas, another mentioned, 'It gives them an opportunity to work in an environment that interests them and to work with a mentor.' Another employer mentioned, 'Job shadowing gets you the feel of what they are going to be doing in the future.' Another comment that was interesting was: 'It is important from the standpoint of providing a better insight of how the job is actually performed.' These employers mentioned, 'Job shadowing allows for students to see what skills are needed to be considered a 'professional' who has a rewarding career and is

usually employable within other companies and large organizations.’ Finally, in this first category another employer mentioned,

It is important to see and know your field because there are some students that are indecisive on what they want to pursue in a career. As well, some students may think a particular field is what they want to do then train for it and decide later they cannot do it.

The second code was understanding the skills needed. According to one employer, ‘job shadowing helps them not only understand the hard skills involved in doing the job, but also understanding of the job itself.’ Another employer mentioned, ‘You must know what is expected of you as it is translated through your employer.’ Whereas, another employer mentioned, ‘It’s very important because it allows the students to receive hands-on experience and/or skills needed to be successful in their career choice.’ And, another employer mentioned, ‘Job shadowing teaches you the importance of a job.’ Finally, one employer simply stated, ‘job shadowing is very helpful.’

The third code was both soft and hard skills. An employer mentioned, ‘Job shadowing teaches them both soft and hard skills.’ Another employer mentioned, ‘It helps in learning how others employ their soft skills.’ Finally, another employer mentioned, ‘Shadowing can develop work ethics and confidence in students, which these are very important soft skills that are needed by the students.’

The fourth code was good fit. Employers mentioned that students get the opportunity to see the culture of an organization and decide if it is a ‘good fit’ for them. Another employer echoed that same thought and mentioned that it helped with ‘familiarity with processes, and organizational structure.’ Others also suggested that ‘job

shadowing is very important in career exploration.’ Another mentioned, ‘It is immersive,’ whereas another highlighted shadowing’s ability, ‘to target specific skills and oversee policy and procedures.’ Finally, job shadowing, according to another employer, ‘sets an example and precedence for students to try to follow.’

Question 11 from the employer questionnaire asked whether the employers had developed any effective ways of supporting the development of soft skills in their organizations. Again, analysis consisted of a clustering process, and a coding process. Here are the findings: The first code was titled, Training through Professional Development (PD). As one employer mentioned,

Our firm offers a lot of soft skills training through our Learning & Development department.’ ‘Our department has even made a series of them – emotional intelligence, business writing, giving & receiving constructive feedback, mandatory quarterly training sessions, with additional mandatory self-directed ‘electives’ to complete annually.

One employer mentioned that they had shadowing, whereas another said, ‘I believe soft skills are mainly overlooked by most organizations as they train and professionally develop employees’ hard skills. Perhaps they think soft skills will be picked up with minimal attention to them.’ Furthermore, another employer wrote on the survey, ‘yes, we do have training; it’s by teaching and modeling soft skills.’ Another employer found it was developed by ‘interacting as often as possible with management and lower management staff.’ One respondent reported that training included ‘team work and social skills,’ while another employer reported their professional development included ‘modeling and workshops.’ Finally, another employer responded, ‘Yes, by offering

volunteer and intern positions - allowing selected individuals to grow their personal emotional connections within field training.'

A second code centered around Professional Practice Communication as a support for soft-skills. An employer mentioned in their organization they 'insist students come professionally dressed and practice communication skills which are taught in the classroom.' Another mentioned they 'require students to open their mouth, speak up, do not shake head or shoulders. Use acceptable English, no slang. Look at the person you are talking to.' Another employer described their professional development as 'communicating with the new employees that come into the organization.' Another employer mentioned they developed ways by 'having their employee's complete their quarterly training for their company.' Another employer mentioned, 'They are teaching communication, work ethic and flexibility and inter-personal skills.'

The third code was titled, Team Building. Employers suggested they supported soft-skills 'by team building with coworkers.' The fourth code was titled, Workshops. One employer mentioned, 'Our organization provides workshops for the enhancement of soft skills.' Whereas, another mentioned, 'Emotional intelligence and is what they offer.' The term emotional intelligence could be defined as skills that could be learned and cultivated, and outlined methods for incorporating emotional skills training in school curricula.

The fifth code was titled, Building Relationships. One employer mentioned, 'Trying to improve the neighborhood and getting people to cooperate and work with the community.' Another employer mentioned, 'Building relationship first. If people know you care they are more willing to work harder.' Finally, another mentioned, 'Addressing

each person, regardless of race, the same way. There should not be any diversity in group communication.'

Another code was titled, Mentoring. One employer mentioned, 'He was mentored on several occasion, and he would offer mentoring to all new applicants.' In addition, another employer mentioned he 'created a group of professionals to join than meets monthly and that is spearheaded and sponsored by management teams to hold discussion of important topics and work situations.' Finally, another employer mentioned, 'I promote mentorship and find community based organizations that partner with me to help establish and maintain programs for students that help to teach them the importance of developing and enhancing their soft skills.'

The employers were surveyed on the same topic as question two from the Parent Questionnaire - who is responsible for developing soft skills in children. There were 57 employers asked to respond to the survey, but only 37 respondents gave an answer to this question. There was a clustering process, and finally a coding process. Here are the findings:

Most respondents thought parents were the primary party responsible for children's development of soft skills. The first code was titled, Parents. As one employer mentioned, 'Parents are responsible for developing soft skills in children, since they are their first teachers.' Another employer mentioned, 'Parents, because this is their first contact with others, training begins at the home front.' Another agreed and mentioned, 'The leaders that lead their children, are their parents. They are the first to give input whether it is positive or negative.' Another employer mentioned, 'The primary responsibility falls on the parents. After that, it falls on whatever society you

place your family in.’ Another comment from a supervisor that the PI found interesting was, ‘Parent - because they begin at home and transfer to everyday life coping skills.’ One of the participants mentioned, ‘Parents most definitely should be the one who are developing those skills. They are their child’s first teachers.’ Another participant mentioned, ‘I believe that soft skills are developed by one’s parents, family and friends.’ One of the participants said, ‘Family’s play a big part in a child’s life, in how they are taught at home, then they will be able to pick the skills that they want.’ Whereas, another employer said, ‘Parents are the first major communicator/teacher in a child’s life.’ Although, another employer mentioned, ‘The parent is responsible for developing soft skills in children because you train up a child in the way that he should go.’ Others, mentioned, ‘I believe the parents are responsible because these are the first teachers in life that sets the base for our lives.’ As another employer mentioned, ‘Parents are responsible for developing soft skills in children because these are the basic home training attributes of courtesy, discipline, and respect.’ Finally, another participant said, ‘Parents, because they are the first teachers’ and furthermore, ‘parents should want to be that person who teaches, sets precedents for what their children are learning.’

Many respondents indicated that both parents and teachers were the main parties responsible for children’s development of soft skills. The second code was titled, Parents & Teachers. One of the participants had this to say, ‘Parents and teachers; that is where most learning comes from.’ Other participants echoed, ‘Parents and teachers,’ ‘Parents and teachers are both educators.’ Another employer argued, ‘Parents and teachers, simply because development starts at home and parents can prepare their children from further developments being taught at school.’ Finally, another participant from the study

mentioned, 'Parents, teachers and peers,' whereas the PI found an interesting comment, as one employer mentioned, 'Soft Skills are developed in the classroom. Soft Skills helps with starting your career.'

The third code was titled, Parent, Teachers & Education System. One participant mentioned,

Both parents & the education system. Parents, because it really is their responsibility to raise their children to interact with the world; but also the education system, since children will spend the bulk of their day in their formative years within the school.

Another employer mentioned, 'Teachers and school because that is where they will get the training and the knowledge they need and also be able to improve on the skills that are needed.' Finally, another employer named, 'parents, schools and professional organizations because these are systems responsible for personal development.'

The fourth code was titled, Home, School & Community. As one employer mentioned, 'development started at home, then school and finally the community. Why? These are places that are in contact with children constantly where these skills can be taught and/or enhanced.' Another employer concurred and added, 'Everyone, parents, teachers. Coaches, mentors, physician, ministers, etc. Soft Skills involve understanding non-verbal cues, team members' roles, the impact of cultural conditioning, etc.' Another employer mentioned, 'everyone who plays a role in the child's development is responsible. Opportunity to learn soft skills were present in the home, at school, during play, at church, at the grocers, and doctor's office.' Another participant mentioned, 'I strongly believe in the well-known proverb, it takes a village to raise a child.'

Therefore, I strongly believe it takes an entire village to develop soft skills in our youths today. If we all work together, our children will be more successful and more apt to gain the soft skills needed in today's society.

Another employer mentioned, 'parents/teachers /society, because children are a product of their environment.' One participant said, 'Any adult who is in that child's life including family members, educators, church associates, coaches, mentors, to name a few, are responsible for developing soft skills in our children.' Another employer mentioned, 'All community members are responsible.' Finally, another participant from the study mentioned, 'Those who have social interactions with the child, should be responsible. Also, such as, but not limited to parents, teachers, family members, peers, etc.'

## **Section 2: Responses from Parents**

The PI's second research question was regarding what soft skills were being consciously supported in the home of the students. The first question that was asked to Group I and Group II parents in the questionnaire was - in what ways are you teaching your child communication skills, verbal and non-verbal communication skills? The PI used a clustering process and finally a coding process. These were the PI's findings: The first code was titled, By Example and Reward System. One parent from each group, Group I and Group II, mentioned, 'I teach my children communication skills by example and by a reward system for showing good examples of communication verbally and non-verbally especially in the soft skills and manners.' Another parent mentioned, 'By reading, listening, observing and verbal expression.' Whereas, another parent mentioned, 'I teach by repetition, visual aids, individual session, small group session, and sharing a

clear definition of the topic.’ Another parent mentioned, ‘I had my children read out loud their favorite books or the USA Today. I would have them to explain what they just read.’ Another parent mentioned, ‘They have ongoing discussions, and involving him in groups/activities both with other kids in his age group and with adults.’ Finally, a parent mentioned, ‘Being a mama, I would be the example and insisting he do the same.’

The second code regarding what soft skills were being supported in the home was titled, Communication. Several parents mentioned they were supporting their soft skills by, ‘verbally talking.’ Another mentioned, ‘Communication is taught verbally by talking and non-verbally by actions.’ Whereas, another mentioned, ‘Verbally speaking clearly, say what is on your mind respectfully, non-verbally; using eye contact, the way I stand and by my body language.’ Many other parents mentioned that they taught in their homes by, ‘verbally talking . . . Verbally . . . Talking and listening, books, social interactions, and interactive games.’ Others mentioned, ‘me as the parent, I would modeling appropriate communication skills,’ and ‘Verbal communication-taking my time talking to them in a relaxed soft way so that they can fully understand what it is that I am saying.’ Finally, another parent mentioned, ‘verbal, teach my child to read and have them communicate back to me what they have read.’

The third code regarding what soft skills were being supported in the home was titled, Questioning. Many parents mentioned that soft skills were consciously supported in their homes. One parent mentioned, ‘I tell my child to ask questions when she does not understand something. When she needs to be understood, I tell her to explain herself when possible. I taught very little on nonverbal skills.’

In the parents' questionnaire, the second question asked was - how are you developing your child's interpersonal skills? This first code was titled, Public. One parent mentioned, 'I put my children in volunteer experiences that will require them to work with the public and have problem solving experience.' Another parent described her daughter, saying,

She has mainly learned interpersonal skills by working in group activities at school, church, and other groups that she is a member. At home, she is developing her skills by having friends over to our house or going out to events with them.

Another parent echoed, 'By getting involved in social activities.' Another parent mentioned, 'By participating in academic, athletic, church groups and other community provided activities where children spend time interacting with others.' Finally, another parent reported, 'I got them involved in team sports that required learning how to work with others as a team.'

The second code regarding developing their child's interpersonal skills was titled, Sharing/Play. In this category, a parent mentioned, we develop interpersonal skills 'by letting him play and sharing his toys with other kids.' Whereas, another parent said, 'she goes to school with other children and interacts with them through activities, politeness and mannerism.' Another parent mentioned, 'Actively listening, role play, and empathizing.' Another parent mentioned, 'By interacting with them a lot and insisting on them saying thank you, of all things.' Finally, one parent mentioned, 'letting my child express their thoughts is how I develop interpersonal skills.'

The third code regarding developing their child's interpersonal skills was titled, Communication. One parent mentioned, 'They make sure he speaks up and is polite when around others.' Another parent said, 'Talking to them,' and another mentioned, 'by allowing her to communicate her feelings back to me.' Another parent mentioned, 'I only respond to correct or pleasant communications. Remind them not to speak negatively to others.' Finally these parents mentioned, 'By communicating and modeling to show my child appropriate behaviors,' and 'making sure they are listening and making sure that we have made eye contact so that they have each other's attention.'

Question seven in the parenting questionnaire asked parents if their child had shown improvement in handling conflicts since the soft-skill learning intervention. This code was titled, Avoided Conflict. One parent mentioned, 'My child will avoid conflict when possible, however, she has shown some improvements since middle school.' Another parent mentioned, 'Yes, I watch how they learned to agree and to disagree. I like how they respect one another's opinions.' Another parent mentioned, 'Yes, our daughter has learned not to pout when she cannot have her way; she is learning to discuss her differences.' Another parent mentioned, 'She has seen an improvement, they are not as aggressive as before.' While another parent mentioned, 'Yes, with certain problems in the past and being taught the correct improvements through parenting. A child does not know how to handle certain conflicts unless they are taught from the beginning.' Finally, another parent mentioned that her son 'is learning the art of not having to have the last word.' Whereas, another parent mentioned, 'yes to understand what the conflict is and find a way to communicate a solution.'

The second code was titled, Mature Behavior. When asked if their child had been improving at avoiding conflict, one parent mentioned, ‘Yes, by using mature assertive behavior and good listening skills, yes.’ While another parent agreed, they mentioned, ‘Yes, he has grown to be more patient and understanding to avoid further conflict.’ Another parent mentioned, ‘she is able to compromise and show greater empathy to others, so yes she has seen some improvement.’ Another parent mentioned, ‘She too has seen improvement, she learned to compromise and to not always react too negativity.’ Other comments that parents had made that the PI did not categorize, but felt notable to mention, included one parent saying, ‘By letting him play and sharing his toys and keep the rules in place this is done at an early stage in their child’s life.’ In addition, their child ‘is getting better with self-expression.’ There was one parent comment that the PI felt worthy to mention, this parent answered the question about improvement saying: ‘No, I did not see any improvements, but my child understands the limitation that she can go.’

