Soft Skills in High School

by

Michelle Glaittli

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Danah Henriksen, Chair
Teresa Foulger
A.J. Metz

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ABSTRACT

Soft skills encompass a wide variety of skills that are necessary to be successful in school and in the workplace. From time management to goal setting, communication and collaboration, the non-cognitive, or soft skills, are fundamental to academic success However, even with their importance, soft skills are often not explicitly taught. The purpose of this action research study was to explore the impact of teaching soft skills to high school students.

A soft skills curriculum was created using self-efficacy theory which serves as the heart of Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory. Specifically, the soft skills were taught, modeled, and then practiced by the participants. The Soft Skills Training Group (SSTG) consisted of eight sessions and covered five soft skills: communication, collaboration, time management, work ethic, and goal setting. Additional soft skills related to employability were also covered. These consisted of creating a resume, completing a job application, and practicing job interviews.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative data included student and teacher Soft Skills Survey results. Qualitative data included student homework assignments and work produced during the intervention. Reflection sheets were completed after each session to serve as a self-assessment of new knowledge and application of the soft skills covered each session. At the conclusion of the SSTG intervention participants were also interviewed to gather qualitative data about their experience in the group.

Results indicate that although high school students had received some training in soft skills, they lacked the motivation to consistently use their knowledge of soft skills in

the classroom. As suggested by previous research, soft skills require hands on practice and constructive feedback to increase student use of soft skills on a regular basis.

DEDICATION

To my grandparents, Lloyd, Velma, Letha, and Bud for their love and support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Steve Jobs was incredibly brilliant, as a revolutionary thinker in technology and the co-founder of Apple. But Jobs didn't always find success in the workplace and was fired for lacking soft skills (Isaacs, 2016). In a competitive job market, technical discipline-specific, or academic skills alone do not always guarantee a position; employers must look beyond the "hard" skills, such as knowledge of specific computer programs, or detailed technical or disciplinary knowledge which is found on numerous applications and resumes. They instead tend to search for those special interpersonal traits, mindsets or work characteristics and approaches—such as dependability, professionalism, leadership, communication skills and more—to make a hiring decision. Such skills are often set out in contrast to hard skills of factual, technical, or disciplinary knowledge, as being "soft" skills, and these are incredibly important for 21st century education and employment (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Unlike hard or technical skills that are specific to the work context, soft skills can be applied in any work setting. Because of their applicability in any setting, soft skills are taking a prominent role in the workplace as technology continues to shape and change the jobs that are possible (Mitchell, Skinner & White, 2010). Due to the increasingly important role soft skills play in employment, this action research study focuses on a method of providing soft skills to high school students with a soft skill training group.

Larger Context

The value of soft skills in the workplace is an issue of global importance, with research on soft skills conducted around in world, including Latin America, the Middle East and Europe (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Groh, Mckenzie & Vishwanath, 2015, Prince, 2017). Nationally, the need to teach soft skills to be prepared for the workforce has increased as the number of jobs that require soft skills continues to grow (Adams, 2012; Balcar, 2014; Bray, 2015; "Lack of soft skills", 2013; Hirsch, 2017), more jobs require interactions among multiple individuals or departments to complete tasks, and a changing economy has made specific technical skills less valuable (Mitchell, Skinner & White, 2010). In 2010, U.S. businesses spent over 25 percent of their training budgets for employee development on soft skills training (National Soft Skills Association, 2015); soft skills training accounted for over 70 percent of the training in Europe in 2016 ("Top 3 Trends", 2017). Although businesses are providing training opportunities to teach soft skills, there is still a strong push to have soft skills taught by educational institutions, either at the secondary or post-secondary level, as businesses report dissatisfaction with the level of preparedness students enter the workforce with (Nealy, 2005).

Soft skills are not new to research on job success. Over fifty years ago, the German Engineering Association recommended that students have at least 20 percent of their coursework curriculum related to soft skill instruction (Schulz, 2008). A 1918 study from the Carnegie Foundation found that 85 percent of job success came from a combination of soft skills and people skills (National Soft Skills Association, 2015). However, this research did not use the term soft skills. Rather, the importance of

"personal characteristics" such as judgment and character were surveyed among engineers (Mann, 1918). Recent research still supports this assertion, with 75 to 85 percent of job success attributed to soft skills or people skills (Robles, 2012). While soft skills play a large role in workplace success, employers often find their employees are being hired without the needed soft skills. The State of the Economy and Employment Survey from Adecco Staffing US found 44 percent of executives report a soft skills gap as being the biggest gap in workforce skills, and employers rated soft skills as the most important factor for new hires finding success and retaining their job (Adecco Staffing USA, 2013; Wilhelm, 2004).

Strong soft skills can help applicants get interviews because it is much easier to teach technical skills on the job than it is to give on the job soft skills training (Lewis, 2017). In a survey conducted by CareerBuilder, 77 percent of employers reported personality skills "just as important as hard skills" (Bray, 2015, p 1). Soft skills are important not only to get a job, but also to keep a job and receive promotions (Robles, 2012). Litecky, Arnett & Prabhakar (2016) proposed a hiring model that is a two-stage process with the first stage filtering applicants based on technical skills, followed by the second stage which looks more closely at soft skills to make the actual hiring decision. This is supportive of new hiring strategies that have moved soft skills to a higher priority, and that those soft skills that might be able to cover for a lack of technical skills (Schulz, 2008). Employees are also able to benefit from high levels of soft skills as research suggests soft skills have a connection to an increase in wages (Belcar, 2014). Several studies (Bacolod & Blum, 2008; Black, Spitz-Oener, 2007; Borghans, Weel & Weinberg,

2006), have found that soft skills can lead to a reduction in the gender wage gap between men and women. (Belcar, 2014).

Defining Soft Skills

Defining soft skills is difficult because the definition can change depending on context, especially since some skills maybe considered a soft skill in a particular field, and a "hard" skill in another (Schultz, 2008). Soft skills are known by many names, such as non-cognitive, people, personal, applied, essential, employability, or 21st century skills (Balcar, 2014; Isaacs, 2016; Robles, 2012). The broadest definition is that soft skills are any non-technical skill or ability needed for success in the workplace. The list of soft skills noted across research includes adaptability, critical thinking, empathy, integrity, optimism, problem solving, decision making, goal setting, self-advocacy, proactivity, resilience, grit, teamwork, self-motivation, communication, positive attitude leadership, independence, self-regulation, creativity, time management, organization, professionalism in dress, work ethic, and punctuality (Prince, 2017; Bray, 2015; Isaacs, 2016; Adams, 2012; Balcar, 2014; Hirsch, 2017). Defining softs skills as a list of specific traits or abilities does not create a more manageable term because each of these traits, such as leadership or communication, can have their own definitions. For example, professionalism might include appearance, punctuality, and communication skills.

Beyond the difficulty in defining soft skills, it is also difficult to measure these skills (Lazarus, 2013). It is very easy to assign technical tasks and measure proficiency, yet it is quite another to measure an individual's level of professionalism. It is also

difficult to measure soft skills in a self-report format, as participants might have difficulty accurately self-assessing their soft skill levels (Groh, Mckenzie & Vishwanath, 2016).

Soft Skills in Education. The subjective and personal quality of soft skills makes it difficult to measure and teach soft skills. Many of the soft skills might be considered part of the individual's personality traits, such as an attitude of optimism, which can be more difficult to teach. However, it has been found that these "personality" changes can occur if given proper training and the individual makes the commitment to improve their skill levels, especially if their job depends upon it (Schultz, 2008). Even with this challenge, there are training programs that are attempting to teach soft skills. An international program for employability skills training offered through the International Youth Foundation provides training to prepare participants to work in a variety of different fields (Francis, 2017). This program teaches social and life skills to participants to help increase their skills to make them more marketable when they interview.

Before students reach the workforce, secondary schools are creating soft skills programs to address and inform their employability needs. High schools in Great Britain and Sacramento are integrating soft skills into their curriculum by requiring students to create portfolios and include areas like collaboration in the student evaluations (Robles, 2012). Even one-time workshops to teach soft skills at high schools have been created (Isaacs, 2016). In Kentucky, a program called Work Ready was created to teach high school students soft skills, such as cooperation and punctuality, where students can gain level points for each year they meet specific criteria (Isaacs, 2016). Kentucky also created a Soft Skills Certification for students to earn while in high school, showing such skills as

responsibility, punctuality, and cooperative work (Campbell, 2012). Soft skills training programs have also been proposed in Kansas and Arkansas in order to provide students with soft skills that they can use in any career field (Clarkin, 2016; Cook, 2015).

Given all of this, soft skills are clearly a core issue for 21st century education and employment—one that many employers are seeking and paying attention to. It is incumbent on the field of education to do so as well, and seek programs that help support students around these skills. In the next section, I will describe the local context for this dissertation study—a study which will focus on just such an intervention endeavor to support students' soft skills, and then investigate the efficacy of this intervention and its impact upon students. As follows, I begin with discussion of the features of the local context.

Local Context

Granite Connection High School (GCHS) located in Salt Lake City, Utah is the site for this research. At GCHS I serve as the school counselor for approximately half of the enrolled students. In this capacity, I work with students individually and in small groups about academic, career, personal, and social issues. A majority of my time is dedicated to working directly with students to make an individual college and career readiness plan, which includes a plan for meeting high school graduation requirements.

As the alternative school for the Granite School District, GCHS enrolls students from across the district on a referral basis. The district consists of eight high schools and four specialty schools, one of which is GCHS. The district spans across nine different cities in Salt Lake County. Granite School District serves a diverse population of students

with approximately 47 percent of students identifying as coming from a language minority background with over 160 languages spoken in the home. The ethnic makeup of the district is 54 percent white, 32 percent Hispanic, and Asian, Black, Pacific Islander and American Indian comprising the remaining 14 percent. Over half of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and most of the high schools are considered low-income schools.

Granite Connection High School students are 48 percent Caucasian and another 52 percent of students identify as a minority groups, with 40 percent of those minority students identifying as Hispanic. GCHS has a high mobility rate at just over 98 percent of the students moving into and out of the school each year. Almost 50 percent of students are limited in English proficiency. Just over 50 percent of parents report their education level as high school graduate or below.

As an alternative high school, GCHS has a strong focus on passing classes and earning credits for graduation, free of any of the other aspects of high school, such as clubs, sports, dances, and any type of extracurricular activities. Since students are attending from across the Salt Lake valley, almost all of the students ride a bus to attend the school and transportation budgets do not allow for additional bus runs for students to stay after school for extra activities.

Students coming to GCHS must meet criteria of credit deficiency based on their grade level or need access to our additional programs. Two of these additional programs offered at GCHS are Early Learning childcare for students that are parents and Independent Study for students that cannot attend school during the regular day hours.

Because of the special populations served at GCHS, there are additional challenges that students face to be successful in their academic and career pursuits.

Some of the issues most frequently discussed among the staff during faculty meetings are students' inability to think critically, to follow through on tasks, to effectively organize assignments, and both plan time for homework completion and turn in assignments on time—all of which are skills which fall effectively into the category of soft skills. Communication skills and "school professionalism" are also often skills that students often lack. Attendance is also an issue at GCHS. The school has a strict attendance policy; over 40 percent of students do not complete the entire quarter because of excessive absences. However, 90 percent of students that complete the quarter pass all of their classes. With this lack of attendance, many students are behind in their academic skills, but they also lack the other skills that schools teach: communication with peers and adults, problem solving, teamwork, organization, self-advocacy, and time management. These types of soft skills are necessary both in the classroom and in the workplace. Clearly, there is a perceived issue with soft skills among the student population, and a concern that this may cause future problems or setbacks for them. Following from them, there is a sense that an intervention may be needed to help support students around the development of these skills.

In my position as a school counselor, I am not able to work directly with students' academic content knowledge. Rather, I am tasked with helping students with all of the other skills that make them successful at school—the same soft skills that will make them successful in the workplace. Less than 25 percent of the graduating seniors

move on the postsecondary education. This means that for a majority of the students, high school is the last formal learning experience in which they can gain the skills necessary to find and maintain employment. It also suggests that 75 percent of the students are heading directly to work after high school graduation, making their time in high school even more valuable for teaching skills needed for employment, such as soft skills.

After an administration change in the 2016-2017 school year, I approached the new Principal and Assistant Principal about the possibility of conducting small group sessions to teach soft skills to students. The Counseling Center has agreed that soft skill training is an important piece of our Comprehensive School Counseling Program and has made it a topic of one of the four in-class guidance lessons presented throughout the school year; these lesson last for thirty minutes and have no follow up components. A one-time one-hour presentation is not enough to cover the numerous skills that encompass the definition of soft skills or allow time for practicing the skills and receiving feedback on their progress. Due to this lack of time to teach and reinforce soft skills, the aim of this dissertation research is to provide soft skills training across several weeks of the semester with the opportunity to allow for reinforcement of skills through practice. The school administration is very supportive of creating time for such a soft skills group to be formed during the school day to support student transportation needs.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to create a soft skills training workshop curriculum with the main objectives of teaching students the soft skills necessary to be competitive in the job market, to be able to retain their employment once hired, and to use their soft

skills in their current classroom and future learning work as well. This research included the creation of the soft skills curriculum with feedback from faculty, measures of student soft skills growth, and student perceptions of the usefulness of a soft skills training workshop. In conducting this research, I used the following research questions:

1. How, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' self-efficacy for gaining employment?
2. How, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' knowledge and demonstration of soft skills?

While soft skills can be difficult to define and measure, their importance in academic and workplace settings is easy to see, as is the perception of a need for these skills to be developed or enhanced for many students. These research questions aim to better understand how high school students think about and learn soft skills, and what impact these skills might have on future academic and career pursuits. While this work is situated in a study conducted in practice at a local level, the potential to inform the field is significant, since there is still a need to better understand, particularly in U.S. educational settings, what can be done to help understand and support soft skills for many students.

The following chapters will provide a discussion of and proposal for this research on soft skills training group to be implemented at Granite Connection High School. Chapter 2 presents literature on related soft skills training efforts and the theoretical framework used to guide this action research study. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology

of the study, including the soft skills intervention curriculum and data collection and analysis methods.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH

Introduction

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the larger context related to the value of and need for learning around soft skills for students looking ahead to the workforce, as well as the local context for this study on the topic. In Chapter 2, I consider literature and theoretical frameworks that guide and support this work. To explore soft skills training groups with high school students, I will use self-efficacy as a theoretical framework to guide my intervention. This approach is supported by theory, educational discourse and previous research surrounding soft skills and their importance for workplace success. In this chapter I will review the literature related to soft skills in general, with a focus on specific soft skills that will be addressed in the training group intervention, all of which is followed by a discussion of key elements of self-efficacy as a theory relevant to this work.

Soft Skills

As discussed in the introduction, soft skills are described using a variety of names and definitions. The lack of a singular list of skills or umbrella term for these skills leads to a variety of research directions. The first point of contention is if the term "skill" is an appropriate name for the type of characteristics or abilities encompassed with the term soft skills (Hurrell, Scholarios & Thompson, 2012). One fear of using the term skill is when discussing unskilled workers and the differentiation between technically unskilled workers and those lacking interpersonal or soft skills.

Musa et al. (2012) describe soft skills using the term “generic attribute” (p 565) and include such skills as communication, problem solving skills, and teamwork. They also use the term 21st century skills to describe the soft skills students and employees must obtain with the list of “critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration” (Musa et al., 2012, p 566). In describing how soft skills can be used in an organization development perspective, Levasseur (2013) classifies soft skills into four different groups: personal skills, interpersonal skills, group skills, and organizational skills, Jain (2009) organizes soft skills into seven types and Crosbie (2005) uses eight soft skill categories (Khasanzyanova, 2017).

Building Soft Skills. Soft skills can be cultivated in a variety of ways. One approach is through students participating in project-based learning (Musa et al., 2012). In this approach, real world situations are used to teach both the technical skills and soft skills to tackle on the job problems. Using a project-based learning approach can help students have a meaningful learning process and improve the skills employers are looking for, such as the ability to solve problems and resolve conflicts (Musa et al., 2012). Like a project-based learning approach, hands on or practical on the job experience is the most often used approach when developing soft skills (Levasseur, 2013). While this approach is less structured than a specific project-based learning method, both require a student to be motivated and committed to learning soft skills. Khasanzyanova (2017) examined volunteering as a method to learn soft skills and found that a volunteer experience in college added both professional and personal skills. Specific soft skills that volunteers

reported gaining were communication, teamwork, open-mindedness, and project management (Khasanzyanova, 2017).

Soft skills also lead themselves to be taught with a cooperative learning or experiential learning approach (Dyson & Plunkett, 2012). Elements of collaborative learning included group and interpersonal skills, which help soft skill development. In a residential educational center in Australia, cooperative learning practices were used to teach leadership skills to students and students reported greater feelings of confidence and the ability to better understand others (Dyson & Plunkett, 2012). Naufalin, Dinanti, & Krisnaresanti (2017) also used an experiential learning model to improve soft skills for students related to entrepreneurship. This study showed that students increased in their confidence, leadership and courage to take risks through the program.

Soft Skills Teaching Programs. As part of a university MBA program, Ingols and Shapiro (2014) examined integration and assessment of soft skills into the MBA coursework and already established student competencies. They found that the demand by employers for MBA graduates to obtain soft skills was worth the addition of the soft skill portfolios and soft skill specific feedback that was provided to students from teachers and internship supervisors. Charoensap-Kelly et. al (2016) examined the effectiveness of an in-person and online soft skills training program in the workplace. Results indicated that participants were more motivated in the course and had higher levels of soft skill comprehension in an in-person format compared to online. However, participants who were willing to learn from the training rather than to fulfill a work

requirement had more behavioral changes of implementing their new learning (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016).

To examine best practices for teaching soft skills, Anthony and Garner (2016) used five different methods to teach soft skills: self-analysis activity, an interview with a professional, a guest lecturer, reading a journal article related to soft skills, and viewing a soft skills video. Students reported gaining the most benefit from the guest lecture and elements from assignments that related to real work applications (Anthony & Garner, 2016). Levasseur (2013) believes that a training program is not an effective way to teach soft skills because of the personalized nature of soft skills, the time and attention required to interact and practice the soft skills with others. While a training program or course can teach some soft skill, Levasseur argues that the self-reflection and feedback needed to fully develop all soft skills are not found in training programs.

Soft Skills and Employability. The value of soft skills in the workplace has been noted in multiple research studies (Azim et al., 2010; Beard et al., 2008 and Bryant 2011). Individuals with creativity and people skills are highly sought after by employers, and employers rate soft skills higher in importance to technical skills of the job. Students are also aware of the importance employers place on soft skills (Direito, Pereira, & de Oliveira Duarte, 2012).

While employers are seeking out new hires who have strong soft skills, many students graduating from high school or college lack training or education about soft skills (Levasseur, 2013). Stovall and Stovall (2009) hypothesize that students lack the time to interact with peers during their education, leaving soft skills to be taught after

they gain employment. Even teachers found soft skills to be important to their teaching, but that they were not given enough soft skill training during their teacher preparation programs (Ngaga, Yunus, & Hashim, 2015). But the "blame game" of who is responsible to teach students soft skills does not stop at the high school level (Hurrell, 2015). Acquiring soft skills comes from a variety of contexts, including individuals themselves and the family unit, all levels of education and training programs, and employers who may or may not provide adequate training to new hires. Some research suggests that poor job quality, and not education, is the reason for individuals to have inadequate soft skill demonstration in the workplace (Hurrell, 2015).

A benefit of soft skills learning experiences in any format is that the skills are often transferable (Musa et al., 2012). If a student changes career trajectory, the soft skills learned in a specific context are likely able to be applicable in any future employment. A key point to making this transferability of soft skills across contexts is to pinpoint the soft skill and connect it from the current context to the new setting. The ability to use the same soft skills across context also distinguishes these skills from technical skills that are task specific (Khasanzyanova, 2017).

Soft Skills in High School. Carlgren (2013) suggests that high school students be required to take a course to develop soft skills, specifically critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving. However, this would require a change in education to address the barriers to implementation of such a course, include teacher preparedness to teach a soft skills course, allowing the time to teach such a course, and navigating the pressure of high stakes testing taking as a primary focus on educational systems

(Carlgren, 2013). While offering a full course dedicated to soft skills would be ideal, my intervention of a pull-out training group addresses some of the issues examined by Carlgren by having the group run by a school counselor and at a location that does not have as much of a vested interest in test scores. In doing this, I can focus more directly on important, real-world applicability of such skills for students, without being bound to test scores or standards-related concerns that are common in many current educational settings.

As follows, I briefly review the core soft skills addressed in this research study, including: communication, collaboration, goal setting, work ethic, time management, and employability skills around resumes, job applications, and interview skills.

Communication. Levasseur (2013) lists communication as the essential interpersonal soft skill. Communication itself is also comprised of many parts, such as listening, verbal communication, written communication, and feedback. Communication is valuable in any context, and has been found to be especially important in adolescence (Erozakn, 2013). In research regarding communication and perceived self-efficacy, Erozakn (2013) found that communication skills were correlated with social self-efficacy for high school students. With high ratings of social self-efficacy, high school students also were more likely to have positive problem-solving approaches, increased self-confidence, and willingness to solve interpersonal problems (Erozakan, 2013).

Collaboration. Collaboration includes group skills, such as leading and participating in teams and collaborative meetings (Levasseur, 2013). Students are unlikely to gain collaborative skills by merely working in a group, this soft skill, in

particular, requires practice and feedback for growth. While there are many research studies regarding the structures of collaborative learning, there is little research as to the skills students need to be successful in a collaborative learning environment (Prichard, Bizo, Stratford, 2006). Some of the important skills for a successful collaborative learning group are interpersonal social skills, conflict resolution, and the ability to see the perspectives of others. These team skills are highly transferable from the classroom to the work place (Prichard, Bizo, Stratford, 2006).

Goal setting. Research on goal setting came to prominence with the Yale Goal Study in 1953. The research found that those with specific written goals for their future had more wealth than those without the written goals (McLoed, 2012). Along with other research, goal setting theory formed and one popular goal format is to use SMART goals. SMART goals use the acronym of specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-defined (McLoed, 2012). This approach to goal setting can be found in many self-help books and online resources (Gustavson & Miyake, 2017).