Question nine from the parent questionnaire asked how important is it to your child to demonstrate personal responsibility, initiative, self-management, and perseverance?

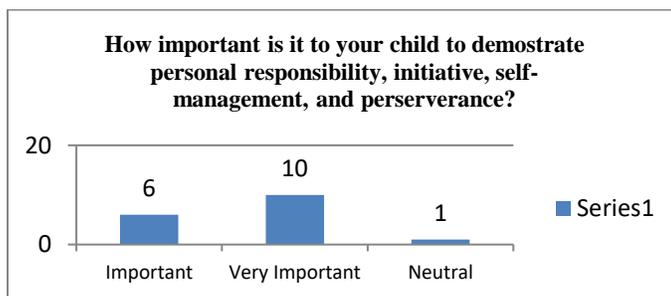


Figure 7. Importance of child’s personal responsibility, initiative, self-management, and perseverance.

There were 30 parents who were asked to respond to the survey questions, but only 17 parents responded to this question, with six parents indicating it was important, and 10 indicating that it was very important for their children to demonstrate personal responsibilities, and one neutral response.

Question 10 from the questionnaire that parents were given asked - how important is it that your children can communicate nonverbally in an effective way?

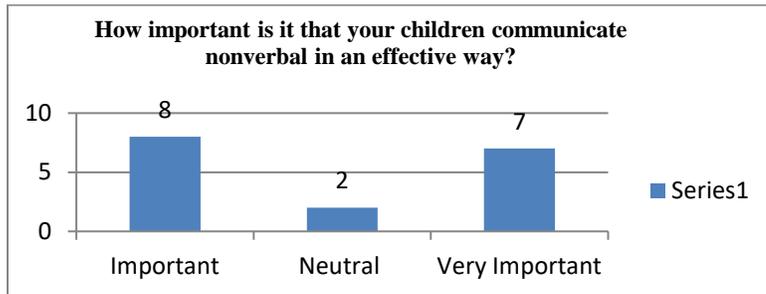


Figure 8. Importance of children’s non-verbal skills.

There were 17 parents who answered the survey question, with seven parents choosing very important and eight more parents saying non-verbal communication was important. Finally, two parents responded neutrally to the question of how important it is that your children communicate nonverbally in an effective way.

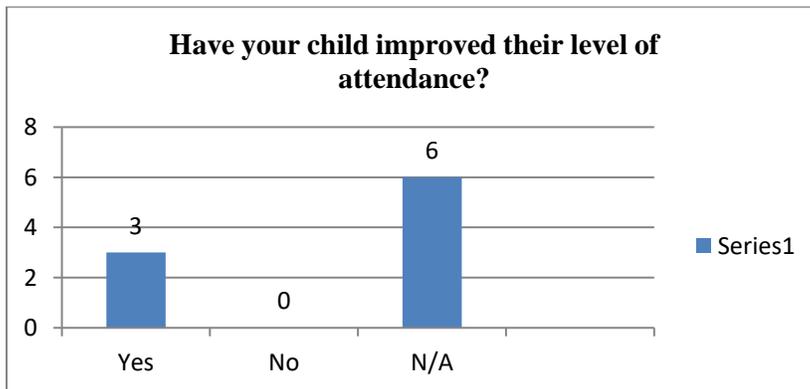


Figure 9. Child improved level of attendance.

Question 11 from the questionnaire asked - has your child improved their levels of attendance since the intervention. Yes or No? The PI asked 30 parents, and 17 responded to the survey. Six parents out of 17 responded ‘yes,’ that they had noticed improvement in their children’s attendance. There was one parent out of 17 respondents who responded ‘no,’ their child’s attendance had not improved. There were nine parents out of 17 respondents who responded ‘N/A’ and one parent responded ‘attendance is not a problem for my child.’ Finally, one parent out of 17 responded ‘neutral.’

Question 12 from the questionnaire asked - has your child improved their ability to manage money [since the intervention?]. Yes or No, Explain?

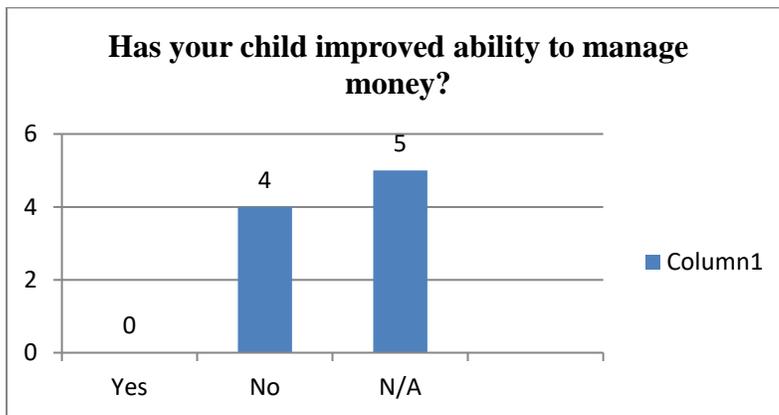


Figure 10. Child improved money management skills.

There were 10 parents who responded yes, that their child improved in managing their money. Four parents responded no, that their child had not improved in managing money. Finally, five parents responded ‘N/A’ to the question concerning their child managing money. One parent responded that her child did not really understand the value of the dollar.

The third research question asked what evidence is there that the intervention devised was successful at developing useful soft skills in the students engaged in the

intervention. The PI asked the parents from Group I and Group II, from their perspective, how important is confidence-in-self for your child?

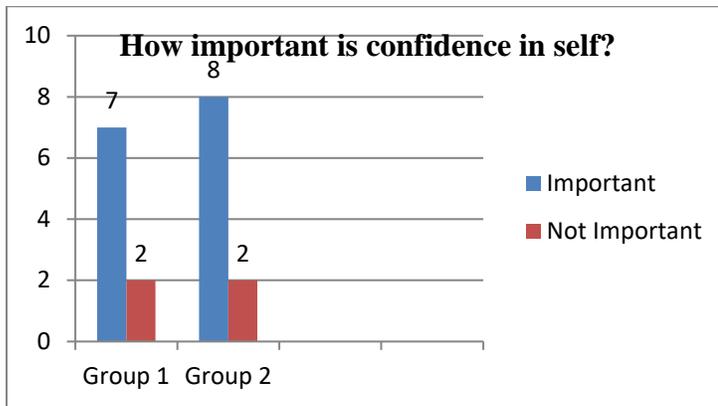


Figure 11. Importance of self-confidence.

There were two groups, 30 participants, with 15 participants in each group. The participants were asked how important confidence in self was for your child. Participants were to choose either ‘important’ or ‘not important.’ In Group I, there were 15 participants, and nine answered, with seven marking ‘important’ and two ‘not important.’ In Group II, there were 15 participants, and 10 answered, with eight indicating ‘important’ and two ‘not important.’

Question four from the questionnaire asked parents from Group I and Group II how effectively their child was able to compromise, negotiate, and persuade. The PI clustered and used a coding process. Here are the findings: This code was titled, Effective. One parent mentioned, ‘My child is very effective because I have taught him rules to go by.’ Whereas, another parent mentioned, ‘My children was excellent at compromise, negotiate and persuading others.’ Another parent shared, ‘On a Scale 1-10, she is an eight. She understands bargaining and uses her personality to her advantage.’ Another participant mentioned, ‘All of them are very good at persuading and compromising. My older children do not negotiate well, but the younger two negotiate

very well.’ One parent mentioned, ‘My child has gotten pretty good,’ whereas, another parent said, ‘my child is very effectively with the skills compromising, negotiating and persuading others.’ Finally, another parent from the study mentioned that her child ‘has the ability to compromise, negotiate and persuade effectively.’

Another code was titled, Need Improvement. As one parent would say, ‘My children lack in the ability to truly compromise and negotiate due to multiple people helping me raise my children with different value systems they are very good at persuading.’ Whereas, another parent mentioned, ‘she needs to show some improvement in all three areas.’

Another code was titled, Average. One parent mentioned, ‘My children are somewhat effective, but still has a long way to go.’ Whereas, another parent mentioned, ‘If she had to measure from 0-100%, she would say 50 to 75%, still have a long way to go.’ Another parent mentioned, ‘Effectively but at an understanding and fair reasoning.’ Whereas, this participant mentioned, ‘Pretty good but needs improvement in comprising.’ Finally, another participant mentioned, ‘My children can negotiate, not sure about how well they are in persuading.’

In question five from the questionnaire, parents from Group I and Group II were asked - how important is appearance to your child?

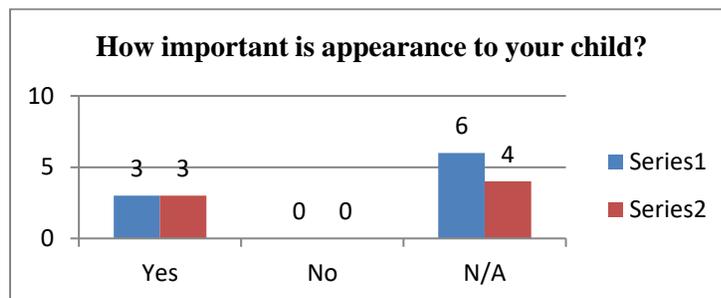


Figure 12. Importance of child’s appearance.

There were two groups, 30 participants, with 15 participants in each group. The participants were asked how important appearances to your child were. Participants were to choose 'Important,' 'Neutral,' or 'Very Important.' In Group I, there were 15 participants, and 10 participants participated, with two Neutral, three 'Important' and five 'Very Important.' In Group II, there were 15 Participants, and eight participated, with two 'Neutral,' two 'Important,' and four 'Very Important.'

In question six from the questionnaire the parents were asked - does your child have the ability to analyze problems and implement a solution. Though 30 parents were asked to respond to the survey question, only 13 parents responded to the question indicating, 'yes' that it was important that their children could analyze problems and implement a solution. One parent added, 'She does have the ability to problem solve in some areas.' Whereas, another parent responded, 'I believe she can analyze a problem but I don't believe she is old enough to promote a solution on her own.' In addition, another parent responded, 'My child could analyze problems in stages.' Finally, one parent mentioned, 'My children some of the time could problem solve.'

In question seven from the questionnaire parents from Group I and Group II were asked - has your child shown improvement in handling conflicts? There were two groups, with 30 participants. There were four participants who responded 'yes.' One parent indicated, 'Yes by letting him play and sharing his toys and keep the rules in place this is done at an early stage.' Another participant responded, 'Yes, my child will avoid conflict when possible however, she has shown improvement since middle school.' Another participant paired, 'Yes, getting better at self-expression,' whereas, another parent indicated, 'No, she understands our limitation.' One parent reflected, 'Yes, by

using mature assertive behavior and good listening skills, yes.’ In addition, one parent emphasized, ‘Yes, I watch how they have learned to agree to disagree. I like how they respect one another’s opinion.’ The PI was told, ‘Yes, he has grown to be more patient and understanding to avoid further conflict.’ Another participant mentioned, ‘Yes, now they are not as aggressive as before.’ Another parent echoed, ‘Yes, she is able to compromise and show greater empathy to others.’ Another participant reported, ‘Yes he is learning the art of not having the last word.’ Moreover, another indicated, ‘yes to understand what the conflict is and find a way to communicate a solution.’ Finally, another participant from the study described, ‘Yes, she learned to compromise and to not always react to negativity,’ and ‘yes, with certain problems in the past and being taught the correct improvements through parenting. A child doesn’t know how to handle certain conflicts unless they’re taught from the beginning.’

In question eight from the questionnaire, parents from Group I and Group II were asked - has your child shown improvement in his or her appearance and personal hygiene?

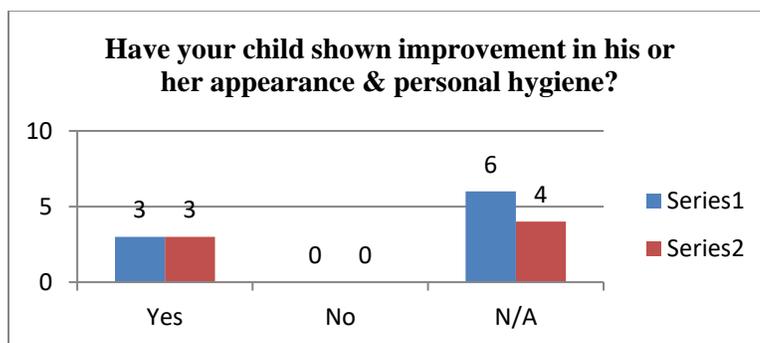


Figure 13. Child shown improvement in appearance and personal hygiene.

There were two groups, 30 participants, with 15 participants in each group. The participants were asked about the importance of appearance to their child. Participants

were to answer ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ or ‘N/A’ (not applicable). In Group I, there were 15 participants, and 9 participated, with three marking, yes their children had shown improvement in his or her appearance and personal hygiene. There were 6 participants who answered ‘N/A.’ In Group II, there were 15 Participants, seven participated with three marking, yes; there was three participants who answered ‘N/A.’

There were other participants that made comments worthy to note. One parent mentioned, ‘My child wants to dress age appropriate and always want to smell good by wearing a body spray and scented lotions.’ Another parent indicated, ‘Yes, handles it all on her own (brushing teeth, bathing self, etc.).’ Another parent reflected, ‘My sons took longer than my daughters to get ready now.’ Whereas, another described, ‘Most of the time he pays close attention to appearance and personal hygiene.’

In question eleven from the questionnaire, parents from Group I and Group II were asked: has your child improved their level of attendance following the intervention?

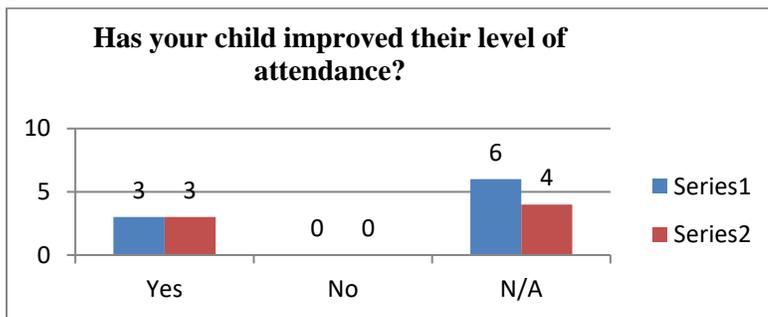


Figure 14. Child improved attendance.