Goal setting can be divided into two types of goals: performance goals, which are usually tied to external motivation such as a reward or avoidance of failure, and mastery goals which promote engagement and learning which are intrinsically motivated (Moeller, Theilier &Wu, 2011). Research indicates that the more ownership students have when making goals the more likely they will be successful in reaching the goal (Bruhn et al., 2016). Rowe, Mazzotti, Ingram, and Lee (2017) found that teachers agreed that goal setting was effective to help students engage in their academic work but felt underprepared to teach goal setting within their current lessons. Results from this study

also indicated that a goal setting intervention increased academic engagement among middle school students.

Self-efficacy can influence the level of motivation a student puts forth to reach a goal (Moeller, Theilier &Wu, 2011). If a student continues to not reach performance goals, they can lose motivation and persistence to continue at the goal, which can change their perceived self-efficacy around the topic of their goal. Because of this relationship between self-efficacy and persistence to reach goals, educators can use this information to adjust the classroom activities to focus on student areas of self-efficacy and interests (Green, Miller, Crowson, Duke & Akey, 2004). Reaching goals is also impacted by the amount and consistency of feedback from peers and teachers, reviewing goal progress and the structure of the goal (Moeller, Theilier &Wu, 2011).

Work ethic. In the context of this research, work ethic means student follow through with class assignments and homework completion, including turning work in to the teacher. Homework completion is influenced by many factors, including personal, home, and classroom factors that support homework completion (Xu, 2011). While many factors influence student homework completion, Xu, 2011, found that individual characteristics accounts for more variance in homework completion than classroom level teacher approaches. Homework management strategies are comprised of many soft skills, including time management, organization, motivation and self-regulation (Xu, 2011). In this regard, the soft skill of work ethic can be influenced by a student's ability to be successful in other soft skills areas.

Time management. The soft skill of time management is often taught under the umbrella of study or organizational skills (Garcia-Ros, Perez-Gonzalez & Hinojosa, 2004). Time management is also a self-regulation skill, which are often correlated to academic success. Akcoltekin (2015) found that students had decreased levels of anxiety when students were able to effectively plan their time, and recommended time management skills be taught in every level of education. Storm, Storm, and Sindel-Arrington (2016) surveyed junior high students and found that, on average, students spent nine hours a day with electronic social interactions, such as social media and cell phone use. They propose that adolescents need support to transition their time focus from themselves and peers to the larger world around them and future demands of adulthood (Storm, Storm, & Sindel-Arrington, 2016).

Employability skills: resumes, job applications, and interview skills. Gaining employability skills is necessary for students graduating from high school, especially for those students that do not continue in postsecondary education environments. With an increased focus on the economic factors related to employment directly out of high school, the research surrounding the policies and supports for these students have increased and included psychological aspects as well, such as student readiness for the transition from high school to the workforce (Phillips, Blustein, Jobi-Davis & Finkelberg White, 2002). Student readiness to enter the world of work can be assessed through their technical knowledge of their field of choice, but also for their soft skill abilities to interact with coworker in a professional setting. Students entering the workforce need a variety of

skills, but a sense of optimism and resiliency were found to be key soft skills for these students (Phillips et al., 2002).

Many programs to support career readiness have been created. The Junior Achievement program in Bowling Green created a work ethic seal to offer to area high school seniors (Baker Hendrick, 2009). Students earn the work ethic seal by completing eight sessions related to career skills, including resume writing and interview skills. Students in this program reported positive outcomes and local businesses in the area agreed that the students had more career-related knowledge and skills (Baker Hendrick, 2009).

The Chicago based program After School Matters (ASM) uses an apprenticeship training program to help urban high school students develop job skills. In a program evaluation to determine the level of marketable job skills participating students gained, mock interviews were conducted (Alexander & Hirsch, 2012). Overall, there was not a difference in interview rating scores between students that were in ASM and in the control group. To examine the ASM program specifically, the highest and lowest rated apprenticeship programs were evaluated. The highest rated apprenticeship programs "were characterized by regular examples of peer collaboration and teamwork, exchange of opinions, and opportunities for apprentices to lead their peers (Alexander & Hirsch, 2012, p 59). The highest rated apprenticeship programs had a strong component of soft skills and their application in the work environment.

Self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy comes from the work of Albert Bandura and is an element of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is "concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982). In other words, self-efficacy is an individual's beliefs that they can successfully navigate situations. Social Cognitive Theory focuses on how humans learn and change, and provides different mechanisms through which learning occurs, including motivational, social, emotional, and cognitive modes for change (Bandura, 2012). Social Cognitive Theory combines self-efficacy with environmental factors, outcome expectations and goal systems to investigate behavior and self-regulation (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is influenced by four primary factors: previous successes, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological factors (Bandura, 1977). Previous experiences of goal success or failures is the most significant of the four factors that influence self-efficacy (Azizli et al., 2015).

Bandura defines self-efficacy as the beliefs individuals have in their ability to be successful in their goals, and having the power to create the desired outcomes based on actions (Bonitz et al., 2010); self-efficacy is "the core belief that one has the power to produce desired effects" (Bandura & Locke, 2003, p 87). A strong sense of self-efficacy can provide motivation to take the steps needed to complete actions that lead to the desired results (Green, 2003). When an individual has high self-efficacy beliefs they tend to believe that they will be successful and set higher goals for themselves (Bandura, 1986).

While it may be considered through the lens of a specific situation, self-efficacy is found across a variety of domains and influenced by factors such as personality and environment. Self-efficacy can have an impact on individuals' performance and motivation (Caprara et al., 2011), and the ability to persevere through difficult tasks. Self-efficacy beliefs influence actions through "cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes" (Bandura, & Locke, 2003, p 87). Self-efficacy is therefore involved in a multitude of goal setting and decision-making processes related to motivation and emotional well-being. The options considered, and the opinions of others used in the decision-making processes is impacted by self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2012). Beyond beliefs in reaching goals, self-efficacy beliefs are also elemental in emotional coping and dealing with negative emotional states, such as stress and depression (Bandura, 2012). Extensive research by Bandura (1977) examined self-efficacy beliefs in the treatment of phobias and intense fears and found that a stronger sense of self-efficacy to be able to survive the fear experience helped individuals to cope with their fear response. Meta-analysis of self-efficacy beliefs has found that these beliefs contribute to motivation and performance goals; those with higher self-efficacy beliefs are able to continue to be motivated toward a task even after a failed attempt (Bandura, & Locke, 2003). This research also found that perceived self-efficacy was a factor in dealing with anxiety or fears.

Self-Efficacy and Soft Skills. Research has indicated that self-efficacy is related to student soft skills, as self-efficacy is a predictor of a student's persistence, as well as goal setting and self-monitoring of those goals (Green, 2013). The ability to learn a

subject in school, self-regulate learning and study skills, and have self-motivation to complete homework can be influenced by students' perceived self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2011). Self-efficacy can also predict future academic behaviors; children having a high sense of self-efficacy in academic work self-regulation in middle school also had this ability in high school (Green, 2013; Bandura, 2012). Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons (1992) found that children's perceived self-efficacy to learn subject material and regulate their learning showed higher mastery regardless of prior grades in the subject (Bandura & Locke, 2003). A student's perceived levels of self-efficacy in academic domains has been found to be associated with higher grades and a lower probability dropping out of high school (Caprara et al., 2011). As student move into the world of work, their perceived self-efficacy beliefs around their career goals and educational attainment lead them to explore more career options and have a greater interest in the careers they decide to pursue (Bandura & Locke, 2003). Relatedly, students who have a low sense self-efficacy in a specific domain are unlikely to consider that domain as a career choice (Bandura, 2012).

Social self-efficacy is used to describe the self-efficacy beliefs of individuals in their social or interpersonal relationships, which are often cited as key soft skills (Erozakn, 2013). This is related to the individual's social confidence, which has been found to correlate to self-esteem, and positive mental health.

Self-efficacy is also part of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which provides an outline of how individuals move from setting goals to determining the actions needed to reach these goals (Fort & Leroy, 2011). SCCT builds upon Bandura's

work to focus specifically on the self-efficacy of career development factors, such as interests and goals (Choi et al., 2012) making it clearly relevant to the construct of soft skills, which in itself signals the kinds of non-academic skills that have been noted as key to success in life and career work. As students explore their career options, self-efficacy can support a student's belief in reaching expected outcomes, including completing the academic requirements and prerequisites for their career of choice (Lent et al., 2017). Self-efficacy supports an interest in a task when success is found in the task. Specific to career skills, women who were given an intervention to increase their building and construction activities showed higher self-efficacy in the activities and a greater interest in the construction-related tasks (Bonitz et al., 2010). Clearly, self-efficacy with respect to soft skills is a factor in improving individuals' ability to succeed and perform in the workplace. This connection makes self-efficacy an important theory for supporting the theoretical constructs of soft skills being explored in this study.

Conclusion

This research is framed by the theory of self-efficacy and supported by the research literature of a need to teach soft skills to students, and the specific soft skills that are necessary for success in the workplace. Based on this guiding framework, an intervention to teach soft skills to high school students was created and will be further explained in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

The methodology used in this action research study is described in this chapter. First, an introduction to the study and its context will be presented. Second, the intervention implementation will be described along with the rationale for the research design. Finally, the data collection and analysis methods will be described.

The purpose of this mixed-methods action research study was to learn more about high school student learning of soft skills, through the implementation and analysis of a weekly soft skills training group for students at Granite Connection High School. Recent scholarship, literature, and broader educational discourse (Robles, 2012; Schulz, 2008) and anecdotal stories from teachers all point to a need to increase soft skills among students. Students need to have strong soft skills to perform well academically, but soft skills also play an important role in student employability prospects after graduation. While the definition of soft skills varies and encompasses a wide variety of skills, for this research project seven specific soft skills will be investigated: communication, collaboration, work ethic, goal setting, time management and employability skills of resumes, job applications, and interview skills. These specific soft skills were selected based on feedback from teachers and the school administration to address the soft skills that were observed to be lacking. Soft skills that are applicable in the classroom and in a workplace setting were also selected in order for the participants to have a context to use

their skills regardless of their current grade level. Data collection and analysis aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' self-efficacy for gaining employment?
2. How, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' knowledge and demonstration of soft skills?

Setting

This research was conducted in the Granite School District's alternative high school, Granite Connection High School (GCHS). Granite School District is the largest school district in the Salt Lake County, serving approximately 68,000 students. The district is diverse; just under half of the students identify with a minority background, over 100 different languages are spoken by students and their families, and 56% of students qualify for free/reduced meal pricing. The district high school graduation rate has been increasing each year, and is currently at 71%.

Granite Connection High School is the alternative school in Granite School District. The school is unique in that is the umbrella site for multiple programs; GCHS is the site for online courses for the entire district, offer child care from students that are also parents, and a comprehensive Independent Learning Lab which provides credit recovery with tutoring hours every evening during the week. The Independent Learning Lab serves student who attend GCHS during the day, but also students that enroll in Independent Study when special circumstances prohibit their ability to attend school during the day. The building is also used for dual purposes. One half is occupied by

GCHS and the other half houses Granite Peaks Adult and Community Education. Granite Peaks provides GED preparation courses and the two programs work closely together to transition students from high school to adult education and GED preparation courses.