There were two groups, 30 participants, with 15 participants in each group. Participants were to answer ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ or ‘N/A.’ In Group I, there were nine participants who responded, with three marking ‘yes;’ and six marking ‘N/A.’ In Group II, there were seven participants responding, with three marking ‘yes;’ and four marking ‘N/A.’ There

was one response that the PI felt worthy to note - one parent mentioned, 'My older three are almost always late. My daughter who is the youngest is always early.'

### **Responses from Focus Group I - Children**

The third Research Question inquired what evidence there was that showed the intervention devised was successful. After eight weeks of implementing the intervention, participants from Group I and Group II children were asked the following in focus groups.

In question one from the focus group, the children were asked had they noticed that they had improvements in their personal hygiene. The first code was titled, My Appearance. The PI defined appearance as an outward impression. As one child mentioned, 'Yes I have. I now care more about my appearance. I am older now and I care about how I look and smell. No one has really taken the time to sit me down and care about me.' Another child reflected, 'Yes I have as well. I now care more about my appearance. I know now that I keep up with my appearance and cleanliness.'

The second code was titled, Can't Tell. One of the participants had this to say, 'I cannot really answer this question.' The PI asked, 'Why not?' The PI noticed there was silence in the room for a brief second! Another participant indicated, 'I haven't noticed a change in my personal hygiene. I still make sure to keep up with my appearance and cleanliness.' Whereas, another participant said, 'well my hygiene always been well and my body have not changed.' The PI found this interesting after speaking with his mom. Another participant reflected, 'No, because my personal hygiene was not a problem, at least I did not think it was. You know sometimes it is hard to smell self.'

The third code was titled, Big Priority. One of the participants mentioned,

This is a big priority to me. I guess since others see me in a different light, I want to care more about myself than before. Before I thought, what was the purpose?

Going to school has nothing to do with personal hygiene.

Whereas, another participant described, 'There is a bigger priority of it now, but nothing really changed, at least what I can tell. I just pay more attention than I did before.'

This fourth code was titled, My Hygiene. One participant responded,

My hygiene is good but I wash my hand way more than I use too. I am more conscious of washing my hands after I used the bathroom and before I eat now. I thought I was, but since this class, I see that I was not all the time.

Whereas another participant mentioned, 'Yes, I have because when I was a kid I did not have to worry about deodorant or anything but now that I am older, I have to worry about a lot of stuff and cleanliness is number one.' This participant shared,

Yes, I realize that my body goes through a lot of changes like odors, so yes I noticed a difference and now I shower more because I know better. I can remember being told, when you don't know, you cannot be punished, but when you know better, there is no excuse but to do better.

Whereas, this participant mentioned, 'Yes because the more you learn the more you learn to take better care of.' Finally, another participant from the focus group concurred, 'Yes because when you get older you would have to change the type of things you use for yourself. Meaning, you may have to change deodorants, soaps and lotions.'

In question two from the Focus Group I and Group II, children were asked - since the implementation of the developing soft life skills program, have you noticed an improvement in your attendance in school, work place, or any activities that you

participated in. The first code was titled, I Want. One participant, as he began to ponder over the question, mentioned, 'My attendance has improved. I want to attend school; I went from poor to perfect attendance. I am still trying to figure out, how did that happen?' Another participant indicated, 'My attendance has improved. I want to attend school too. I too went from poor to perfect.' Another participant reflected,

The school year just started so I have been there every day. Well if you look at last year, I guess you could say, it has improved. At least now I want to attend and before, no one cared if I attended.

Another participant mentioned, 'I take coming to school more serious now. I actually can say I do care more about my education. Thank you for these last few weeks.' Another participant emphasized, 'Yes because I am not a people person but being in the program I have learned how to work with people. Therefore, my attendance has increased. I am really trying.'

This second code was titled, Purpose Now. As one participant mentioned, 'Since the training, my attendance has improved. I can see a purpose now. Someone actually cares if I come or not.' Another participant responded, 'Yes I did notice a difference in my attendance while attending high school, I went from perfect to poor, now I have went from poor back to perfect.' Another participant indicated, 'I actually do participate in more activities now and work. I enjoy my job and I enjoy the activities that I take part in.' Whereas, another participant concurred and added, 'Yes throughout school, I have a problem with comprehension now I can comprehend very well. So I use to miss a lot of school, because I was ashamed, now I attend a lot more.' Another mentioned, 'Yes I come to school more than I use too. This has really made me look at things different,

thank you.’ Finally, another participant mentioned, ‘Yes I felt like I did not need the classes I was taking; now I see that my attendance is very important for my self-improvement.’

This third code was titled, No Change. The PI really did not know what to title these comments, but felt these comments should be noted. One participant mentioned, ‘Actually there has not been any change, I still do not like school.’ Another participant responded, ‘Yes, my attendance never dropped below a 95%. My school gives us treats for coming to school, so does that really count?’ Another participant described, ‘No, because I am always at school.’ Whereas this participant mentioned, ‘I am always at school most of the time and if I am not it is an emergency going on.’ Finally, there were a few more participants that concurred, ‘No change, sorry.’

In question three from the Focus Group I and Group II, children were asked if their level of motivation had increased since participating in the intervention. The first code was titled, Excited About. One participant mentioned, ‘Oh yes my level of motivation has increased. I am excited about what I do and say now. I do matter; I know that for myself now, I do matter.’ Another participant mentioned, ‘Yes my level of motivation has increased. I am excited about what I do and say too. I ditto what she just said.’ Whereas, this participant mentioned, ‘I always push and motivate myself to do better. Where you know better, you do better.’ Moreover, another mentioned, ‘Yes my motivation increased because I felt I could not do it very myself and I realized it was welcoming myself into the real world.’ Another participant reflected, ‘Motivation, yes, have increased, I been learning more stuff, I still have hope now to learn and be engaged even more.’ ‘One of the other participants mentioned. ‘Yes because I am working toward

my goals to graduate and be something in life.’ Whereas, this other participant mentioned, ‘I am always motivated, and has been that is why I am here now.’ Another participant concurred and added, ‘Yes this intervention made me want even more, thanks.’ Finally, these last two participants mentioned, ‘yes because I be happy when I come in class ready to work,’ whereas, another mentioned, ‘Yes, motivation increased very high because lots of people were pulling and praying for me.’

The second code was titled, Why Care. One participant maintained that, ‘Yes my level of motivation has increased some. Before, I always thought why care, when no one else cares. I now know I am accountable for my own actions so my level of motivation is over the top.’ Whereas, another participant mentioned, ‘Yes it has increased because now I am more confident in myself.’ Another participant suggested, ‘Yes because it is my senior year and I am motivated about graduating. This class has really helped me.’ Finally, another participant mentioned, ‘I wake up every day and thank God. He shows me I have a task to finish.’

This code was titled, No Change. One of the participants reflected, ‘No change and I have nothing else to report,’ others all smiled and said ‘Well ok.’ Another participant mentioned, ‘I am sorry to say, but no because I been motivated already. In this world, you better be motivated.’ Another participant indicated that, ‘Since I participated in the intervention I have learned a lot of different things, stuff that I never knew, but I would have to say, I agree with some of the others, my motivation level has not changed.’ Finally, two other participants mentioned, ‘No change,’ and ‘I would not say my level of motivation has changed, I am still motivated by being happy, so I cannot really say that I am motivated to do more than I would want to.’

In question four from the Focus Group I and Group II children were asked - have you noticed that you have more conversation about right and wrong behavior?

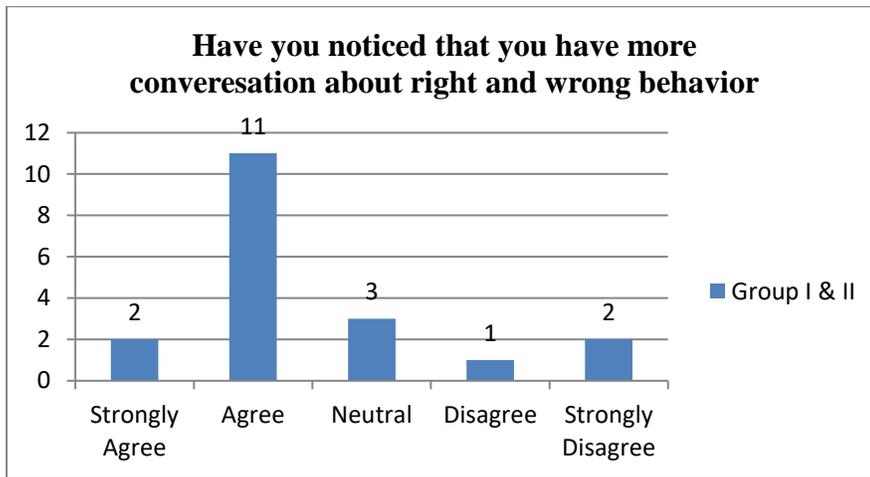


Figure 15. Increased conversations about right and wrong behavior.

There were 19 participants who participated in this focus Group I and Group II session. When asked whether they had noticed an increase in conversation about right and wrong behavior, participants were to answer using the Likert scale choices: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. Two participants marked they strongly agreed they had been having more conversations about right and wrong behavior. Eleven more marked they agreed that they were having more conversations about right and wrong behaviors. Three participants marked neutral. In addition, one participant disagreed that there had been any change in conversations about right and wrong behavior. Finally, two participants marked strongly disagree.

In question five from the focus Group I and Group II, children were asked - have you noticed that you and your parents have more discussions about traits such as respect and responsibilities?

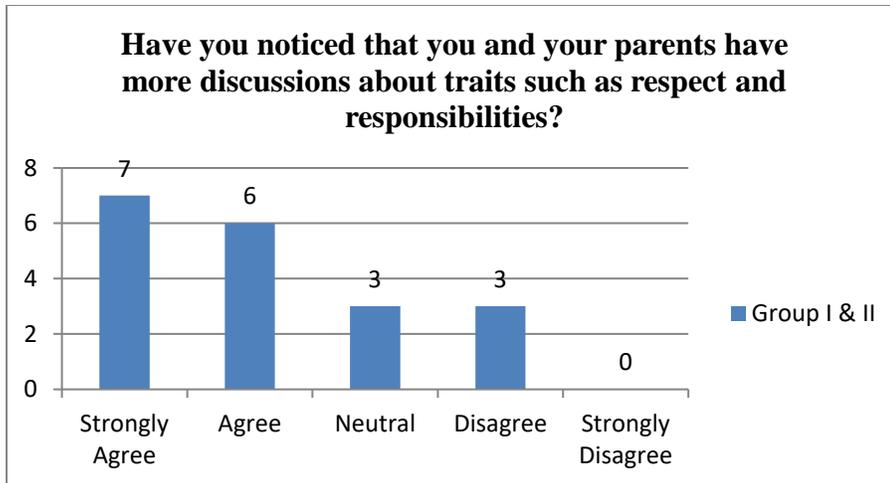


Figure 16. Increased discussions about respect and responsibilities.

There were 19 participants in this focus Group I and Group II session. The participants were asked have you noticed that you and your parents have more discussion about traits, such as respect and responsibilities. Seven participants said they strongly agreed that they have noticed that their discussions with their parents had been more conversations on respect and responsibility. Six participants agreed that they too had more conversations on respect and responsibility. Whereas, three said neutral. In addition, three participants disagreed, indicating that they had not noticed any change in conversations about respect and responsibility. Finally, there were none who strongly disagreed.

**Responses from Focus Group I & II - Parents:**

The data from the focus group consisted of five questions asked to 30 participants, from both Group 1 and Group II parents. The process used was to first cluster the data in the terms used by the participants. This process led to a high number of categories, so a second more carefree and interpretation-based iteration was necessary to bring the categories back to a manageable number. This process of clustering research findings

with similar meaning into common themes was also a steady part of the data analysis method known as phenomenological.

The third Research Question inquired what evidence there was that showed the intervention devised was successful. After eight weeks of implementing the intervention, participants from Group I and Group II, parents, were asked the following:

In question one from the Focus Group I and Group II parents were asked - have you noticed your child or children making improvements in their personal hygiene since implementing the Developing Soft Life Skills Program? The first code was titled, simply Practical. One participant indicated, 'I really like the program. I believe it is very practical. In addition, being able to talk about personal issues with your children, can somewhat be uncomfortable for both you and them.' Another participant described,

This program has provided me with great solutions to motivate my children to make smart choices that make following our family rules more pleasant. I wish I had started this program when the kids were younger because I think about how much easier it would have been for all of us. It is clear and precise.

With that statement, another participant mentioned,

We have wasted so much time in needless arguing with my child! The intervention over soft skills has taught me how to put both myself and my child's time to better use. Before using the Soft Life Skills Intervention, I would go into lengthy discussions/arguments with my child, justifying myself & defending.

One of the participants reflected, 'My family really liked the program. I believe it is very practical. This will be, actually is a way of my family new living.' Whereas, another participant mentioned,

Loved it. Made my other children participate in the program also. The other children after watching and listening to our conversations, made them want to be part of this new intervention. I can see, there is still hope in my family surviving.

Finally, another participant mentioned, 'The role-plays were very valuable.'

The second code was called **Solution**. As one participant mentioned, My seventeen-year-old grandson does not live with us but is here daily. He lives in a single parent house. I was ready to just tell them he could not come here anymore. He was rude and abusive. My husband is disabled and I was afraid my grandson would get angry and hurt him. You know kids do not take corrected criticism well. After starting the program, I could really start to see some difference in my grandson. This program has really helped my family, along with attending church weekly.

Whereas, another participant described,

There is definitely less yelling in our home. Our son is realizing that he is accountable for his own actions and that blaming others is useless. It is certainly a work in progress, and we are seeing some results. I cannot keep this child out of the shower. He needs to start paying the water bill.

Another participant indicated,

We completed the Soft Life Skills Intervention program this summer with positive results, but found ourselves still struggling with motivating a 6-year old to complete daily routines on time and without argument (e.g., getting ready for school, getting ready for bed, completing homework). The openness in communication will get some getting use too.

Finally, another participant concurred and added,

From lesson one to the end, this course was invaluable in getting my daughter to understand that her behavior was unacceptable and to create change from within. Being able to talk with her without her putting up walls was like magic. Thank you so much.

In question two from the Focus Group I and Group II parents were asked - since the implementation of the developing soft life skills program, have you noticed an improvement in your child's attendance in school, workplace, or any activities that your children participate in?