Students wishing to attend GCHS must be referred by their school counselor and meet enrollment criteria. The criteria have changed over the years as the school policies and administration has changed. Basic criteria for enrollment include credit deficiency, or the need to utilize one of the programs offered at the school, such as being a parent and needing to access the childcare program to complete high school. The student population at GCHS is also very fluid; new students begin each quarter and students frequently transition to adult education or drop out of high school and then return. Students arrive to GCHS deficit in credits with over 70 percent of students dropping out of high school each year. Less than 10 percent of student test at a proficient level in mathematics, language arts and science (SOAR, 2017).

Four years ago, GCHS underwent a name change from Granite Peaks and with it a change in many of the school policies and procedures. With this change, the referral process was updated to be more streamlined and a student attendance policy strictly enforced. The school was also promoted as a “flexible learning option” due to the multiple modalities of learning provided (online and in-person) as well as the ability for students to repeat a course or take courses out of their grade level. In the 2016-2017 school year, new administrators were appointed to GCHS and again changes occurred. One such change was the implementation of a matrix of credits earned toward high school graduation and year in school to determine acceptance to attend GCHS. With this

change, the demographics of the school took a major shift to more credit deficient students and a larger deficiency of credits. In the 2015-2016 school year, 41 senior students were considered on track for graduation, which was 25 percent of the 163 seniors enrolled throughout the year. In 2016-2017 this number dropped to 15 percent with 28 seniors on track for graduation out of 181 seniors.

With so many students not completing their high school diploma through GCHS, many of these students enter the workforce full time before their high school class has graduated. This limits the amount of time that a student is able to learn and practice soft skills in the supportive and safe environment of high school. In a previous cycle of reconnaissance research, two teachers were interviewed as to the soft skills taught in their classrooms and the amount of class time given to teach and reinforce these skills. Both teachers responded that pressure to do well on standardized tests and extensive amounts of content to cover during the school year has limited the time given to direct instruction of soft skills. However, even without the time given to teach these skills, the teachers still expected high levels of soft skills from their students, particularly in collaboration and time management.

Participants

The population from which study participants were selected for this research included Granite Connection High School juniors and seniors who have been assigned to my caseload of students, which is done by last name with my students having last names beginning with the letters A-L. Potential participants from this list of enrolled students had an individual meeting with me in December to discuss the research; this conversation

covered the duration of the intervention and its purpose, data collection methods, and confidentiality. If agreeable, students were given student assent and parental consent forms to sign and return before participating in the research study.

Students returning student assent and parental consent forms were randomly assigned using a random number generator to one of two groups, the Soft Skills Training Group (SSTG), or the Control Group (CG). A total of 27 students were recruited to participate in the research; 13 were assigned to the CG and 14 to the SSTG. In order to accommodate the Soft Skills Training Group (SSTG) intervention into the school schedule, it was aligned with the quarters of the school year, with the Soft Skills Training Group being held during the 3rd quarter of the school year. The group was not held the first week of the quarter when class policies were presented, and the last week of the quarter to turn in all final assignments. This approach also allowed for a natural start and end to the intervention group.

To promote participation throughout the duration of the intervention, several strategies were used to engage students, and gain support from teachers. Participant engagement in the intervention was first addressed through the rapport I have developed with students. Having positive interactions prior to the intervention allowed me to engage the students on an individual level as we discuss personal experiences with the soft skills being taught.

To gain support from teachers to allow students to miss class time to participate in the intervention, I presented to the entire faculty prior to the intervention beginning to inform them of the students who will be participating, as well as the schedule for group

meetings. I also sent weekly reminders to teachers of when the intervention would be held. To decrease missing class time, and to allow for students to maintain progress in their coursework, each session was scheduled to be held during a different class period; there was one scheduling issue and Session 7 was moved to be in during the same period (4A) as Session 5. Although the sessions were held in different periods, consistency was maintained by having the intervention held every Thursday. Table 1 provides the exact dates of intervention sessions.

Student attendance at Granite Connection High School is a large concern, with approximately 40 percent of students not completing the quarter due to attendance issues. Based on the enrollment trends of the school, participants might miss sessions of the intervention when they are absent, or may be unenrolled or transition to other programs before the completion of the full eight sessions of the intervention. In order to more accurately determine the influence of the intervention on student participants, only those students who attended at least five of the eight sessions were included in the data analysis. Student attendance was taken at each session and individual student data was removed if a majority of sessions were not attended. If a session had less than half of the participants in attendance, a makeup session would be offered the following week. There were no sessions that required a makeup session be held.

The Control Group completed the Student Survey three times during the course of the intervention; once at the beginning of the intervention in January, at the end of March after the group was complete, and finally at the end of the school year in May. The Control Group only completed the Student Survey and was not provided with any

intervention materials. The intervention group followed the same schedule of survey administration, but received the Soft Skills Training Group (SSTG) intervention in Quarter 3. At the conclusion of the training group, all eight students who were still enrolled and completed the full intervention of the SSTG participated in semi-structured interviews about their experiences in the training group. The Soft Skills Training Group began on January 25 and was held once a week for 8 weeks, and each session lasted 30 minutes. Table 1 illustrates the schedule for data collection and intervention implementation.

Table 1 *Student Groups Timeline*

Group	Beginning of January	SSTG: January-March	End of March	End of May
Control Group (CG)	Survey Administration		Survey Administration	Survey Administration
Soft Skills Training Group (SSTG)	Pre-Survey Administration	8 Session Soft Skills Training Group: January 25, February 1, 8, 15, 22, March 1, 8, 15	Post-Survey Administration Participant Interviews	Follow-up Survey Administration

Role of Researcher

In this research study I served as the Soft Skills Training Group facilitator as well as conducting all data, which included conducting the interviews. I was also the participants' school counselor. I worked with the participants throughout the school year for academic services, college and career exploration activities, social/emotional support and other areas as needed. Since the intervention did not begin until the second half of the

school year, I had a varied level of rapport with students based on their needs and length of enrollment prior to the intervention. As I meet with students and empathize with them around work balance, work and school responsibilities they often want to hear more about my experiences with advanced academic work. I remained mindful about how I discussed my research with students as not to bias them if they participated in the intervention or were in the control group. Serving as the participants' school counselor as well as a researcher required a delicate balance of my roles to ensure the validity of student responses on surveys and during interviews.

Intervention

The Soft Skills Training consisted of eight 30-minute weekly group sessions. Each session focused on a specific soft skill area: goal setting, communication, collaboration, work ethic, time management, and employability skills of job applications and resumes, and interview skills. The final session was a review of the skills covered in the previous sessions and an evaluation of the goals set in Session 1. This session also served as a group termination session to address any issues or future needs of participants. Each of the seven content sessions followed the same model of (a) introduction to the soft skill, (b) examples or models of the soft skills, (c) practice and application of the soft skill (d) homework of how to use the skill and continue to practice the soft skill presented, and (e) written journal style responses to the session.

Each session began with an introduction to the soft skill for the session via direct instruction, including a definition of the soft skill and why the skill is valuable in both school and work settings. This information was then supplemented by examples or

models of the soft skill. This portion of the instruction aimed to be collaborative between examples that I provided, and students contributing with their personal experience and previous use of the soft skill. However, student participation was minimal during some sessions, resulting in more examples and models provided by me than the students.

Next, all students participated in practicing or applying the soft skill to their life. This varied based on the specific soft skill being taught. For example, collaboration included a discussion and teamwork activity, while time management included a written assignment of how each student spends their time. After practicing the soft skill to learn more about its application, students were given a homework assignment. For example, students were assigned to complete their resume started during the session or to share the goals they had set with friends and family members. Students were also given a prompt to complete a written response to reflect on their learning, including how they could use the soft skill in their life.

Participation during the sessions to practice and apply the soft skill in life varied across the intervention sessions. The completion of homework assignments and reflection journal prompts also varied. Because many participants did not come to the next session with completed assignments and reflections, time was given at the beginning of the sessions for participants to complete these items.

To better inform the curriculum and student experience during the course of the training group, participants were also be asked to complete exit tickets at the end of three of the sessions (Session 2, 4, and 6). These exit tickets served as a qualitative source of data to inform my teaching practice and to make changes to the planned intervention to

better engage the students and improve their knowledge and self-efficacy of soft skills. Student exit tickets can be found in Appendix E.

This format is modeled after the framework of experiential learning models, which includes new experiences, reflection, learning from new experiences, and generating new knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Yardley, Teunisssen, & Dornan, 2012). This was accomplished in the SSTGs by using real world examples in the group, assignments to apply the skills outside of school, and student reflection journals.

The format of the intervention was also structured to target three sources of self-efficacy, performance accomplishments, vicarious experience and verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1977). Performance accomplishments are the successful demonstration of soft skills, or a student's belief that they have mastered the skill (Bandura, 1977). This source of self-efficacy was found in the opportunities for students to practice their soft skills with scaffolding support as needed. A guided performance approach in which "we do" instruction is given was found in the third component of the session, practice and application of the soft skill. From this experience, self-efficacy can be gained to complete the skill alone, leading to self-directed mastery demonstrated through the completion of homework assignments.

Vicarious experience is seeing others successfully perform the soft skills (Bandura, 1977). After the soft skill was introduced, students saw examples and models of the soft skill being taught before they try it themselves. Verbal persuasion is providing feedback and verbal support to the students (Bandura, 1977). Students were provided feedback on their soft skills as they practiced the skill during the session, as well as

encouragement and support from me during the session. The written reflections provided students with feedback to themselves.

A timeline for the SSTG implementation is provided in Table 2.

Table 2 *Study Timeline*

Procedure	Timeframe	Actions
Preparations	May 2017-December 2017	● Obtaining ASU IRB approval ● Obtaining IRB approval from school district ● SSTG meetings on school master calendar
SSTG Curriculum Creation	May 2017-December 2017	● Creation of eight 30 minute group sessions including: ○ Session Content ○ Student Assignments ○ Student Reflection Prompts
Student Recruitment	December 2017-January 2018	● Recruit students to participate by providing student assent and parent consent forms to students
Preliminary Data Collection	January 2018	● All student groups (CG, SSTG) take pre-survey online in computer lab
Soft Skills Training Group	January 2018-March 2018	● SSTG will participate in 8 30-minute weekly sessions
Data Collection	March-April 2018	● CG will take pre-survey in computer lab ● SSTG will complete post-survey in computer lab ● SSTG interviews conducted by researcher
Data Collection	May 2018	● CG will complete post-survey in computer lab ● SSTG will complete follow-up survey in computer lab

Instruments and Data Sources

This action research investigation used a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) mixed methods research is necessary when a single data source is insufficient or when the theoretical approaches used in the study is supported through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Due to the difficulty of quantifying soft skills, a mixed method approach best served this research study to allow for a variety of data types and sources that speak to the research questions in comprehensive and rich ways. As such, quantitative data was gathered via participant surveys, (to understand students' perceptions as to whether the training is strengthening their skills and self-efficacy), teacher surveys (to identify changes in students based on teacher perceptions and get a sense if the content is transferring to classwork), and student grade point averages and rates of employment.

To better understand the fluid nature of soft skills and student self-efficacy to use soft skills, qualitative data was gathered by participant interviews, participant reflection journals and other student assignments completed during the intervention. Qualitative data was also gathered from teacher written responses to student soft skill demonstration, and researcher reflections of intervention participation. This data was gathered to be able to answer the research questions for this study:

1. How, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' self-efficacy for gaining employment?
2. How, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' knowledge and demonstration of soft skills?

Quantitative Data. Students participating in the intervention, as well as a control group, completed the Soft Skills Student Survey. This survey is found in Appendix B. This survey was created for this research project to address the specific soft skills covered in this intervention. Questions were designed with the aim to measure successful demonstration of the soft skill as well as student confidence level to use the soft skill, in alignment with the concept of self-efficacy and the soft skills being addressed.

This survey asks students to rate how often they are able to perform one of the five soft skills covered in the intervention (communication, collaboration, time management, goal setting, and work ethic) on a five-point scale from very often to never. The employability skills of interviews, resumes, and job applications are covered in questions asking students to rate their knowledge of these skills, on a six-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Self-efficacy is often perceived self-efficacy and based on individual self-reflection, and not the actual performance of the task in question (Grieve, Witteveen, Tolan, & Jacobson, 2014). As such, the Soft Skill Student Survey aimed to have participants reflect on their abilities to rate their level of comfort with the various elements of the soft skills.

Teachers with participating students in their courses were also given a survey to complete. This survey is found in Appendix C. This survey included both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was collected in the form of responses to a five-point scale from very often to never of how often they see the soft skills covered in the intervention exhibited by student participants. This survey also included open-ended questions for teachers to provide specific examples of which students were demonstrating

the soft skills and in what context. The survey also included feedback about the intervention to make changes for future cycles.

Although the focus of this research was to prepare students for employment, soft skills are also important in academic pursuits. To capture the application of the soft skills intervention on student grades, student grade point averages (GPA) from each quarter was collected and analyzed to explore potential differences between the control group and each session of the soft skills training groups.

Qualitative Data. The qualitative data was gathered in four ways. First, as the researcher, I kept my own journal during the SSTGs and it included observations of student behaviors and feedback to improve the SSTG. Second, students completed reflections about their experiences in the SSTG and the application the content has to their lives. These reflections were completed from prompts provided during the training group sessions. Examples of prompts include discussing how they could use the soft skill in their life, or why it is important to have the soft skill. Students also completed assignments during the SSTG to illustrate their learning and application of skills outside of school. Assignments were in a variety of forms, from written responses to individual and group activities, as well as student job applications and resumes.

After each session, I made a journal entry based on my experience and observation of the participants during the intervention sessions. Along with the student exit tickets, my observations and journal entries were analyzed during the intervention to determine if changes should be made to future sessions of the Group. This qualitative data was also used in final analysis of the Soft Skill Training Group.

Finally, students from the intervention participated in semi-structured individual interviews to gain participants perspectives of the SSTG, their soft skill development and their self-efficacy toward using their soft skills. The interview question prompts are found in Appendix D. These interviews lasted between 8 and 30 minutes and were conducted during the school day.

Data Analysis

In the action research process, data analysis is conducted during the evaluation phase (Ivankova, 2015). During this phase of action research inferences about the intervention are made to determine next steps for the intervention (revision, expansion, or planning).

Quantitative data was gathered from three administrations of the Student Soft Skills Survey. The Soft Skills Training Group and the Control Group completed the Survey at pre-intervention, post-intervention and one quarter follow-up. Scores from the survey were compared using an independent t-test to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between students participating in the intervention and students in the control group. The control group was also used to compare differences in the mean of GPAs of participating students.

Qualitative data gathered from participant interviews, intervention journals and assignments, as well as researcher reflections were combined and analyzed using a thematic approach. This process included a review of the data for familiarization, followed by the creation of meaning units found in the data. The review of the data for familiarization was completed by hand. To supplement the process, the software program

HyperRESERACH was used. Meaning units will then be group together to form themes from the data. The thematic analysis approach "allows themes to emerge from [participant's] descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006)" (Hamilton & White, 2010, p 277) which aligns well with the data sources of participant journals and assignments. Participant themes were then compared to researcher reflection themes to determine connections from both student and facilitator perspectives.

Validity and Reliability

A strength of this research study is the design, including a control group by random selection. By including a control group, internal validity can be increased and threats such as history and maturation can be minimized. Using random selection to the intervention groups or the control group also strengthened the validity of the research by making the groups likely to be equivalent and decreasing the threat of nonequivalence. However, there were threats to the external validity of this research with my role as the students' school counselor, intervention facilitator, and researcher. To control for this, I reminded participants that their survey responses are confidential and that they can and should be honest with their responses for feedback about their experiences in the intervention and its impact on their soft skill level and use.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter, data analysis and results are presented, as quantitative and qualitative data organized to answer the research questions of this study. This mixed methods action research study looked at the following research questions:

1. How, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' self-efficacy for gaining employment?
2. How, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' knowledge and demonstration of soft skills?

I begin with a brief overview of data collection information. Following this the major sections of this chapter go through the results pertaining to each research question in both quantitative and qualitative data.

Data Collection

A total of 27 students submitted assent and consent forms to participate in the study. Students were randomly assigned to the control group (n=13) or the intervention group (n=14). Table 3 includes additional demographics of the participants.

Table 3 *Participant Demographics*

	Soft Skills Training Group	Control Group
Male	5	4
Female	9	9
Senior	6	6
Junior	8	7

Each session had over half of the participants attend, so no booster sessions were required. Four participants attended all eight sessions. During the course of the intervention three students were unenrolled from school and did not complete all sessions. Additionally, two students only attended four of the eight sessions and per the data collection protocols were not included in post intervention data analysis. Nine students are included in post intervention data analysis. On average, 76% of the students attended per session and participants had an average attendance of 84% of the intervention. Table 4 includes attendance information for each session.

Table 4 *Intervention Attendance*

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Attendance	14/14	12/14	13/14	8/13	10/13	6/11	8/11	8/11

Quantitative data was collected in several forms. First, student participants in both the control and intervention groups completed a pre-survey (n=27). The pre-survey was completed on January 24 and 25, 2018. Following the intervention, a post-survey was given to all participants (n=18) still enrolled in school on March 15 and 19, 2018. A final follow up survey was given to enrolled students who completed a post-survey (n=11) on May 18, 2018.

Next, teachers completed the teacher survey (n=12) between March 19 and April 18 as they returned their consent forms and received the electronic survey. Nine students completed the intervention and were included on the teacher survey.

The final measure of quantitative data collected was grade point averages (GPAs). Data was available for all participants (n=27) from Quarter 2, 20 participants in Quarter 3, and 19 participants in Quarter 4.

Qualitative data was collected throughout the intervention in my researcher reflection journal, student reflections completed at each session of the intervention, exit tickets completed at the end of three sessions of the intervention, and student participant semi-structured interviews. Student interviews were conducted between March 26 and April 30 with all intervention group students still enrolled (n=8).

Table 5 *Qualitative Data Word Counts*

Data Source	Word count
Exit Tickets	1,229
Session Reflections	4,464
Researcher Reflection Journal	4,436
Participant Interviews	20,330

Data Analysis Approaches – Quantitative and Qualitative

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using three approaches, one to compare the Soft Skills Training Group to the Control Group and two to analyze the SSTG participant responses. First, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine any differences in the mean scores between the SSTG and CG at all three times of the survey; before the intervention, immediately following the completion of the SSTG, and at a follow up at the end of the school year. This procedure determines if there is a statistically significant difference between the intervention participants and those students

who did not participate. Second, the SSTG participant scores from the pre-survey, post survey, and follow up survey were compared to determine any differences in the mean scores using a paired t-test. This analysis shows any statistically significant differences in participants scores across time. Finally, percentages of SSTG participants responses were calculated to examine changes in participants across time that may not show as statistically significant in the paired t-tests.

Qualitative analysis was conducted in two cycles. The first cycle included the elemental methods of In Vivo coding and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2015). First, In Vivo coding was used to gather the exact words used by participants in their interview responses to remain as close to the participant's perspective as possible. The participant reflection journals and other sources of qualitative data were coded using descriptive coding, as many responses were answering questions and this method provided a clearer picture as to which skill was being discussed or in which context the skill was being applied. The process of descriptive coding provided me with topics around which to further analyze the data. After the first cycle of coding the data, I used code landscaping to create a word "bubble" of the most frequently used words appearing the largest in the word graphic (Saldaña, 2015). This gave me insight into both the specific words, and the overall topics that were repeating throughout the data.

In the second cycle of coding, pattern coding was used to group together the various topics or themes found in the first cycle (Saldaña, 2015). This process moved the data from individually coded segments into larger themes. Finally, in post-coding the study's "trinity" was identified and codeweaving was used. The study's "trinity"

identifies the three major themes in the data and, similarly, codeweaving attempts to move the primary codes found into the data into concise narratives explaining the connections in interrelations of the codes (Saldaña, 2015).

Using a mixed method approach is valuable in this research in order to balance for limitations in the data collected. In the quantitative data, the Likert type questions used in both the student and teacher Soft Skills Surveys may not accurately capture a difference in level of skill of a student; the numerical difference between a "sometimes" response and an "often" response is equal, but the difference in student behaviors between the two responses may not be equivalent.

The small sample size to begin the study, along with attrition throughout the course of the intervention, also limits the quantitative data from having a large sample size for statistically significant differences to be found between the groups in this study. The quantitative data provides a basis which the qualitative data expands on. Qualitative data allows more information to be gathered from participants to further explore what a "sometimes" or "often" response means in their daily life and impact it has on the development of their soft skills. To answer the research questions in this study, the quantitative data will first be presented to provide a general overview of use of soft skills. This will serve as a foundation for the qualitative data which will provide a more in depth look at soft skills for high school students.

In terms of the organization of the findings as follows, I report on each research question's findings as an overall section, and within this, quantitative data are reported first, followed by qualitative data.

Research Question 1

The first research question in this study was: how, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' self-efficacy for gaining employment? To address this question, the specific soft skills focused on employability will be examined. This includes the job applications, resumes, and job interviews sessions of the intervention.

Applications/Paperwork. The Job Applications and Materials section of the Soft Skills Student Survey did not have any statistically significant differences at the pre-survey administration between the SSTG and CG means. This indicates that the two groups were similar in their initial levels of job application knowledge and skills. However, there was also no difference found between the SSTG and CG at the post-survey or the follow up survey administration. The SSTG and CG means and significance levels for each question can be found in Table 6.

SSTG Participant Survey Results. When comparing the means of the SSTG participants across the three administrations of the survey, from pre-survey to post-survey the mean score of participants increased, and this increase was statistically significant (sig 0.04). When comparing the pre-survey to the follow up survey, there was also a statistically significant difference (sig 0.02), as the mean of scores increased. This indicates an increase in the mean scores of participants, and that those increases were found both at the end of the intervention and remained at the follow up survey. When examining the questions individually, only Question 2 (*I know the process for obtaining documents needed to get a state identification card*) indicated a statistically significant

difference at the post survey (sig 0.022), and at follow up (sig 0.028). The results from all the questions in the Job Applications and Materials section of the survey can be found in Table 7.