This code was titled, Purpose and Importance. One participant mentioned, I have noticed that both my son and daughter attendance has improved some. My son just did not see the purpose or the importance of attending school. My daughter said they would not miss me; I am just one person. Therefore, since this training, I can see some improvement.

In addition, another participant described,

There was not much missing of school. Our problem was students cutting class and playing too much in the hallway. It was as if school was a huge playground and again what was the purpose of going. Therefore, since the summer camp intervention, I can see some improvement.

Another participant concurred and added, 'Yes, I can see some. I am just so glad that you people took an interest in helping with talking with my children.' Finally, another participant maintained that,

Attendance is # 1 on my list of rules in my house. You cannot stay here if you are not improving in something and attendance is necessary. You must go to school and on time, daily. Thanks, for reinforcing what I have been trying to tell my children.

The second code was titled, Over the Top. One participant mentioned, 'Excellent outcome. I can see what you meant by travelling the distance. I really can see some improvement in their attendance. Thanks again.' Another participant described, 'Over the top, I am so appreciative of your program. I cannot thank you enough.'

The third code was titled, Somewhat. One participant reflected, 'Not really much difference. My children go to a school where the principal gives out rewards for coming to school. They have pizza day weekend.' Another participant indicated, 'Somewhat, they are trying to do better and I as the parent is trying too. I have to take my kids to school daily. They do not like riding the bus.' Whereas, another mentioned, 'Well somewhat! School is just 4 weeks into the year. But so far, it has been great.' Finally, another concurred,

Some. I just do not understand why my kids do not want to attend school. What is this K-12? They have made it so easy that kids do not have to attend school. They got home school. Personalize schooling. I just want my child to attend school.

In question three from Focus Group I and Group II, parents were asked - has the level of motivation increased in your child or children? This code was titled, Come A Long Way. As one participant explained,

I have been helping my children more with their homework and talking more with my children. I noticed that since we have been coming and participating, I too as the parent have a responsibility in assisting my children. Therefore, since I spend more time, I can see my children wanting me to spend more and I have seen them be more motivated to do things around the house. I don't have to say, make your bed up or clean the dishes anymore.

Another participant mentioned,

I think this program was the best time I could have participated with my children. They saw it as fun and creative. They are motivated more and asking, when is the next program starting. I indeed see an improvement in their behavior and they are more motivated to participate; I see some of the shyness' leave, disappear; I see better attitudes.

Another participant said, ' Maybe bit too much. They never stop talking. I can see a self-confidence that I have never seen before. And I like that in my children.' Whereas, another participant reflected,

Since this program, my daughter wakes her own self up. I do not have to tell her make your bed up; wash the dishes, help around the house. It is as a light bulb has been turned on in her head. I wish the classes could continue for the next 2 years.

Finally, other participants described, 'I noticed that my children and I talk more now. We always have something to talk about. Maybe it has always been there, the conversation, and we just did not have the time to talk and notice. I thank you.' In addition, she mentioned, 'I noticed that my child looks forward to participating in the soft life skill

program. I noticed that my son talks more; more willing to share; and really motivated and open for change and improvements.’

This second code was titled, We Matter. As one participant described, ‘I can see some improvement in my children as well. What I have noticed the most is they speak up now. It’s like they know that they have a voice.’ Another mentioned, ‘I have noticed less fussing in my house. My children play more. They are more creative. They are always looking up stuff on Google. Since this class, my children make me wonder, who they are.’ Finally, another concurred and added, ‘One thing I heard my children say, ‘I do matter and I do have a voice. I am happy to participate in this soft skill program.’ Just to hear my children say, I want to spend time with my parents was something unheard of in my family. Thank you.’

In question four from the Focus Group I and Group II parents were asked - have you noticed that you and your children have more conversations about right and wrong behavior?

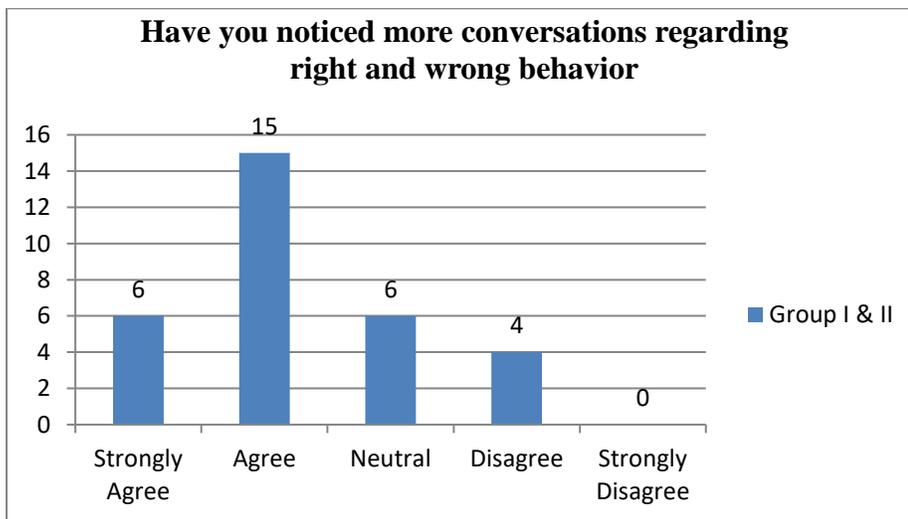


Figure 17. Increased discussions about right and wrong behavior.

There were 30 participants in this focus group. There were six participants who strongly agreed that they noticed that their discussion with their parents had been more conversations on respect and responsibility. Fifteen more marked ‘agreed’ that they too had more conversations on respect and responsibility. Whereas, six participants marked ‘neutral.’ In addition, four participants marked ‘disagreed,’ that they had not noticed any change in conversations about respect and responsibility. Finally, there were none who choose strongly disagree.

In question five from Focus Group I and Group II parents were asked - would they agree that both they and their children have more discussion about traits such as respect and responsibilities?

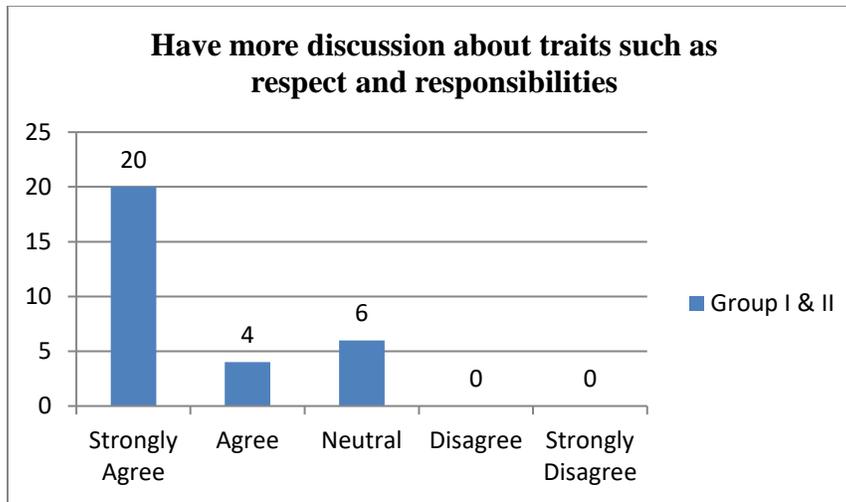


Figure 18. Increased discussions about respect and responsibilities.

There were 30 participants in this focus group. Participants were to answer strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. There were 20 participants who strongly agreed that they noticed that their discussion with their parents had been more conversations on respect and responsibility. There were four who agreed that they

too had more conversations on respect and responsibility. Whereas, six participants were neutral. In addition, none marked disagree or strongly disagree.

### **Parent Pledge and Children Pledge: Results**

At the initial meetings between both Pastors and the PI, questionnaires (Appendix C and Appendix D) were disclosed, and in order for the PI to agree to teach the Soft Life Skills Invention, all parties - parents and children - had to agree to participate in the Parent Pledge; and the children had to agree to participate in the Children's Pledge. All participants agreed and signed the disclosure, one hundred percent.

Both Parent and Children Pledges stated that their involvement in Develop Soft Life Skill Program (DSLSP) was another step in their personal journey to:

- 1) Invest in my academic success and future by setting goals and working toward achieving them.
- 2) Inspire possible career opportunities by building relationships and networks that can help me secure a better future.
- 3) Ignite my potential by making decisions with positive consequences and outcomes.

### **Checklist for Positive Action: Results**

The PI developed a Checklist for Positive Actions, which is in Appendix E. While the PI was teaching and assessing the Soft Life Skills Intervention, the PI was assessing both parents and their children to see what they were learning and how involved they were in the learning process. All parties got involved, and what that meant was that all parents understood that everything they did impacted the actions of others; so finding activities that made an impact was important.

The PI was looking and found that all participants were very motivated about the learning process. Participants discovered that you do not waste your day in bed. You get up; face the world with a plan, and make things happen. Each day you start your day with, 'I must learn something each and every day.' You cannot succeed while sleeping your day away. In addition, one must find a passion for what they do. Participants discovered that finding something that makes you look forward to learning more, doing more, and achieving more is where you will find your passion.

The flip side: both the PI and participants had to keep the mindset that all participants must stay optimistic. It was challenging for all participants to realize that you could not learn everything that must be taught and learned in a short period of time. Some things take a life time to learn and execute. There is no denying that, at times, life gets difficult for everyone. Trying to maintain a positive outlook and think about how to make things better, and not dwell on how bad things may seem, takes being very optimistic.

It was very important that participants realized and understood that there were consequences for every action and decisions that led to a positive outcome. For every action, there was a consequence, and both parents and their children battled with old ways of doing things with no consequences. The intervention that was modeled and taught placed some order in their decision-making. For example, children increasing their concerns over personal hygiene may be expressed by something as simple as washing your hands several times through the day. Alternatively, just getting up to catch the bus on time without having their parents take them to school, was also an example.

The final Checklist for Positive Action was for all participants to see the potential in the intervention. Each participant had the ability and talent to be successful. They all set realistic goals and they all worked to achieve them. As the PI and presenter, it was always stated and encouraged that ‘you can do it,’ if you all come, participate, get involved, and stay engaged, the Soft Life Skills Intervention would change your life for the better. In every aspect of your life, you will want to do better.

**Observation Characteristics:**

As the Researcher introduced and taught the Soft Life Skills Intervention there was an Observation Characteristics Rubric that she used as a checklist to assess and be able to give feedback to participants throughout the intervention. There was a rubric that was used for The Characteristics that were observed, shown here:

- a) Characteristics of strong work ethics, and professionalism:
- b) Characteristics of accepting constructive feedback:
- c) Characteristics of coping under pressure:
- d) Characteristics of developing effective strategies for managing their time; able to balance time to study; time for leisure; and time for job:
- e) Characteristics of showing up with smiles on their faces wanting to be there:
- f) Characteristics of flexibility open for change:
- g) Characteristics of self-confidence; candidates who can show inner sense of assuredness:
- h) Characteristics that show candidates are always prepared:

- i) Characteristics of positive attitudes; always willing to do their very best, and not give up:
- j) Characteristics of improve communication skills; ability to write; ability of read' and the ability to speak clearly:
- k) Characteristics of positive teamwork; candidates' ability to work in diverse environments; and able to get along fairly well with people:
- l) Characteristics of critical thinking and problem solving; candidates who are accountable for problem that may occur:

### **Summary**

The data suggested that though parents in the study readily recognized the value of soft skills, they did not know that term. Both Group I and Group II understood clearly that learning soft skills was a process. Parents who participated in this study realized that soft skills were necessary for their children to succeed in education, job training, and independent living. However educators assumed that children were learning soft skills in the home setting; parents were assuming that these necessary skills were taught in the educational setting. As the result of both parents and children who participated in the Soft Skills Intervention, they showed noticeable awareness and improvement in their professional work ethics and the ability to open up and accept change. Both parents and children were able to accept constructive feedback. The parents who participated alone with their children learned that they played a key role in their children's learning. Furthermore, some parents mentioned how important it was for parents and other family members to be able to demonstrate to the children personal responsibilities, initiative, self-management, and preservation. Parents learned that they played a vital role in

helping their children learn and develop soft skills. A number of pieces of evidence suggested that both parents and children had increased in wanting to spend time with each other and communicating more. This intervention helped develop closer bonds between at least some parents and their children.

### **Chapter Five: Discussion & Reflections**

The purpose of this study was to articulate the role of ‘soft skills’ in life and employability to a group of then-current high school students, with the intent of advocating for an increase in those skills, or at least a heightened awareness. This study consisted of five parts: (i) Seeking information about desired soft skills from employers associated with the target school, (ii) seeking data from parents of participating students regarding the inclusion of instruction in soft skills in their parenting practices, (iii) crafting an intervention for students based on an analysis of the data and knowledge of the literature, (iv) conducting interventions in off-site locations, through two area churches, and (v) assessing the outcomes of the intervention in terms of (i) greater student awareness of the importance of soft-skills and (ii) greater student ability with soft-skills in their interactions.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

**Research Question 1.** What soft skills are sought by the employers associated with the target school in their new hires?

**Research Question 2.** What soft skills have been consciously supported in the homes of the students?

**Research Question 3.** What evidence is there that the intervention devised was successful at developing awareness of the importance of soft skills and even the development of soft skills when the students engaged in the intervention?

## Results

**Research Question 1:** What soft skills are sought by the employers associated with the target school in their new hires?

According to this study, and the researcher believes this to be in line with the literature review in Chapter Two, employers that participated in the survey were seeking candidates with a range of soft skills, which are grouped into three types: communication, interpersonal, and teamwork skills. The first cluster of skills is communication skills. Employers were seeking candidates who could articulate thoughts and ideas effectively, able to demonstrate oral, written, and nonverbal communication skills within a variety of forms and contexts. Employers wanted their candidates to be effective listeners who could analyze meaning, which included having certain knowledge, values, and attitudes. Employers wanted candidates who could utilize multiple media and technology, and know how to judge their effectiveness. Also, these candidates must know how to communicate effectively in diverse situations or environments and use communication to instruct, motivate, and persuade.

The second cluster emphasized interpersonal skills. These skills were required for relating to other people. These sorts of skills had long been recognized as important for success in school and the workplace. From the employers' perspective, new employees should be good listeners, should not criticize others, condemn, or complain, and should try to see things from other peoples' perspectives. These were the sort of skills that employers were seeking in new employees, at the time of this writing. Employers expected new hires to have interpersonal skills, such as working creatively with others,

being able to communicate clearly, and collaborate with others. These were skills that students should learn as they progress from preschool through postsecondary.

The third set of soft skills were clustered as teamwork skills. These skills were required for collaboration with others. Employers wanted their new hires to be able to demonstrate the ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams. New hires should be able to exercise flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish common goals. Also, these new hires should be able to assume shared responsibility for collaborative work, and value the individual contributions made by each team player.

**Research Question 2:** What soft skills are being consciously supported in the homes of the students?

As the participants shared their experiences, many of the parents were not initially aware of what soft skills were. Many parents communicated that they were learning soft skills that were a process and that they were skills that, as parents, they may not possess or know how to teach. As self-selecting participants, they were onboard with the idea that these skills were necessary for their children to succeed in education, job training, independent living, and in the workplace. At the same time, most parents thought their children should learn all those necessary skills in the educational setting. They assumed that educators would teach their children all the necessary skills. In summary, there was little conscious support or intentional training in soft skills by parents in the home.

After implementing the Soft Life-Skills program with participants from the two non-denominational Christian churches, the researcher realized there were things that may have been taken for granted in the training, and therefore were not articulated in the

explicit curriculum. These included the need for parents and teachers to demonstrate a positive attitude within themselves in order to encourage a positive attitude within their children. Research showed that just a simple smile and a friendly hello when passing created a positive attitude. Being around friendly people with positive attitudes was something that some children, or parents, may not be used to, and that type of positivity was entirely new for them.

**Research Question 3:** What evidence is there that the intervention devised was successful at developing useful soft skills in the students engaged in the intervention?

In the researcher's analysis of the focus group data there was a code titled, We Matter. As one described, 'I can see some improvements in my children. The most visible improvement was that the children began to communicate more frequently.' Parents explained that it was as though their children began to understand that they too had a voice. Some parents noticed less agitation in their homes. They noticed their children were laughing and playing with each other more.

Since the teaching of soft skills intervention, some parents shared that their children said, 'I do matter and I do have a voice, I am happy to participate in this soft skill program.' Just to hear children say, 'I want to spend time with my parents,' was something unheard of in many families. Parents were grateful for the opportunity to have their child share in the intervention, as was frequently expressed in phrases like, 'We all thank you for doing this for our kids.'

The following comments reported improvements, as articulated by some participants: 'Since the training my attendance has improved,' 'I now have a purpose for attending - before the intervention, I felt I had no purpose.' Another stated, 'Yes I did

notice a difference in my attendance while attending high school, I went from perfect to fair to poor, now my attendance has grown from poor to perfect.’ Another stated, ‘I actually do participate in more activities now and work. I enjoy my job and I enjoy the activities.’ Another stated, ‘Yes, throughout school, I had a problem with comprehension now I can comprehend very well. I use to miss a lot of school, because I was ashamed, now I attend a lot more.’ Another reported, ‘I come to school more than I use too. I feel that by participating in this intervention it has really made me look at things different, and I thank you.’ As the person who taught this intervention, the researcher observed the remarked upon transformation in the participants and received their positive feedback, making her think this intervention was a viable learning approach.

One question that was asked to both Group I and Group II children was whether their level of motivation had increased since participating in the intervention. This question was coded ‘excited about.’ Participants reported that, yes, their level of motivation had increased and they were now excited about what they did and said. They felt they did matter, and they said that they knew themselves, that they mattered; it was not just something their parents said. Additionally, while this was not an anticipated change due to the intervention, there seemed to be an important shift in the relationship between the parents and their children, which the researcher explored in more depth in the following section.

### **Unintended Effects**

Some of the most striking changes may have been in the relations between the parent-child pairs in the study – several reported feeling much closer. Parents and children spent considerable quality time together during the weeks of training in a

positive church setting and focusing on their child's positive development. This provided opportunities for meaningful parent-child interaction, and for parents to share wisdom, show concern, express praise, and embody the love they felt for their children. While this parent-child interaction focused on helping the child become more aware and competent, close parent-child collaboration was built into the intervention, and flowed from the relational teaching philosophy of the PI. However, a person could never fully anticipate how parents and children would interact in situations of potential judgment and social expectation, so the PI was pleased that they were able to take advantage of this opportunity so productively. Perhaps, because of the added social support provided by conducting the intervention in their church as part of a church community, both parents and children had a notably positive experience with little friction or judgment.

### **Recommendations for Future Research and Practice**

Based upon the findings of the research in the study, there are several recommendations that would be very beneficial to other researchers on this topic.

(1) The PI recommends school districts to: (1) conduct professional development and training designed to enhance the knowledge of soft skill for teachers and administrators; (2) provide adequate collaborative and planning time; (3) coordinate administrative and district support in implementing soft skills in their current curriculums; and (4) supply adequate resources, equipment, and support personnel working within the classroom settings.

(2) Further research could adopt a quantitative or mixed methods approach to expand the population to include other schools/departments and other community

colleges. Additionally, the population could also include the perspectives of faculty, in addition to students and employers.

(3) A larger sample of participants would have been useful; for example, integrating the perspectives of other parents and their children by including all churches in the North County region. However, this method would have proven too time-consuming and a huge undertaking, pushing the limits of the PI's expertise and time constraints.

(4) A longer more detailed and practice-heavier intervention. This study was short by most educational standards. (i) With a heavier intervention there would be more time to break into small groups; whereas participants could act out the skills discussed and taught and (ii) with a heavier intervention there could be more facilitators and more interaction amongst participants and facilitators.

(5) Another recommendation is that Schools of Education consider implementing an intervention to prepare both post-secondary and secondary educators to successfully deliver soft skills instruction. With training, more teachers could integrate soft skills into the curriculum; thereby, increasing students' knowledge of soft skills.

(6) Missouri educational leaders should play a vital role in preparing business educators to effectively integrate soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum. The Missouri Department of Education, school systems, and colleges providing teacher education should provide training in the area of soft skills instruction to future and current Missouri business education teachers.

(7) A follow-up study should be conducted in two years to determine progress toward the goal of preparing parents and their children to enter the 21st century

workforce with a better understanding of soft skills. Lastly, this study should be repeated in other states.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitation of the study presented several directions for future research. The qualitative approach used in this study limited the sample size to 83 participants (20 students, 30 parents and 32 employers); the population focused on only two midsize churches of a selected community. Further research could adopt a mixed methods approach to expand the population to include other parents, schools, colleges, churches, and employers. Additionally, the population could also include the perspectives of parents-to-be. Future research could also explore a comparison of the effectiveness of the intervention for teaching parents and their children soft skills. Other studies could also examine the extent to which K-12 integrated soft skills into their curriculum training.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, employers who interact with and hire employees, like our students, value an array of soft skills and consider them a vital job skill set. Further, they frequently noted that the social skills and relational awareness associated with soft skills competency was one thing they could not teach to employees. The data suggested that though parents in the study readily recognized the value of soft skills, they did not know that term. Additionally, they did not generally claim to be teaching their children most of the soft skills in the intervention in their home routines; however, they indicated that they believed those things were being covered in the schools. Lastly, with regard to the teachability of soft-skills, the data suggested an affirmative answer – soft skills could be taught. Many of the students and many of their parents independently confirmed changes

in attitude, approach, and attendance even in this relatively brief exposure. Additionally, the positive child-focused time spent by parent and child seemed to have added a measure of relevance that raised everyone's spirits and made learning these vital skills an enjoyable family experience.

### References

- Abdullah-Al-Mamun, M. (2012). The soft skills education for the vocational graduate: Value as work readiness skills. *British Journal of Education, Society, & Behavioural Science*, 2(4), 326-338.
- Alshare, K. A., Lane, P. L. & Miller, D.. (2011). Business communication skills in information system (IS) curricula: Perspective of IS educators and students. *Journal of Education for Business*, 86(3), 186-194. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ915957>
- Andrews, J., & Higson, H. (2008). Graduate employability, 'Soft skills' versus 'hard'. *Higher Education in Europe*, 33(4). Retrieved from <http://www.immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/JOURNALS/H081200A.pdf>
- Anne E. Casey Foundation. (2001). *Taking the initiative on jobs & race: Innovations in workforce development for minority job seekers and employers*. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/resources/taking-the-initiative-on-jobs-and-race/>
- Arkansas State Department of Education. (2007). *Combined research report of bousiness leaders and college professors on preparedness of high school graduates*. Little Rock, AR: Arkansas State Department of Education.
- Barbarin, O. (2002). Characteristics of African American families. *Research to Teaching UNC SSW*. Retrieved from [ssw.unc.edu/rtpresentation/PDFs/aa\\_families.pdf](http://ssw.unc.edu/rtpresentation/PDFs/aa_families.pdf)
- Baughner, D. (2013, October 29). *InnovationSTL*. Retrieved from [stlbeacon.org](http://stlbeacon.org): [https://www.stlbeacon.org/#!/content/33399/soft\\_skills102513](https://www.stlbeacon.org/#!/content/33399/soft_skills102513)
- Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

- Blades, F. A. (2012, March). Measuring employability skills. *National Children's Bureau*, 1-37. Retrieved from <http://www.partners4value.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Measuring-Employability-Skills.pdf>
- Calderon, S. L. (2013, August 21). Americans say U.S. schools should teach "soft" skills. *Gallup*, 1-3. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/164060/americans-say-schools-teach-soft-skills>
- Calvin-Campbell, K. (1988, February 03). Supporting the development of the whole child through Orff Schulwerk, Montessori, and Multiple Intelligences. ED 417 030. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED417030.pdf>.
- Cameron, J. (2013, September 2). The definition of non-cognitive skills relationships & family. *Relationship & Family*. Retrieved from <http://www.verifyrecruit.com/index.php/friendships/making-friends/The-Definition-of-Non-Cognitive-Skills.html>
- Cassidy, S. (2006). Developing employability skills: Peer assessment in higher education. *Education + Training*, 48(7), 508-517.
- Catt, S. E., Miller, D. S., & Hindi, N. M. (2006). *Don't misconstrue communication cues: Understanding miscues can help reduce widespread and expensive miscommunication*. *Strategic Finance*, 2006(June), 51-55. Retrieved from <http://sfmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/sfarchive/2005/06/Dont-Misconstrue-Communication-Cues.pdf>
- Chadha, D. (2006). A curriculum model for transferable skills development. *Engineering Education*, 1(1), 19-24. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.11120/ened.2006.01010019>

- Chaturvedi, A., Yadav, A., & Bajpai, S. (2011). Communicative approach to soft & hard skills. *VSRD International Journal of Business & Management Research*, 1(1), 1-6. Retrieved from [http://www.vsrjournals.com/MBA/Issue/2011\\_3\\_March/1\\_Ajir\\_Chaturvedi\\_Research\\_Article\\_Mar\\_2011.pdf](http://www.vsrjournals.com/MBA/Issue/2011_3_March/1_Ajir_Chaturvedi_Research_Article_Mar_2011.pdf)
- Cohen, J., Onunaku, N., Clothier, S., & Poppe, J. (2005, September). Helping young children succeed: Strategies to promote early childhood social and emotional development. Retrieved from [http://www.zerotothree.org/site/doc-server/help\\_yng\\_child\\_succeed.pdf](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/doc-server/help_yng_child_succeed.pdf)
- Collet, C., Hine, D., & du Plessis, K. (2015). Employability skills: Perspectives from a knowledge-intensive industry. *Education & Training*, 57(5), 532-559.
- Confidence Building Training (2014). Soft skills training with hard edge results. *Confident Building*. Retrieved from <http://www.softskills-training.co.uk/confidence-building.html>
- Conley, D. T. (2008). Rethinking college readiness. *New Directions for Higher Education*, Winter(144), 3-13. ERIC Number: EJ824814.
- Conrad, C. A., & Leigh, W. A. (1999, January). Soft skills: A bridge or barrier to employment. *Focus*, 27(1), 5-6, 8. Retrieved from <http://www.jointcenter.org/focus/pdf/jan99.pdf>.
- Deloitte. (2009). *Developing people for the future of business*. Deloitte Consulting Business. Retrieved from [http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-SouthAfrica/Local%20Assets/Documents/Skills%20Development\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-SouthAfrica/Local%20Assets/Documents/Skills%20Development_Brochure.pdf)
- Dewson, S., Eccles, J., Tackey, N., & Jackson, A. (2000). *Guide to measuring soft outcomes and distance traveled*. The Institute for Employment Studies. Retrieved

from <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/guide-measuring-soft-outcomes-and-distance-travelled>

Diamond, A. (2010, September 1). *The evidence bases for improving school outcomes by addressing the whole child and by addressing skills and attitudes, not just content*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3026344>.

Division, Y. L. (2014, February). Honest self assessment, soft skills critical to getting first job,. *ABA (News Archives)*. Retrieved from [http://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2014/02/honest\\_self-assessme.html](http://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2014/02/honest_self-assessme.html)

Downey, M. (2011, August 15). A harder line on softer skills: If young people can master photoshop, can't they figure out alarm clocks? Retrieved from <http://blogs.ajc.com/get-schooled-blog/2011/08/15/a-harder-line-on-softer-skills-if-young-people-can-master-photoshop-cant-they-figure-out-alarm-clocks/>

Dpharmarajan, P. V., Pachigalla, R., Lanka, K. (2012, Sept-Nov). The significance of inculcating soft skills in students in the process of teaching hard skills. *International Journal of Applied Research & Studies*, 1(II), 1-11. Retrieved from <http://ijars.in>

Dunn, S. (2004). Why soft skills matter in your office. Retrieved from <http://www.managerwise.com/article.phtml?id=429>

Durlak, J. (2010). *Afterschool programs that follow evidence-based practices to promote social and emotional development are effective*. Retrieved from [http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/better\\_social\\_emotional\\_learning.pdf](http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/better_social_emotional_learning.pdf).

Early Childhood Mental Health. (n.d.). Early childhood brain development. Retrieved from <https://dmh.mo.gov/healthykids/providers/early-childhood-brain-development.html>

Edutopia. (2011, October 6). Social and emotional learning. *Edutopia*. Retrieved from [www.edutopia.org](http://www.edutopia.org): <http://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history>

Edutopia. (2013, July 3). College and career ready: Soft skills are crucial. *Edutopia*. Retrieved from <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/college-career-ready-soft-skills-crucial-ben-johnson>

European Commission. (2003). The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge. *Communication from the Commission, 58*(Final Brussels). Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0058:FIN:en:pdf>

Farkas, G., & Vicknair, K. (1996). Appropriate tests of racial wage discrimination require controls for cognitive skill: Comments on Cancio, Evans, and Maume. *American Sociological Review, 61*(4), 557-560.