Table 6 *Soft Skills Survey Applications/Paperwork Section Independent T-Test*

Applications/ Paperwork Survey	Pre-Survey-SSTG		Pre-Survey-CG			Post Survey-SSTG		Post Survey-CG			Follow Up-SSTG		Follow Up-CG		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig
Q1	4.57	1.74	5.38	1.39	0.194	5.33	0.71	4.86	1.89	0.507	5.67	0.52	4.40	2.07	0.179
Q2	4.43	1.45	4.92	1.98	0.464	5.22	1.03	5.00	2.07	0.792	5.17	0.93	4.60	2.07	0.565
Q3	4.93	1.14	5.31	1.70	0.500	5.11	0.93	5.13	1.73	0.984	5.67	0.52	4.60	2.07	0.251
Q4	5.29	1.20	5.46	1.66	0.754	5.33	0.87	5.50	0.76	0.680	5.67	0.52	5.20	1.09	0.375
Q5	3.93	1.73	4.85	1.91	0.202	4.89	1.62	4.63	2.00	0.767	5.83	0.41	4.40	1.82	0.091
Q6	4.93	1.07	5.31	1.70	0.500	5.33	0.71	4.88	1.73	0.475	5.67	0.52	4.60	2.19	0.273
Q7	28.07	5.46	31.23	8.40	0.254	31.22	4.87	30.00	8.70	0.722	33.67	2.94	27.80	9.17	0.170
Total															

Table 9 *Soft Skills Survey Resume/Interview Section Independent T-Test*

Resume/Interviews Survey	Pre-Survey-SSTG		Pre-Survey-CG			Post Survey-SSTG		Post Survey-CG			Follow Up-SSTG		Follow Up-CG		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig
Q1	3.00	1.52	4.08	1.55	0.081	4.60	1.78	4.25	1.58	0.669	5.67	0.52	4.60	2.07	0.251
Q2	5.07	1.14	5.08	0.86	0.989	5.9	0.32	4.88	1.13	0.014	5.83	0.41	4.80	0.84	0.025
Q3	2.71	1.73	3.85	1.41	0.075	5.10	1.10	3.38	2.33	0.054	5.67	0.52	4.60	1.67	0.170
Q4	4.29	1.59	4.46	1.51	0.771	5.00	1.57	4.63	1.69	0.632	5.67	0.52	5.40	0.89	0.550
Q5	4.64	1.60	4.39	1.94	0.708	5.30	0.95	4.63	1.41	0.242	5.50	0.84	5.40	1.34	0.883
Q6	3.93	1.90	4.62	1.66	0.328	5.70	0.49	5.00	1.41	0.161	5.67	0.52	5.20	0.84	0.285
Q7	5.00	0.88	5.00	1.53	1.00	5.40	0.70	4.88	1.73	0.392	5.67	0.52	5.00	1.73	0.389
Total	28.64	6.55	31.47	7.89	0.320	37.00	3.65	31.63	9.55	0.119	39.67	3.61	35.0	8.75	0.261

Table 7 *SSTG Application/Paperwork Paired T-Test*

Applications/Materials Survey		Mean Differences	SD	Sig
Q1	Pre-Post	-0.75	2.18	0.365
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	0.45	0.374
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.80	2.17	0.137
Q2	Pre-Post	-1.38	1.40	0.028
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	1.10	0.704
	Pre-Follow Up	-2.00	1.22	0.022
Q3	Pre-Post	0.00	0.76	1.000
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.55	0.178
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.80	1.10	0.178
Q4	Pre-Post	-0.25	0.71	0.351
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.55	0.178
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.80	1.30	0.242
Q5	Pre-Post	-0.75	1.39	0.170
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.55	0.178
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.80	1.79	0.088
Q6	Pre-Post	-0.80	0.76	0.104
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	0.45	0.374
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.80	0.84	0.099
Total	Pre-Post	-3.63	4.07	0.040
	Post-Follow Up	-1.80	2.49	0.181
	Pre-Follow Up	-8.00	4.85	0.021

For each question in this section of the survey, at least 50 percent of students in the intervention group reported agreeing or strongly agreeing at time of post-survey. In the post survey, the response rate of agree or strongly agree ranged from 62 to 88 percent for each item in the intervention group. At the follow-up survey, Question 2 (*I know the process for obtaining documents needed to get a state identification card*) had 60 percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. For all other questions in this survey section, 100 percent of participants gave agree or strongly agree responses. Individual question responses are found in Table 8. Although obtaining documents for an identification card was a part of the intervention materials, due to time restrictions during

the SSTG, this information was not presented to participants. In the pre-survey, total scores ranged from 15-36, with a 36 as the highest possible score. At the post-survey total scores ranges increased and were from 25-36, At follow up, the rage of scores again increased and were ranged from 30-36.

Table 8 *SSTG Applications/Paperwork Survey Responses*

Applications/Paperwork Responses of Strongly Agree and Agree	Pre-Survey	Post Survey	Follow Up Survey
Q1 I know how to obtain a job application from the place I would like to work	64%	88%	100%
Q2 I know the process for obtaining documents needed to get a state identification card	64%	88%	60%
Q3 I understand how to complete an application for a job	64%	64%	100%
Q4 I am aware of the types of documentation an employer will need me to provide in order to be hired	79%	75%	100%
Q5 I know how to do a search for job openings	43%	75%	100%
Q6 I feel confident in my ability to complete a job application	71%	88%	100%

Interviews and resumes. The Job Interview and Resume section of the Soft Skills Student Survey did not have any statistically significant differences at the pre-survey administration between the SSTG and CG means. This indicates that the two groups were similar in their initial levels of job interview and resume knowledge and skills. At both the post-survey and at the follow-up survey one item of seven showed a statistically significant difference between the SSTG and CG. Question 2 (*I know how to dress when I go to a job interview*) was significant at $p < .05$ at the post survey (sig .014)

and at follow up survey (sig .025). Table 9 includes the means for all questions in this section.

Soft Skills Training Group Participant Results. When comparing the SSTG scores in the Job Interview and Resume section of the surveys across time, there was a statistically significance difference in mean scores from the pre-survey to the post survey (sig 0.004). When comparing the pre-survey to the follow up survey, there was also a statistically significance difference (sig 0.023) in the increase of mean scores. This indicates that SSTG participants had increase in their scores after the intervention, and that the differences remained in the follow up survey. When viewing the questions individually, three items had statistically significant differences across survey administrations. Question 1 (*I know how to create a resume to highlight my strengths*) had a statistically significant difference (sig 0.011) from the pre-survey to the post-survey. This item had the largest increase from pre-survey to post-survey of the entire Soft Skills Survey. This indicates that students were not familiar with creating a resume and according to the survey scores, this knowledge increased after the intervention. Question 3 (*I understand the purpose of a cover letter for a job application*) had a statistically significant difference (sig 0.002) from the pre-survey to the post-survey. When comparing the pre-survey to the follow up survey, this question also had a statistically significant difference (sig 0.003). While an increase of knowledge of cover letters is important, this is another specific item that was planned to be included in the SSTG but was not covered due to time constraints. Finally, Question 6 (*I feel confident in my ability to complete a resume)* had a statistically significant difference (sig 0.011) from

the pre-survey to the post-survey. This question is important to this survey as it is used to gage student self-efficacy by asking for their confidence level. This increase in mean scores indicates that SSTG participants were able to increase their self-efficacy related to creating a resume. Table 10 includes the means for all items in this section of the Soft Skills Survey.

Table 10 *SSTG Resume/Interview Paired T-Test*

Resume/Interviews Survey		Mean Differences	SD	Sig
Q1	Pre-Post	-1.56	1.42	0.011
	Post-Follow Up	-1.20	1.64	0.178
	Pre-Follow Up	-2.40	2.30	0.080
Q2	Pre-Post	-0.44	0.73	0.104
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	0.45	0.374
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.80	1.10	0.178
Q3	Pre-Post	-2.78	1.86	0.002
	Post-Follow Up	-0.60	0.89	0.208
	Pre-Follow Up	-3.40	1.14	0.003
Q4	Pre-Post	-1.11	2.67	0.247
	Post-Follow Up	-.020	0.45	0.347
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.80	1.92	0,105
Q5	Pre-Post	-1.00	1.50	0.081
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.55	0.178
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.40	2.19	0.226
Q6	Pre-Post	-2.33	2.21	0.011
	Post-Follow Up	0.00	0.71	1.00
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.80	1.92	0.105
Q7	Pre-Post	-0.33	0.71	0.190
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	0.45	0.374
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.80	0.84	0.099
Total	Pre-Post	-9.56	7.11	0.004
	Post-Follow Up	-2.80	2.95	0.101
	Pre-Follow Up	-12.40	7.77	0.023

At the post-survey at the end of the intervention, participants of the SSTG agreed or strongly agreed from 66 to 100 percent for each item. Question 6 (*I feel confident in my ability to complete a resume*) had a 100 percent agree or strongly agree response rate. At follow up survey administration, six of the questions had a 100 percent response rate of agree or strongly agree; only Question 5 *(I have up to date contact information for my list of references*) had at different response rate at 80 percent of students reporting agree or strongly agree. Table 11 includes the SSTG response rates for each item in this survey section. At pre-survey, total scores ranged from 17-39, with the highest possible score of 42. At post-survey total scores increased and ranged from 32 to 42. At the follow up survey total scores ranged from 35 to 42, with 4 students at a total score of 42.

Table 11 *SSTG Resume/Interview Survey Responses*

Resume/Interview Responses of Strongly Agree and Agree	Pre-Survey	Post Survey	Follow Up Survey
Q1 I know how to create a resume to highlight my strengths	7%	67%	100%
Q2I know how to dress when I go to a job interview	71%	89%	100%
Q3 I understand the purpose of a cover letter for a job application	14%	67%	100%
Q4 I know who will be a reference for me on job applications	57%	78%	100%
Q5 I have up to date contact information for my list of references	71%	89%	80%
Q6 I feel confident in my ability to complete a resume	50%	100%	100%
Q7 I feel confident in my skills that I would use in a job interview	64%	89%	100%

Student Employment. In the Soft Skills Student Survey participants were asked if they currently had a job, or if they did not have a job if they were currently looking for

a job, or not. In the pre-survey, 50 percent of respondents indicated they did not have a job and were not looking for one, and 40 percent were currently employed. At the post-survey these numbers changed slightly with 55 percent of respondents not employed and not looking for a job, and 33 percent currently being employed. Student employment data is found in Table 12.

Table 12 *Student Employment Responses*

	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Follow Up Survey
Have a job	40%	33%	55%
Do not have a job, but currently looking for one	10%	12%	18%
Do not have a job, not looking for one	50%	55%	27%

Teacher Survey. In the Teacher Soft Skills Survey, they were asked to rate student demonstration of their knowledge of employability skills, such as creating a resume, preparing of ran interview, and applying for a job. This was the only item that some teachers left blank, which might indicate that teachers are not talking to students about these skills, and as such would not be able to give an accurate evaluation of student knowledge of employability skills. The average score on this question was the lowest in the survey at 3.3, indicating that students "sometimes" demonstrate their knowledge of employment skills.

Qualitative Data Reported for Research Question 1. During the job interview session, participants were able to write interview questions, as well as have a brief mock interview with a peer in the group. Qualitative findings from participant interviews

suggested that this mock interview helped to prepare student for future job interviews, as one student specified, by "practicing the questions and everything, we could already know, like, what they would ask you in an interview, and, like, you already know what you can answer with." Two themes emerged here, which pointed to the ways in which interviews were a challenge for these students, and the explicit training helped them to build their resume skills.

The challenges of interviewing. As will be discussed in regard to communication, students reported interviewing as difficult for them because they have difficultly talking in groups. One student participant spoke to this saying "I mean usually it is ok talking with one person but that [talking in groups] is like an important part…it was difficult" and "actually speaking I guess is something I need practice with." Even despite this struggle, students have been able to find employment. For instance, one student reported that, "I suck at interviews because I hate talking in person, it is weird and but yeah, I'm pretty sure it went good because it got the job."

This session covered a lot of elements about interviewing, making each element a surface level of discussion to include so many topics. Despite this brief overview of job interviews, participants qualitatively reported gaining new information about job interviews from the session, but also noted the need to have additional follow up in the form of more practice of interviews, such as practicing "eye contact to let people take me seriously." Participants also requested more interview preparation information, such as reviewing possible interview questions because "practicing the questions and everything we could already know, like, what they would ask you in an interview and you already

know what you can answer with" which could help them "look a bit more prepared." Appropriate dress and appearance were a major piece of what participants were familiar with in interviewing as they were able to explain a proper appearance for a job interview. In the homework and reflection of the interview session, participants noted multiple items for proper dress, such as "button up shirt", "suits" and "professional hair" styles.

The reflection given about job interviews was extremely positive; for instance, when students were asked about how to respond to an interview that did not go well, they responded in ways that focused on trying again by describing how they needed to "practice how to have an interview in preparation for your next interview" and, "improve on what went wrong, be more prepared."

Building new resume skills. While participants were all familiar with resumes at a basic level, the most often reported new information was the ability to use a template to create their resumes, specifically the Google document template. Even with their knowledge of resumes, many participants hadn't made one before, even if they have been employed. For the participants that had made a resume before, they were created in a school course and not connected to applying for a specific job. All participants were given time to create a resume and instructed to complete their resume before the next session. Only one participant completed their full resume before the next session, so no analysis of resumes created during the intervention could be completed. As found in other skills, the motivation to create a resume was lacking with one participant reflecting that they need "the opportunity/motivation/reason/push to start working" on a resume. This type of response was found across the group with participants reporting not having a

reason to create a resume. Another barrier to making a resume was a lack of information to include on their resume, which was the only response as to what was difficult in creating a resume in the reflection journals.

Employability Soft Skills. When directly asked their level of confidence in employability skills and their application in finding and maintaining employment, all participants reported an increase in their level confidence after participating in the Soft Skills Training Group. Participants reported a confidence level of 2-5 (on a ten-point scale) before the intervention and from 6-10 after the intervention during their individual interviews. All participants were able to discuss employability skills, including the elements they already knew, as well as new knowledge they gained during the course of the intervention. However, even with this growth in confidence levels, there were still gaps in student knowledge and skill related to employability, specifically related to confidence in interviewing and completing a full resume. Confidence in interviews was often associated with shyness, social anxiety, or difficulty interacting with new acquaintances. These barriers to confidence were also found in the soft skill of communication and collaboration. Creating a resume seemed especially difficult as only one participant returned a completed resume. Participants did not express any difficulties with creating a resume in their reflection journals, but in interviews issues with a lack of job experience and education were given as challenges to completing a resume, saying it was difficult, “typing down your experience.”

Research Question 1 Summary. The first research question in this study was: how, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students’

self-efficacy for gaining employment? Soft Skills Training Group participants indicated that they were better prepared to apply to a job, complete a resume, and be interviewed for employment. Quantitative data indicated an increase in employability skills with student knowledge of job applications increasing in survey results. Student knowledge of resumes and job interviews also showed an increase, specifically their knowledge of how to create a resume. Although participants reported feeling confident to use their soft skills in finding employment through the qualitative data, they still faced barriers with the challenges of interviewing and a lack of motivation to apply their knowledge.

Research Question 2

The second research question is this study was: how, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' knowledge and demonstration of soft skills? This research question included the specific soft skills covered in the intervention of communication, collaboration, work ethic, time management, and goal setting. This research question includes the Teacher Soft Skills Survey results along with the student GPA data.

Teacher Survey. In the Teacher Soft Skills Survey, teachers were asked to rate student demonstration of their communication, collaboration, time management, work ethic, and goal setting skills. The average of scores for each item ranged from 3.5 to 3.8, indicating a "sometimes" use of soft skills in the classroom. There were two participants who consistently had the highest and lowest scores for each question. With these students removed, the average remained the same at 3.5 to 3.8. Because of the lack of variation in the scores, it is likely that teachers were not able to have enough information to

adequality evaluate student soft skill use. The survey was also given only once, so there is no other set of data to compare to examine soft skill growth.

Communication. The Student Soft Skills Survey showed some variation in the SSTG and CG in their pre-survey scores; this data is presented in Tale 13. Question number 3 (*When there is a disagreement with my friends, I am able to talk things out with them*) was just outside of the range of a statistically different between the two groups (sig 0.054). The other six questions in the communication section did not show any difference between the groups.

In the post survey, three items showed a statistically significant difference, but all favored a higher mean in the CG. Question numbers 5 (*I am able to express my feelings clearly*), Question 6 (*I make sure that my message is heard and understood*) and Question 7 (*When I am at school I feel confident in my ability to communicate with students and teachers*) were statistically significant at $p<.05$ for these three items. In the follow up survey, no statistically significant differences were found in the responses between the SSTG and CG.

Soft Skills Training Group participant results. When comparing the changes in the SSTG participants from pre-survey to post-survey, there was not a statistically significant difference. However, when comparing the pre-survey to the follow up survey, there was a statistically significant difference (sig 0.028) with an increase in scores. When examining individual questions in this section of the survey, two questions had a statistically significant difference. Question 2 (*I am able to communicate my needs)* (sig 0.001) and Question 5 (*I am able to express my feelings clearly)* (sig 0.035) had a

statistically significance difference from the pre-survey to the follow up-survey. These results are found in Table 14.

Table 14 *SSTG Communication Paired T-Test*

Communication Survey		Mean Differences	SD	Sig
Q1	Pre-Post	-0.44	1.01	0.225
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.55	0.178
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.11	1.37	0.813
Q2	Pre-Post	-0.56	1.13	0.179
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.55	0.178
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.80	0.45	0.001
Q3	Pre-Post	-0.11	1.05	0.760
	Post-Follow Up	0.40	1.52	0.587
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.20	1.30	0.749
Q4	Pre-Post	-0.11	1.17	0.782
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	0.84	0.621
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.80	1.64	0.338
Q5	Pre-Post	0.22	1.30	0.622
	Post-Follow Up	-1.00	0.71	0.034
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.60	1.14	0.035
Q6	Pre-Post	0.11	1.27	0.799
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	0.84	0.621
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.40	1.14	0.477
Q7	Pre-Post	-0.33	1.50	0.524
	Post-Follow Up	-0.60	0.89	0.208
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.40	1.51	0.108
Total	Pre-Post	-1.22	6.40	0.582
	Post-Follow Up	-2.40	3.13	0.162
	Pre-Follow Up	-7.60	5.03	0.028

In the post-survey, responses of very often or often ranged from 44 to 77 percent for each item in the intervention group. Four of the seven items had 66 percent of respondents reporting very often or often. At the follow up survey, often or very often was reported at 80 percent or higher for each item. Two questions (Question 2 *I am able to communicate my needs* and Question 5 *I am able to express my feelings clearly*) had

100 percent of respondents reporting they very often or often demonstrated that skill. These were the same items that showed a statistically significant difference from the pre-survey to the follow up survey. This indicates a growth in SSTG participants abilities to express their feelings. Mood and affect were found to play a role in use of soft skill knowledge, which may connect to their ability to better communicate their feelings to others. Table 15 includes the response rate for all questions in this section of the survey. The total scores in communication ranged from 20-31 in the pre-survey and 18-35 in the post survey, with 35 the maximum score in this section. At the follow up survey, scores ranged from 26-35.

Table 13 *Soft Skills Survey Communication Section Independent T-Test*

Communication Survey	Pre-Survey-SSTG		Pre-Survey-CG			Post Survey-SSTG		Post Survey-CG			Follow Up-SSTG		Follow Up-CG		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig
Q1	3.71	1.00	4.00	0.92	0.445	4.00	0.94	4.00	1.07	1.000	4.50	0.84	4.20	1.10	0.618
Q2	3.57	0.94	3.77	0.83	0.568	4.00	1.07	4.00	1.07	1.000	4.50	0.55	3.80	1.30	0.259
Q3	4.00	0.68	4.70	0.48	0.006	4.10	0.88	3.88	0.83	0.588	4.17	0.75	4.00	0.71	0.716
Q4	3.57	0.76	4.08	0.95	0.138	3.90	0.74	4.38	0.91	0.240	4.50	0.84	4.00	0.71	0.318
Q5	3.0	1.04	3.39	1.33	0.407	3.00	1.33	4.25	1.16	0.053	4.67	0.52	4.00	0.71	0.104
Q6	3.71	1.00	4.38	0.87	0.075	3.80	0.79	4.63	0.75	0.038	4.34	0.82	3.80	1.10	0.378
Q7	3.21	1.19	3.77	1.30	0.258	3.40	1.26	4.63	0.75	0.028	4.17	0.75	4.20	0.84	0.946
Total	24.79	3.67	28.10	4.05	0.036	26.20	5.31	29.75	3.99	0.137	30.84	3.43	28.00	3.67	0.219

Table 16 *Soft Skills Survey Collaboration Section Independent T-Test*

Collaboration Survey	Pre-Survey-SSTG		Pre-Survey-CG			Post Survey-SSTG		Post Survey-CG			Follow Up-SSTG		Follow Up-CG		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig
Q1	3.79	0.89	4.08	0.86	0.397	3.70	1.34	4.25	0.71	0.310	4.33	1.21	4.60	0.55	0.662
Q2	4.71	0.47	4.77	0.44	0.756	4.50	0.71	4.88	0.35	0.191	4.17	1.17	5.00	0.00	0.149
Q3	3.64	1.01	3.69	1.18	0.908	4.10	0.88	4.38	0.92	0.526	4.50	0.55	4.20	0.84	0.492
Q4	4.29	0.83	4.31	1.18	0.956	4.22	0.67	4.75	0.46	0.081	4.17	0.75	4.80	0.45	0.134
Q5	4.36	0.75	4.31	1.18	0.897	4.30	0.67	4.12	0.64	0.584	4.17	1.17	4.60	0.55	0.468
Q6	3.36	1.22	3.62	1.39	0.611	4.11	1.36	4.00	0.76	0.841	3.67	1.51	3.80	1.30	0.880
Q7	3.64	1.22	3.62	1.50	0.959	3.80	1.23	4.38	0.92	0.288	4.00	1.55	4.60	0.55	0.434
Total	27.79	4.86	28.38	6.23	0.782	28.88	6.22	30.75	2.55	0.443	29.00	7.40	31.60	2.30	0.473

Table 15 *SSTG Communication Responses*

Communication Responses of Very Often and Often	Pre-Survey	Post Survey	Follow Up Survey
Q1 When I need help on an assignment, I am comfortable asking my teachers for help	50%	78%	80%
Q2 I am able to communicate my needs	57%	67%	100%
Q3 When there is a disagreement with my friends, I am able to talk things out with them	79%	67%	80%
Q4 When discussing an issue with someone, I try to actively listen instead of planning what I will say next	43%	67%	80%
Q5 I am able to express my feelings clearly	36%	44%	100%
Q6 I make sure that my message is heard and understood	50%	67%	80%
Q7 When I am at school I feel confident in my ability to communicate with students and teachers	29%	44%	80%

Collaboration. The Collaboration section of the Soft Skills Student Survey did not have any statistically significant differences at the pre-survey administration between the SSTG and CG means. This indicates that the two groups were similar in their initial levels of collaboration skills. However, the post-survey and follow-up survey also did not indicate any differences between the groups. Table 16 includes the mean scores for the SSTG and CG

Soft Skills Training Group participant results. When comparing the SSTG participants scores across time in the different survey administrations, there were no statistically significant differences in the Collaboration section of the Soft Skills Survey. When looking at the individual questions in this section, only Question 3 *(I can give constructive criticism when working on a group project in class*) had a statistically

significant difference (sig 0.052) from the pre-survey to the follow up survey. Table 17 includes a summary of this section's mean scores.