First Five Years Fund. (2016). Brain development. Retrieved from <https://www.ffyf.org/the-need/brain-development/>

Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N., & Hyun, H. H. (2009). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. (8th, ed.) San Francisco, CA: The McGraw Hill.

Frist, B. (n.d.). Child's first 5 years hold key to success. Retrieved from <http://toosmall.org/news/commentaries/childs-first-5-years-hold-key-to-success>

- Gadsdem, V. L. (2002). Current areas of interest in family literacy. *National Center of the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy*, 3(7), 1-57. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=571>.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gerstein, J. (2014, February 9). The other 21st century skills: Why teach them. User Generated Education. Retrieved from [www.usergeneratededucation.wordpress.com/2014/02/09/the-other-21st-century-skills-why-teach-them/](http://www.usergeneratededucation.wordpress.com/2014/02/09/the-other-21st-century-skills-why-teach-them/)
- Gibson, C. (2000). Stronger links: New ways to connect low-skilled workers to better jobs. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/jobsinitiative/strongerlinks.pdf>. ERIC Number: ED455421.
- Gray, K., & Koncz, A. (2014, November 18). The skills/qualities employers want in new college graduates. 1-2. Retrieved from <https://www.naceweb.org/about-us/press/class-2015-skills-qualities-employers-want.aspx>
- Greenstone, M. & Looney, A. (2011, November). *Building America's job skills with effective workforce programs: A training strategy to raise wages and increase work opportunities*. The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/building-americas-job-skills-with-effective-workforce-programs-a-training-strategy-to-raise-wages-and-increase-work-opportunities/>.
- Gutman, L. M., & Schoon, I. (2013, November 13). *The impact of non-cognitive skills on outcomes for young people: Literature Review, Executive Summary*. Institute of Education. Retrieved from [http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Non-cognitive\\_skills\\_Exec\\_summary.pdf](http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Non-cognitive_skills_Exec_summary.pdf)

- Hamedani, M. Y. G., & Darling-HammondL (2015, March). *Social emotional learning in high school: How three urban high schools engage, educate, and empower youth*. Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE): New York, NY. Retrieved from <http://edpolicy.stanford.edu>. Eric Number: ED561818
- Handel, M. J. (2010). What do people do at work: A profile of U.S. jobs from the survey of workplace skills, technology, and management practices (STAMP). Retrieved from [stamp\\_OECD@A\\_edit2.doc](stamp_OECD@A_edit2.doc)
- Hansen, K. (2014). *Emphasizing your transferable and marketable skills in your cover letter*. Quintcareers. Retrieved from <https://www.livecareer.com/career/advice/cover-letter/cover-letter-transferable-skills>
- Hansen, K. H., & Hansen, R. S. (2010). Quintessential Careers: What do employers really want? Top skills and values employers seek from job-seekers. Retrieved from [http://www.physics.emory.edu/faculty/roth/careerskills/soft\\_skills.pdf](http://www.physics.emory.edu/faculty/roth/careerskills/soft_skills.pdf)
- Harms, W. (2004, January 8). Heckman's research shows non-cognitive skills promote achievement. *Chicago Chronicle*, 23(7), 1-4. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/040108/heckman.shtml>
- Heckman, J. S., Stixrud, J., & Urzua, S. (2006). The effects of cognitive and noncognitive abilities on labor market outcomes and social behavior. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 24(3), 411-482.
- Higher Education Authority. (2004). Creating Ireland's knowledge society: Proposals for higher education reform - A submission by the Higher Education Authority to the OECD. Retrieved from [http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/oezd\\_review\\_of\\_higher\\_education\\_2004.pdf](http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/oezd_review_of_higher_education_2004.pdf)

Holzer, H. (1999, September 14). Study warns of Black economic crisis. *The Final Call*.

Retrieved from [www.finalcall.com/national/1999/economy9-14-99htm](http://www.finalcall.com/national/1999/economy9-14-99htm)

Hsin, A., & Xie, Y. (2012, February). *Hard skills, soft skills: The relative roles of cognitive and non-cognitive skills in intergenerational social mobility*. PSC Research Report

No. 12-755. Retrieved from <http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/pubs/abs/7406>

Hunter, M. (2017, August 1). Students, know why soft skills are important: The importance of developing soft skills in a hard world of academia and employment can't be overstated. *Gulf News*. Retrieved from [Gulfnews.com: http://gulfnews.com/culture/education/students-know-why-soft-skills-are-important-1.1216145](http://gulfnews.com/culture/education/students-know-why-soft-skills-are-important-1.1216145)

Indiana Youth Institute. (2012, March). *Soft skills: Beyond academic success*.

Indianapolis, IN: Issue Brief. Retrieved from [www.iyi.org](http://www.iyi.org)

Irish Universities Association. (2005). *Reform of 3rd level and Creation of 4th level Ireland-securing competitive advantage in the 21st century*, Retrieved from

<file:///C:/Users/Felita/Downloads/Reform3rdCreation4thlevelBrochure.pdf>

Jain, V. (2009). Importance of soft skills development in education. Retrieved from <http://schoolofeducators.com/2009/02/importance-of-soft-skills-development-in-education/>

Johnson, F. (2013, December 16). Don't call them soft skills. *National Journal*, 1-2.

Retrieved from <http://www.nationaljournal.com/policy/insiders/education/don-t-call-them-soft-skills-2013>

Johnston, S., & McGregor, H. (2005). Recognizing and supporting a scholarship of practice: Soft skills are hard! *Asia Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 6(1), 1-6.

- Kaushal, N., Magnuson, K., & Waldfogel, J. (2011). *How is family income related to investments in children's learning?* New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Klaus, P. (2008). *The hard truth about soft skills: Workplace lessons smart people wish they'd learned sooner.* New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.
- Lake Research Partners. (2011, March). *Exploring student attitudes, aspirations & barriers to success.* Retrieved from <https://www.aft.org/pdfs/highered/studentfocusgrp0311.pdf>
- Lazarus, A. (2013). Soften up. The importance of soft skills for job success. *Physician Executive*, 39(5), 40-45.
- LDS Employment Resource Services. (2015). What does your employer expect from you? Retrieved from <https://www.ldsjobs.org/ers/ct/articles/what-does-your-employer-expect-from-you?lang=eng>
- Leigh, W. A. (1999). *Soft skills training: An annotated guide to selected programs.* Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies,.
- Lerman, R., & Packer, A. (2010, April 21). Will we ever learn? *Education Week*, 1-3. Retrieved from <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=901345&renderforprint=1>
- Lestus, L. (2013, February). *Closing the gap.* The Liberty Group, pp. 42-44. Retrieved from <http://www.thelibertygroup.com/docs/closing-the-gap-laura-lestus.pdf>
- Lippman, L., & Keith, J. (2009, April). *A developmental perspective on workplace readiness: Preparing high school students for success.* Retrieved from Child Trends: [https://www.hotworkforce.com/Employer\\_Business/downloads/ChildTrends\\_WorkReady.pdf](https://www.hotworkforce.com/Employer_Business/downloads/ChildTrends_WorkReady.pdf)

- Lleras, C. (2008). Do skills and behaviors in high school matter? The contribution of noncognitive factors in explaining difference in educational attainment and earnings. *Social Science Research*, 37(3), 888-902.
- Lloyd, M.A., & Kennedy, J. H. (1997). Skills employers seek. Retrieved from <http://www.psywww.com/careers/skills.htm>.
- Mackes, M. (2013). *Employers look for communication skill, ability to work in a team in new college grads*. Job Outlook 2013 Report, National Associations of College and Employers (NACE). Retrieved from <http://www.naceweb.org/career-development/trends-and-predictions/job-outlook-2013-attributes-employers-want-to-see-on-new-college-graduates-resumes/>
- Macomb Brain Injury Association of Michigan. (2009). [website]. Retrieved from <https://www.biami.org/>
- Magazine, A. (2003). Soft skills that make a better tester. Retrieved from <http://www.stickyminds.com/sitewide.asp?OBJECTiD=6752&FUNCTION=detailbrowser&oBJECTtYPE=art>
- Mayne, D. (2017, September 12). *How you benefit from proper etiquette*. Retrieved from thespruce.com: <https://www.thespruce.com/how-you-benefit-from-proper-etiquette-1216688>
- McGann, K. (2010, October). IBEC Education & Skills Survey. Retrieved from [http://www.onevoiceforlanguages.com/uploads/2/4/6/7/24671559/ibec\\_education\\_and\\_skills\\_survey\\_2010.pdf](http://www.onevoiceforlanguages.com/uploads/2/4/6/7/24671559/ibec_education_and_skills_survey_2010.pdf)
- Miller, E. (2008). Zero to three. Ounce of Prevention Fund. Retrieved from <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/research/pdfs/SecureAttachment.pdf>

Mincer, J. (1974). *Schooling, experience, and, earnings*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Montessori Theory. (2015). [website]. Retrieved from Daily Montessori: <http://www.dailymontessori.com/montessori-theory/>

Montessori Training. (2014). [website]. Retrieved from [http://montessoritraining.net/What\\_is\\_montessori/overview.htm](http://montessoritraining.net/What_is_montessori/overview.htm)

Moore, T. B. (2011, March). What works for promoting and enhancing positive social skills. *Child Trends*. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org>

Mroz, D. (2014, May 1-7). Boosting innovation: Are your "soft skills" up to par? Retrieved from <http://www.wired.com/2014/05/boosting-innovation-soft-skills-par/>

Murden, D. M. (2012). Teach your kids soft skills. Retrieved from <http://www.tidewaterwomen.com/featured/august-2012/teach-your-kids-soft-skills?>

National Career Service. (2015, February 17). What are the 'soft skills' employers want? *Spotlight at the National Career Service*, pp. 1, 2. Retrieved from <https://nationalcareer.service.direct.gov.uk/aboutus/newsarticles/Pages/Spotlight-SoftSkills.aspx>

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). Young children develop in an environment of relationships. Retrieved from [http://www.developingchild.net/pubs/wp/Young\\_Children\\_Environment\\_Relationships.pdf](http://www.developingchild.net/pubs/wp/Young_Children_Environment_Relationships.pdf)

Nishi, D. (2013). 'Soft skills' can help you get ahead. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324715704578481290888822474>

- Nunn, R. (2013). More on the soft skill deficiencies of college graduates. *Workforce Solutions group*, 1-8. Retrieved from <http://workforcesolutions.stlcc.edu/2013/time-soft-skill-deficiencies>
- Office of Disability Employment Policy. (2008). Soft skills. *Society of Human Resource Management*. Retrieved from [www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/introduction.pdf](http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/introduction.pdf)
- Office of Disability Employment Policy. (2013). Skills to pay my bills. Office of Disability Employment Policy. Retrieved from [dol.gov](http://dol.gov)
- Outten, D. (2014). The four facets of soft skills in action - Soft skills team. Retrieved from <http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/softskillsfacets?cl=wn-may-softskills>
- Parsons, T. L. (2008). [Softs skills; hard skills; definition]. Retrieved from <http://searchcio.teachtarget.com/definition/soft-skills>
- Pianin, E. (2014, January 29). The surprising reason college grads can't get A job. *The Fiscal Times*, 1-13. Retrieved from <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Articles/2014/01/29/Surprising-Reason-College-Grads-Can-t-Get-Job>
- Pickerden, A. (2006-2007, January - December). Evaluation of soft indicators. *Equal*, 3. Retrieved from <http://www.equal-works.com>
- Plomin, R., deFries, J. C., & Loehlin, J. C. (1977). Genotype-environment interaction and correlation in analysis of human behavior. *Psychological Bulletin*, 84(2), 309-322.
- Policyx, S. C. (2014, February 21). Reservists' transferable skills. *SaRE*, pp. 1-2. Retrieved from <http://www.sabre.mod.uk/Employers/What-reservists-Offer/Transferable-Shills.aspx#>. UwgEkn-9KSM

Postlewaite, A. (2006, March 21). *Non-cognitive skills, social success, and labor*.

Retrieved from <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~dansilv/SocialSuccess.pdf>

Pulliam, M. (2008). Skills employers seek. *Excelsior College Career Corner*. Retrieved

from [https://www.excelsior.edu/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=f62e4045-5ef8-4a7f-90de-bd102d2e6068&groupId=78666](https://www.excelsior.edu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=f62e4045-5ef8-4a7f-90de-bd102d2e6068&groupId=78666)

Raftree, L. (2011, September 15). Soft skills and environments for youth economic empowerment. pp. 1-5. Retrieved from <http://lindaraftree.com/2011/09/15/soft-skills-and-enabling-environments>

Rakos, K. (2014, September 2). Skills can be taught, but attitude is forever. Retrieved from <https://www.eremedia.com/fordyce/skills-can-be-taught-but-attitude-is-forever/>

Robert, C. (2014). The definition of non-cognitive skills. Retrieved from [http://www.ehow.com/info\\_8410447\\_Definition-noncognitive-skills.html](http://www.ehow.com/info_8410447_Definition-noncognitive-skills.html)

Robles, M. M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. *Sage*, 75(4), 453-465. doi:10.1177/1080569912460400

Schulz, B. (2008, June). The importance of soft skills: Education beyond academic knowledge. *NAWA Journal of Language and Communication* 2008(June), 146-154.

Softskillsindia. (n.d.). [Workforce shortage in India]. *softskillsindia*. Retrieved from [www.softskillsindia.com](http://www.softskillsindia.com): [softskillsiindia.com](http://softskillsiindia.com)

Sommerfield, A. (2011). Recasting non-cognitive factors in college readiness as what they truly are: Non-academic factors. *Journal of College Admission*, 213, 18-22. Retrieved from <http://www.nacacnet.org>

- Sulphey, M. (2015). Patterns of employability skills among business students. *IPE Journal of Management*, 5(2), 57-73. from <http://gatekeeper2.lindenwood.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1790896804?accountid=12104>
- Symonds, S. F. (2011). Pathways to prosperity. *Harvard University Graduate School of Education*, 1-53. Retrieved from <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/4740480>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2012, October 15). *Developing young people's skills for work is a must, new UNESCO report urges*. Retrieved from UNESCO: [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/single-view/news/developing\\_young\\_peoples\\_skills\\_for\\_work\\_is\\_a\\_must\\_new\\_u/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/single-view/news/developing_young_peoples_skills_for_work_is_a_must_new_u/)
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce. (2011). *Life in the 21st Century workforce: A National Perspective*. University of Phoenix. Retrieved from <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/publication/edu/Life%20in%20the%2021st%20Century%20Workforce.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Labor. U. S. (2017). Unemployment rate 2.4 percent for college grads, 5.1 percent for high school grads in August 2017. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/unemployment-rate-2-4-percent-for-college-grads-5-1-percent-for-high-school-grads-in-august-2017.htm>
- Vanderkam, L. (2014, January 24). 4 soft skills that you need to learn. pp. 1-6. Retrieved from <http://www.fastcompany.com/3025282/how-to-be-a-success-at-everything/4-soft-skills-that-you-need-to-learn>

Wagner, T. (2014). *Tony Wagner's seven survival skills*. Retrieved from <https://www.tonywagner.com>: <http://www.tonywagner.com/7-survival-skills>

World Health Organization. (2004). The importance of caregiver-child interactions for the survival and health development. *CAH-Child and Adolescent Health and Development, 2004*, 1-130. Retrieved from [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/42878/1/924159134\\_X.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/42878/1/924159134_X.pdf)

**Appendix A:**  
**Time Line**

Table A1

*DSLSP Intervention Curriculum Assignments*

<b>Weeks:</b>	<b>Content Area:</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion:</b>
Week 001	Introduction – Be Professional	Summer 2016
001	Activity 1.1 Be Fun	
001	2.1 Speed Dating	Summer 2016
001	3.1 Be Attentive	Summer 2016
001	4.1 Role Play - Speaker	Summer 2016
	5.1 Be Accountable – Speaker-Role Play	Summer 2016
Week 002	6.2 Not Here on Friday Activity	Summer 2016
002	7.2 Absence Form – Created-Role Play	Summer 2016
002	8.2 Role Play-Be Adaptable	Summer 2016
002	9.2 Be Charming – Role Play	Summer 2016
002	10.2 Be Humble - Reflection	Summer 2016
002	11.2 Speaker-Thank You Note	Summer 2016
002	12.2 Parents & Student write their own BE’s	Summer 2016
Week 003	13.3 Be Better – Role Play	Summer 2016
003	14.3 Be Organized-Speaker-Role Play	Summer 2016
003	15.3 Keep going-Be Motivated-Speaker	Summer 2016
003	16.3 Be Positive –Speaker-M&M Game	Summer 2016
003	17.3 Wordel2- Speaker	Summer 2016

---

Week 004	18.4 Reflection-To Be Impressive	Summer 2016
004	19.4 Reflection-Workshops-Speaker	Summer 2016
004	20.4 Handwriting & Generational Issues	Summer 2016
004	21.4 Cursive Handwriting	Summer 2016
004	22.4 Coloring Relief	Summer 2016
Week 005	23.5 Conversation Deck – Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
005	24.5 Summarizing-Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
005	25.5 Video Analysis	Summer 2016
Week 006	26.6 Omitting Offensive-Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
006	27.6 Appearance – Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
006	28.6 Turning Around Put Downs – Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
Week 007	29.7 Job Annoying Habits’ – Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
007	30.7 Why was I field – Speaker-Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
007	31.7 Scenario-Speaker-Role Play-Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
Week 008	32.8 Making a Good Impression-Speaker	Summer 2016
008	33-8 Door Opening – What to do Speaker	Summer 2016

---

---

008	34.8 How do you Chew – Speaker-Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
008	35.8 How To Introduce Self – Speaker	Summer 2016
008	36.8 Good Grooming Habits – Speaker-Observation & Feedback	Summer 2016
008	37.8 Dress to get a Job – Speaker – Observation & Feedback Closing Remarks, Evaluations, Giving out Certificates	Summer 2016

---

**Appendix B:**  
**Observation Characteristics**

Table B1

*Observation Characteristics*

---

- ✓ Learned the Characteristics of strong work ethics, Professionalism.
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics of accepting constructive feedback.
  - ✓ Learn the Characteristics of coping under pressure
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics of developing effective strategies for managing their time; able to balance time to study; time for leisure; and time for job.
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics of showing up with smiles on their faces; wanting to be there.
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics of flexibility and open for change.
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics of self-confidence; candidates who showed inner sense of assuredness
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics that show candidates are always prepared.
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics of improved communication skills; ability to write; ability of read; and the ability to speak clearly.
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics of positive teamwork; candidates' ability to work in diverse environments; and able to get along fairly well with people.
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics of critical thinking and problem solving; candidates who are accountable for problem that may occur.
  - ✓ Learned the Characteristics of positive attitudes; always willing to do their very best, and not give up
-

Table B2

*Types of "soft" Outcomes: Example of Indicators*

Types of "soft" outcomes	Examples of Indicators that will be evaluated	Researcher – Implementation of Intervention and evaluating Distance Travelled
Key work skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The acquisition of key skills eg team working, problem solving, numeracy skills, information technology</li> <li>○ The acquisition of language and communication skills;</li> <li>○ Completion of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor</li> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor</li> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor</li> </ul>
Attitude Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increase level of motivation</li> <li>○ Increase levels of confidence</li> <li>○ Recognition of prior skills</li> <li>○ Increased feelings of responsibility</li> <li>○ Increased levels of self-esteem</li> <li>○ Higher personal and career aspirations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor</li> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor/Parents</li> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor/Parents</li> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor/Parents</li> <li>○ Parents</li> </ul>
Personal Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improved personal appearance/</li> <li>○ Improved levels of attendance – evaluate by parents</li> <li>○ Improved personal hygiene – evaluate by parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor</li> <li>○ Parents</li> <li>○ Parents</li> <li>○ Parents</li> <li>○ Parents</li> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor</li> </ul>

---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Greater levels of self-awareness</li> <li>○ Better health and fitness</li> <li>○ Greater levels of concentration and/or engagement</li> </ul>	
Practical skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ability to complete forms</li> <li>○ Ability to write a CV</li> <li>○ Improved ability to manage money</li> <li>○ Improved awareness of rights and responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor</li> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor</li> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor/Parents</li> <li>○ Trainer/Assessor/Parents</li> </ul>

---

*\*Note:* the researcher is the trainer of intervention.

Table B3

*Professional Development Skills - Mastered*

---

In week one and week two of the Professional Development in Communication and Interpersonal Skills, participants:

---

- Learned the ability to understand group dynamics and work effectively within a team.
  - Learned the ability to apply accepted business etiquette in dining and other situations.
  - Learned the ability to build trust and internalize honesty and integrity.
  - Learned the ability to communicate more effectively.
  - Learned the ability to turn script for small talk, and other occasion.
  - Learned the ability to put away technology away completely.
  - Learned the ability to communicate clearly and effectively.
  - Learned the ability to maintain a good working relationship.
- 

In week three and week four of the Professional Development in Teamwork and Work Ethics, participants:

---

- Learned the ability to have the skills to work together as a team and foster a collaborative atmosphere during negotiations.
  - Learned the ability to respect the opinions of others.
  - Learned the ability to team help each other.
  - Learned the ability to offer ideas and...
  - Learned the ability to contribute to a project.
  - Learned the ability to understand the importance of a diverse workplace.
  - Learned the ability to not participate in destructive about others and their peers.
- 

In week five and week six of the Professional Development in Flexibility and Adaptability, participants:

---

- Learned the ability to change or be changed in any circumstance.
  - Learned the ability to be persisted in the face of difficulties.
  - Learned the ability to adapt to varied roles, responsibilities.
  - Learned the ability to deal with positive with praise, setbacks and criticism
- 

In week seven and week eight of the Professional Development in Negotiate and Analytical skills, participants:

---

- Learned the ability to identify a problem and create a solution.
  - Learned the ability to analyze data from information collected.
  - Learned the ability to create a set of steps to implement a process for the outcome.
  - Learned the ability to give examples of problem-solving that works.
  - Learned the ability to listen actively to the other party during a debate.
  - Learned the ability to keep his or her emotions in check during the negotiation.
-

## Appendix C:

### EMPLOYER QUESTIONNAIRE

The employers' survey was designed to gather information from employers about the preparedness of SLPS graduates regarding *soft skills* in the following Pathways:

- Manufacturing
- Healthcare

**1. From an employer's perspective, how do you define *soft skills*?**

**2. How do children and adolescents develop soft skill?**

**3. Which soft skills are critical for entry-level positions: Mark all that apply.**

- a) \_\_\_ Communication Skills
- b) \_\_\_ Interpersonal Skills
- c) \_\_\_ Teamwork Skills
- d) \_\_\_ Analytical Skills
- e) \_\_\_ Flexibility Skills
- f) \_\_\_ Adaptability Skills
- g) \_\_\_ Work Ethic Skills
- h) \_\_\_ Negotiate & Persuasive Skills

**4. Which Soft Skills do employers find lacking in job applicants? Mark all that apply.**

- a) \_\_\_ Communication Skills
- b) \_\_\_ Interpersonal Skills
- c) \_\_\_ Teamwork Skills
- d) \_\_\_ Analytical Skills
- e) \_\_\_ Flexibility Skills
- f) \_\_\_ Adaptability Skills
- g) \_\_\_ Work Ethic Skills
- h) \_\_\_ Negotiate & Persuasive Skills

**5. How would you rank these soft skills in importance? 1-8.**

\_\_\_communication skills

\_\_\_interpersonal skills

\_\_\_teamwork skills

\_\_negotiate & persuasive skills

\_\_work ethic skills

\_\_flexibility skills

\_\_adaptability skills

\_\_analytical skills

**6. How important are work readiness skills to employers?**

not important    less important    neutral    important    very important

**7. How important are soft skills to your organization?**

not important    less important    neutral    important    very important

**8. For job candidates, having soft skills is more important than having hard skills.**

Strongly disagree    disagree    don't know    agree    strongly agree

**9. Employers can easily teach applicants the *hard skills* of how to do their job, but it is more difficult to teach applicants the *soft skills* involved in working well with others.**

Strongly disagree    disagree    don't know    agree    strongly agree

**10. In what way is job shadowing important for students?**

**11. Have you developed any effective ways of supporting the development of soft skills in your organization?**

## Appendix D

### PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE:

- Should parents be responsible for teaching their children soft skills?
  - In what way are soft skills being taught in the home setting?
  - Are parent reinforcing soft skills in the home setting and what might be missing?
- 1. In what way are you teaching your child communication skills, verbal and non-verbal?**
  
  - 2. How are you developing your child's interpersonal skills?**
  
  - 3. How important is confidence in self for your child?**  
not important    less important    neutral    important    very important
  
  - 4. How effectively is your child able to compromise, negotiate and persuade?**
  
  - 5. How important is appearance to your child?**  
not important    less important    neutral    important    very important
  
  - 6. Does your child have the ability to analyze problems and implement a solution?**  
not important    less important    neutral    important    very important
  
  - 7. Has your child shown improvement in handling conflicts, and handling conflicts while participating in the soft skills intervention training? Yes or No**
  
  - 8. Has your child shown improvement in his or her appearance and personal hygiene while participating in the soft skills intervention training?**
  
  - 9. How important is it to your child to demonstrate personal responsibility, initiative, self-management, and perseverance?**  
not important    less important    neutral    important    very important
  
  - 10. How important is it that your child communicates nonverbally in an effective way?**  
not important    less important    neutral    important    very important
  
  - 11. Has your child improved their levels of attendance while participating in the soft skills intervention training? Yes or No**
  
  - 12. Has your child improved ability to manage money while participating in the soft skills intervention training? Yes or No**

**Appendix E**



**Parent Pledge**

My involvement in Develop Soft Life Skill Program (DSLSP) is another step in my personal journey to:

**Invest!** In my academic success and future by setting goals and working toward achieving them.

**Inspire!** Possible career opportunities by building relationships and networks that can help me secure a better future.

**Ignite!** My potential by making decisions with positive consequences and outcomes.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix F****Student Pledge**

My involvement in Develop Soft Life Skill Program (DSLSP) is another step in my personal journey to:

**Invest!** In my academic success and future by setting goals and working toward achieving them.

**Inspire!** Possible career opportunities by building relationships and networks that can help me secure a better future.

**Ignite!** My potential by making decisions with positive consequences and outcomes.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### Checklist for Positive action



- ✓ **Get involved.** Everything you do impacts others, so find activities (and people) that make the world a better place!
- ✓ **Be motivated.** Do not waste your day in bed. Get up; face the world with a plan, and make things happen! You cannot succeed while sleeping your day away.
- ✓ **Find your passion.** What do you have to do? Find something that makes you look forward to learning more, doing more, and achieving more.
- ✓ **Stay optimistic.** There is no denying that at times, life gets difficult for everyone. Try to maintain a positive outlook and think about how to make things better, and not dwell on how bad things may seem.
- ✓ **Understand consequences.** Every action and decision has a consequence. Be mindful about your behavior and focus on decisions that lead to positive outcomes.
- ✓ **Realize potential.** You have the ability and talent to be successful. Set goals and work to achieve them. Remind yourself that you can do it!

## Appendix H

Focus Group Protocol and Question Guide for (Parents). \*Note: (Children will not be present for this Focus Group because the children will be talked about).

Welcome and Introduction (20 minutes)

- Introduce self
  - Provide background on this Exploratory Study and Purpose
  - Ground Rules
- Today will be a facilitated conversation. I will ask broad questions or ideas for your response. I want this to be a conversation. The idea is that by having a conversation I will be able to get the experience of what you are thinking. You do not have to respond to every question. You may interact with one another, respond to comments, or pose questions to me. However, I do hope that each of you will be an active participant.
  - Unless anyone has an objection, I would like to record our conversation today. As the Facilitator, it is difficult for me to take notes. The recording will afford me the opportunity to listen to the group again, as well as have access to verbatim comments.
  - Parents who participated in the study, you are asked to participate in this process because you are actually participants of the study being implemented. All results will be reported taken together.
  - Finally, I ask that you use your skills in terms of time management, and allowing one person to speak at a time. We hope to get through all of the questions in 60 minutes. I apologize in advance if I have to move the conversation along before everyone is ready. It is very important that we get to all the questions.

Introduction

1. Does anyone have questions before we begin?
2. As a way to begin, I would like each of you to introduce yourself; explain why you agreed to be a part of this study, and what you hope to gain from the study

(Personal Skills 15 minutes)

1. Implementing the Developing Soft Life Skills Program, have you noticed your child or children improvements in their personal hygiene? Explain?

(Attitude Skills 15 minutes)

2. Since the implementation of the Developing Soft Life Skills Program, have you noticed an improvement in your child attendance in school, workplace, or any activities that your children participate in? Yes or No, Explain how?
3. Have the level of motivation increased in your child or children? Explain?

(Key Work Skills 15 minutes) Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strong Disagree

4. Have you noticed that you and your children have more conversations about right and wrong behavior? SA – A- N-D-SD

(Practical Skills 15 minutes) Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strong Disagree

5. My child and I have more discussions about traits such as respect and responsibilities. SA-A-N-D-SD

### Appendix I

Focus Group Protocol and Question Guide for (Children) \*Note: (Parent's will not be present for this Focus Group because the parents will be talked about).

- Introduce self
  - Provide background on this Exploratory Study and Purpose
  - Ground Rules
- Today will be a facilitated conversation. I will ask broad questions or ideas for your response. I want this to be a conversation. The idea is that by having a conversation I will be able to get the experience of what you are thinking. You do not have to respond to every question. You may interact with one another, respond to comments, or pose questions to me. However, I do hope that each of you will be an active participant.
  - Unless anyone has an objection, I would like to record our conversation today. As the Facilitator, it is difficult for me to take notes. The recording will afford me the opportunity to listen to the group again, as well as have access to verbatim comments.
  - Children/ or Students who participated in the study, you are asked to participate in this process because you are actually participants of the study being implemented. All results will be reported taken together.
  - Finally, I ask that you use your skills in terms of time management, and allowing one person to speak at a time. We hope to get through all of the questions in 60 minutes. I apologize in advance if I have to move the conversation along before everyone is ready. It is very important that we get to all the questions.

#### Introduction

3. Does anyone have questions before we begin?
4. As a way to begin, I would like each of your to introduce yourself; explain why you agreed to be a part of this study, and what you hope to gain from the study

(Personal Skills 15 minutes)

6. Implementing the Developing Soft Life Skills Program, have you noticed that you as the participant have improvements in your personal hygiene? Explain?

(Attitude Skills 15 minutes)

7. Since the implementation of the Developing Soft Life Skills Program, have you noticed an improvement in your attendance in school, workplace, or any activities that your children participate in? Yes or No, Explain how?
8. Have the level of motivation increased in yourself? Explain?

(Key Work Skills 15 minutes) Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strong Disagree

9. Have you noticed that you have more conversations about right and wrong behavior? SA – A- N-D-SD

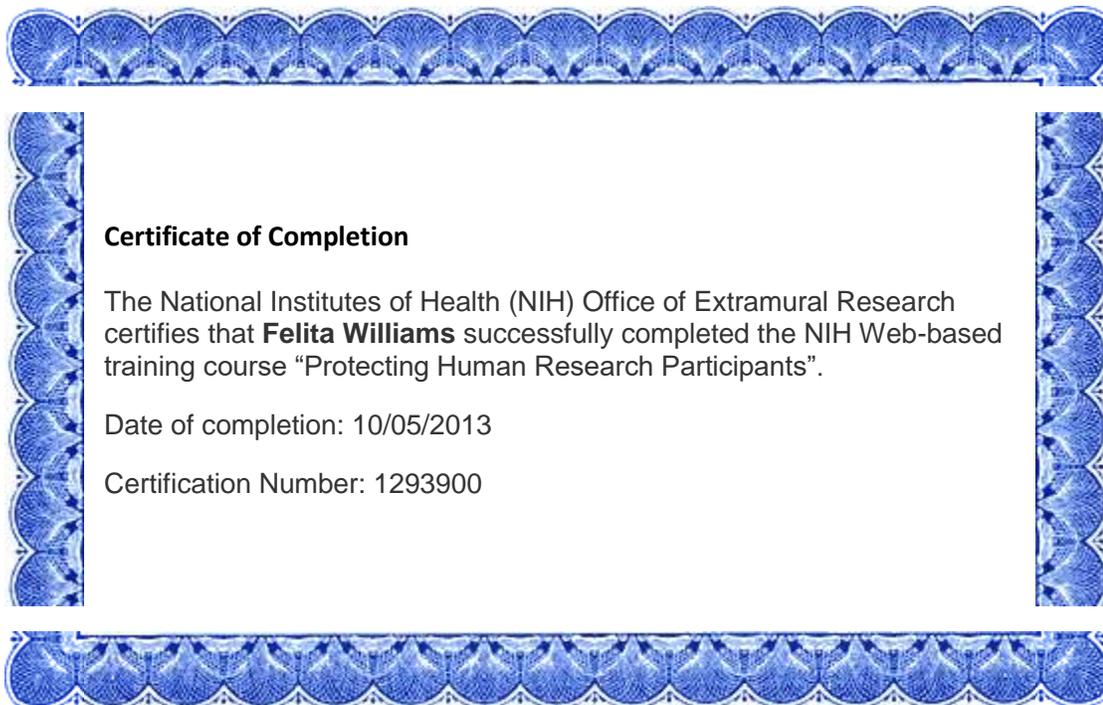
(Practical Skills 15 minutes) Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strong Disagree

10. Have your notices that you and your parents have more discussions about trails such as respect and responsibilities? SA-A-N-D-SD

**Appendix J**

## Observation Characteristics

- ✓ Characteristics of strong work ethics, Professionalism.
- ✓ Characteristics of accepting constructive feedback.
- ✓ Characteristics of coping under pressure.
- ✓ Characteristics of developing effective strategies for managing their time; able to balance time to study; time for leisure; and time for job.
- ✓ Characteristics of showing up with smiles on their faces; wanting to be there.
- ✓ Characteristics of flexibility and open for change.
- ✓ Characteristics of self-confidence; candidates who can show inner sense of assuredness.
- ✓ Characteristics that show candidates are always prepared.
- ✓ Characteristics of positive attitudes; always willing to do their very best, and not give up.
- ✓ Characteristics of improved communication skills; ability to write; ability of read; and the ability to speak clearly.
- ✓ Characteristics of positive teamwork; candidates ability to work in diverse environments; and able to get alone fairly well with people.
- ✓ Characteristics of critical thinking and problem solving; candidates who are accountable for problem that may occur.

**Appendix K**

## Appendix L

# LINDENWOOD

## INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES – Group I

### **“An Exploratory Study of the Role of “Soft Skills” in the Training and Employability of High School Graduates”**

Principal Investigator Felita Williams

Telephone: 636-699-6653 E-mail: fsw482@lindenwood.edu

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Info \_\_\_\_\_

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Felita Williams under the guidance of (Dissertation Chair) Dr. Stephen Sherblom. The purpose of this research is to explore the role of “soft skills” in the training and employability of high school graduates.
  
2. a). There are (3) Groups of Participants in this study – (2) Groups of Parents and Children learning about Soft Skills and (1) Group of Employers being asked about soft skills and their line of work. You are in Group (1), parents and children from Temple of Deliverance Outreach Ministries. Your participation will involve parent and child coming to church on Tuesday nights for one and a half hours. We will meet for (4) Weeks take (1) Week off, and then meet again for the next (4) Weeks. Additionally, parents will be asked to complete a survey and invited to participate in a focus group.
 

**b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be 5 to 10 minutes to answer a survey (via) Survey Monkey; and if you choose, an additional hour for a focus group.**

**Approximately In Group I & II Parent-Children pairs; will be 15-50 participants and in Group III will be 12-65 employers participating in this research**
  
3. **There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.**
  
4. **Your child may benefit from the soft skills training I am offering. Additionally, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about Soft Skills and may help with the evaluation of the effectiveness of an intervention, which will teach parents how to teach their children soft skills in the home setting.**

- 5. **Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.**
  
- 6. **We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.** In some studies using small sample sizes, there may be risk of identification.
  
- 7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, (Felita Williams at 636-699-6653) or the Supervising Faculty, (Dr. Stephen Sherblom at 636-949-4759). You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Provost at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.**

.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Principal Investigator    Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Investigator Printed Name

## Appendix M

### INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES –

#### Group II

#### “An Exploratory Study of the Role of “Soft Skills” in the Training and Employability of High School Graduates”

Principal Investigator Felita Williams

Telephone: 636-699-6653 E-mail: fsw482@lindenwood.edu

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Info \_\_\_\_\_

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Felita Williams under the guidance of (Dissertation Chair) Dr. Stephen Sherblom. The purpose of this research is to explore the role of “soft skills” in the training and employability of high school graduates.

2. a). There are (3) Groups of Participants in this study – (2) Groups of Parents and Children learning about Soft Skills and (1) Group of Employers being asked about soft skills and their line of work. You are in Group (II), parents and children from The King’s House. Your participation will involve parent and child coming to church on Wednesday nights for one and a half hours. We will meet for (4) Weeks take (1) Week off, and then meet again for the next (4) Weeks. Additionally, parents will be asked to complete a survey and invited to participate in a focus group.

**b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be 5 to 10 minutes to answer a survey (via) Survey Monkey; and if you choose, an additional hour for a focus group.**

**Approximately In Group I & II Parent-Children pairs; will be 15-50 participants and in Group III will be 12-65 employers participating in this research**

**There are no anticipated risks associated with this research. The study is confidential.**

**4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your child may benefit from the soft skills training I am offering. Additionally, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about Soft Skills and may help with the evaluation of the effectiveness of an intervention, which will teach parents how to teach their children soft skills in the home setting.**

**5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.**

- 6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location. . In some studies using small sample sizes, there may be risk of identification.
- 7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, (Felita Williams at 636-699-6653) or the Supervising Faculty, (Dr. Stephen Sherblom at 636-949-4759). You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Interim Provost at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

---

Participant's Signature                      Date

---

Participant's Printed Name

---

Signature of Principal Investigator    Date

---

Investigator Printed Name

## Appendix N

### INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES –

#### Group III

#### **“An Exploratory Study of the Role of “Soft Skills” in the Training and Employability of High School Graduates”**

Principal Investigator Felita Williams

Telephone: 636-699-6653 E-mail: fsw482@lindenwood.edu

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Info \_\_\_\_\_

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Felita Williams under the guidance of (Dissertation Chair) Dr. Stephen Sherblom. The purpose of this research is to explore the role of “soft skills” in the training and employability of high school graduates.
2. a). There are (3) Groups of Participants in this study – (2) Groups of Parents and Children learning about Soft Skills and a third group of Employers being asked about soft skills and their line of work. As a member of the employer group your participation will involve the following:
  - (a) Filling out a survey regarding the importance of soft skills for your business, and (b) if you are willing, participating in a focus group with other employers. The amount of time involved in your participation will be 5 to 10 minutes to answer a survey (via) Survey Monkey; and if you choose, an additional hour for a focus group.

Approximately 12 to 65 employer participants will be involved in this research
3. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your company may benefit from the soft skills training I am offering by having more skilled job candidates to hire in future. Additionally, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about Soft Skills and may help with the evaluation of the effectiveness of an intervention, which will teach parents how to teach their children soft skills in the home setting.
4. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
5. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location. In some studies using small sample sizes, there may be risk of identification.

6. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, (Felita Williams at 636-699-6653) or the Supervising Faculty, (Dr. Stephen Sherblom at 636-949-4759). You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Interim Provost at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

---

Participant's Signature                      Date

---

Participant's Printed Name

---

Signature of Principal Investigator    Date

---

Investigator Printed Name

**Vitae**

Felita Sharmett Williams

---

**Education**

**Ed.D. Education Administration**  
Lindenwood University  
St. Charles, Missouri

May 2018

**Education Specialist**  
Lindenwood University  
Education Administration  
St. Charles, Missouri

August 2013

**Masters of Arts MAT**  
Lindenwood University  
Education Administration  
St. Charles, Missouri

August 2011

**Masters of Arts**  
Lindenwood University  
Professional Counseling  
St. Charles, Missouri

August 2008

**Masters of Arts MBA**  
Lindenwood University  
Business Administration  
St. Charles, Missouri

May 1989

**Bachelor of Arts**  
University of Central Missouri  
Warrensburg, Missouri  
Major: Communication  
Minor: Business Administration

May 1983

**Certifications**

Principal  
Business Education

**Current Employment**

Schools

2008 – present  
St. Louis Public

**Professional Experience**

***Assistant Principal;*** Beaumont (CTE) High School; St. Louis Public School; St. Louis MO 01/2016 – Present

Administer all aspects of Career Technical Education Programs  
Curriculum development, supervision of staff, coordination of enrollments,  
Coordination of transportation and scheduling, developing of budgets; and  
Administration of Federal Perkins grants, and serving as a liaison between school and business community

***New Teacher Leader of NTI;*** DESE & University of Central Missouri  
08/2014 – 08/2015

Collaborate and provide new educators the skills needed for a successful school year  
Consult and mentor new educators on how to be an effective teachers  
Collaborate with new educator of how to have a Well-Managed Classroom

***Business Education Teacher/Test Coordinator;*** Soldan International High School of St. Louis Public Schools

08/2014 – 01/2016

Implemented programs for high school students  
Teach (CTE) Career Technical Education Business Courses  
Collaborate with other (CTE) Educator content in the areas of career planning of business students  
Teacher workplace readiness skills and personal skills

***Program Specialist*** (Business, Marketing, Information Technology and Agricultural Sciences)

Career and Technical Division of St. Louis Public School District; St. Louis MO  
08/2012 – 07/2014

Collaborate with Career and Technical Education instructors in development relationships with business and post-secondary institutions  
Collaborate with educators to provide work-based learning and post-secondary opportunities for Career and Technical Education students.  
Manage the Carl Perking Federal Grant  
Supervise and train new educators  
Develop effective marketing campaigns to increase student enrollment

***Cluster Support Team;*** St. Louis Public School District, St. Louis MO  
09/2012 – 07/2014

Support teaching & learning.

Implement literacy, cross curricular connections.  
Interventions and support with assisting schools improving performance of all students  
Collaborate with other educators with improving the performance of students that have the greatest achievement gap.

***Business Education Teacher***, Roosevelt High School in St. Louis Public Schools; St. Louis MO

09/2008 – 08/2012

Teach (CTE) Career Technical Education Business Courses  
Collaborate with other (CTE) Educator content in the areas of career planning of business students  
Teacher workplace readiness skills and personal skills

**Professional Memberships**

Association for Career & Technical Education (ACTE)  
National Business Education Association (NBEA)  
Missouri Council of Career and. Technical Administrators (MCCTA)

**Community Activities**

Eastern Star