Table 17 *SSTG Collaboration Paired T-Test*

Collaboration Survey		Mean Differences	SD	Sig
Q1	Pre-Post	0.11	1.05	0.760
	Post-Follow Up	-0.80	0.84	0.099
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.60	0.89	0.208
Q2	Pre-Post	0.22	0.83	0.447
	Post-Follow Up	0.20	0.84	0.621
	Pre-Follow Up	0.60	1.34	0.374
Q3	Pre-Post	-0.56	1.50	0.302
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	0.84	0.621
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.40	1.14	0.052
Q4	Pre-Post	0.00	0.76	1.00
	Post-Follow Up	0.00	0.71	1.00
	Pre-Follow Up	0.00	0.71	1.00
Q5	Pre-Post	0.00	0.50	1.00
	Post-Follow Up	0.00	1.00	1.00
	Pre-Follow Up	0.00	1.00	1.00
Q6	Pre-Post	-0.88	1.25	0.087
	Post-Follow Up	0.50	1.29	0.495
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.60	1.51	0.426
Q7	Pre-Post	-0.33	0.87	0.282
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.55	0.178
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.00	1.0	0.089
Total	Pre-Post	-1.58	4.00	0.338
	Post-Follow Up	0.00	5.10	1.000
	Pre-Follow Up	-3.00	4.64	0.222

In the pre-survey total scores in collaboration ranged from 18-35, with a maximum score of 35. In the post-survey, the total scores ranged from 17-35, with three students having the maximum 35. In the follow up survey total scores ranged from 15-35. In the follow up survey, often or very often responses ranged from 60 to 100 percent of the respondents depending on the specific item. Question 3 *(I can give constructive criticism when working on a group project in class*) had 100 percent of respondents

indicating that they often or very often are able to give constructive criticism. Questions 6 (*I make sure everyone in the group has an assignment to complete*) had the lowest percentage of agreeing or strongly agreeing at the follow up survey. Interestingly, this question showed an increase at the post survey, but it was not maintained through to the follow up survey. The percentages for each item are found in Table 18.

Table 18 *SSTG Collaboration Responses*

Collaboration Responses of Very Often and Often	Pre-Survey	Post Survey	Follow Up Survey
Q1 I am able to work with others to complete a project	64%	67%	80%
Q2 When working in a group, I give others the chance to talk and give their opinion	100%	78%	80%
Q3 I can give constructive criticism when working on a group project in class	57%	67%	100%
Q4 I am able to share responsibility with others in my group	79%	88%	80%
Q5 I am able to adjust my ideas after receiving feedback from the group	86%	89%	80%
Q6 I make sure everyone in the group has an assignment to complete	50%	75%	60%
Q7 When I am at school I feel confident in my ability to work on group projects with other students	57%	67%	80%

Work Ethic. The Work Ethic section of the Soft Skills Student Survey did not have any statistically significant differences at the pre-survey administration between the SSTG and CG means. This indicates that the two groups were similar in their initial levels of work ethic. At the post-survey two items showed a statistically significant difference between the groups, with the CG having a higher mean score. Table 19 includes the means for all items in this section of the survey. Question 4 (I see tasks through until the end) showed a statistically significant difference in scores between the

SSTG and CG. At the follow up survey, there were no items that showed a difference between the groups.

Soft Skills Training Group participant results. When comparing the SSTG participants scores across time in the different survey administrations, there were no statistically significant differences in the Work Ethic section of the Soft Skills Survey. Table 20 includes the mean scores of the SSTG participants. When looking at the individual questions in this section, only Question 6 (*I think I work hard while I am at school)* had a statistically significant difference (sig 0.043) from pre-survey to post survey. However, this difference showed a decrease in participants scores on this question.

Table 20 *SSTG Work Ethic Paired T-Test*

Work Ethic Survey		Mean Differences	SD	Sig
Q1	Pre-Post	0.33	0.71	0.195
	Post-Follow Up	-0.60	0.55	0.070
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.40	0.90	0.374
Q2	Pre-Post	0.78	1.64	0.193
	Post-Follow Up	-1.20	1.10	0.070
	Pre-Follow Up	-00.80	0.84	0.099
Q3	Pre-Post	0.11	0.78	0.681
	Post-Follow Up	0.40	1.14	0.477
	Pre-Follow Up	0.20	1.30	0.749
Q4	Pre-Post	0.33	1.00	0.347
	Post-Follow Up	-0.80	0.84	0.099
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.60	0.89	0.208
Q5	Pre-Post	0.33	1.22	0.438
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	1.30	0.749
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.40	1.14	0.477
Q6	Pre-Post	0.78	0.97	0.043
	Post-Follow Up	-0.60	0.89	0.208
	Pre-Follow Up	0.00	0.71	1.000
Q7	Pre-Post	0.22	0.83	0.477
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.89	0.374
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.60	0.89	0.208

Total	Pre-Post	2.89	6.03	0.189
	Post-Follow Up	-3.40	4.16	0.12
	Pre-Follow Up	-2.60	4.10	0.229

Work Ethic is unusual compared to the other constructs, as it shows a decrease in the percentage of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with each statement. This could happen for a variety of reasons, including giving more socially desirable responses at the pre-survey, or a change in awareness or honest when rating personal work ethic. Even with the decrease in scores at the post-survey, in the follow up survey the percentages show an increase to high percentages, with four questions at 100 percent of participants reporting they strongly agree or agree to demonstrating the skill.

In the post-survey of SSTG participants, 44 to 55 percent of participants reported often or very often using work ethic skills. Of the seven items in this section, five items had 55 percent of respondents indicating they often or very often demonstrate the elements of a strong work ethic. Total scores in the post survey ranged from 17-35. In the follow up survey, three items had 80 percent of respondents indicating they often or very often demonstrate the skill. The remaining four items in this section had 100 percent of respondents indicating that they often or very often demonstrate the specific skill. Question 7 (*I feel confident in my ability to complete my work for school*) had 100 percent of respondents reporting that they very often feel confident to complete their school work. Follow up scores ranged from 28 to the maximum of 35. Table 21 includes the responses for each question in the work ethic section of the Soft Skills Student Survey.

Table 21 *SSTG Work Ethic Responses*

Work Ethic Responses of Very Often and Often	Pre-Survey	Post Survey	Follow Up Survey
Q1 After I finish my homework, I turn it in on time	64%	56%	80%
Q2 If I don't finish my assignments in class, I take them home to finish	57%	44%	100%
Q3 When I am asked to do something by my teacher, I can complete the task without a reminder	71%	56%	80%
Q4 I see tasks through until the end	57%	44%	100%
Q5 I want to do my best work on all of my assignments in class	86%	56%	100%
Q6 I think I work hard while I am at school	86%	56%	80%
Q7 I feel confident in my ability to complete my work for school	71%	56%	100%

Student Grade Point Average (GPA) data was also collected as a measurement of work ethic; students who turn in their work should receive higher grades and also utilize other soft skills from the intervention, such as communication with teachers to determine missing work. There were no statistically significant differences in the GPAs of the SSTG or CG students. After the intervention, Quarter 3 grades, and again at follow up, Quarter 4 grades, there were also no difference in GPAs for the two groups. The SSTG average GPA was 2.09 prior to the intervention, 2.32 post intervention, and 2.30 at follow up on a four-point scale. Table 22 includes GPA data for each grading period covered in the intervention.

Table 19 *Soft Skills Survey Work Ethic Section Independent T-Test*

Work Ethic Survey	Pre-Survey-SSTG		Pre-Survey-CG			Post Survey-SSTG		Post Survey-CG			Follow Up-SSTG		Follow Up-CG		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig
Q1	3.93	0.83	4.31	0.75	0.226	3.50	1.08	4.25	0.71	0.110	4.17	0.75	4.00	0.71	0.716
Q2	3.57	1.28	3.85	1.34	0.592	3.30	1.34	4.13	0.99	0.116	4.33	0.52	4.40	0.89	0.880
Q3	4.21	0.89	4.70	0.63	0.123	4.10	0.99	4.63	0.75	0.233	4.17	0.75	4.50	0.84	0.946
Q4	3.93	0.92	4.23	0.93	0.403	3.60	0.85	4.75	0.46	0.003	4.50	0.55	4.80	0.45	0.353
Q5	4.50	0.76	4.77	0.44	0.275	4.10	0.99	4.88	0.35	0.053	4.33	0.52	4.80	0.45	0.148
Q6	4.21	0.89	4.62	0.77	0.224	3.80	1.03	4.50	0.76	0.129	4.33	0.82	4.60	0.89	0.618
Q7	4.07	1.00	4.46	0.78	0.270	4.10	0.99	4.50	0.76	0.362	4.83	0.41	4.60	0.89	0.579
Total	28.43	4.91	30.92	3.52	0.145	26.50	6.36	31.63	3.16	0.055	30.67	2.80	31.40	4.34	0.742

Table 23 *Soft Skills Survey Time Management Section Independent T-Test*

Time Management Survey	Pre-Survey-SSTG		Pre-Survey-CG			Post Survey-SSTG		Post Survey-CG			Follow Up-SSTG		Follow Up-CG		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig
Q1	4.14	0.66	4.46	0.66	0.223	4.00	0.82	4.13	0.99	0.773	4.50	0.84	4.40	0.89	0.852
Q2	3.71	0.91	4.31	0.75	0.078	3.70	1.25	3.88	0.64	0.725	3.83	0.75	4.20	0.83	0.464
Q3	3.36	1.01	3.69	1.11	0.419	3.90	1.10	3.63	1.60	0.671	4.67	0.52	3.80	1.10	0.117
Q4	2.79	0.70	3.39	1.04	0.090	2.90	1.10	2.88	1.36	0.966	3.50	0.55	4.00	1.00	0.318
Q5	3.36	0.93	4.23	0.82	0.017	3.70	1.16	3.88	0.83	0.725	3.67	0.82	3.80	0.45	0.753
Q6	3.29	0.85	3.92	1.04	0.088	3.20	1.14	4.00	0.76	0.107	4.0	0.89	4.60	0.89	0.297
Total	20.64	3.86	24.00	3.70	0.030	21.40	4.97	22.38	4.03	0.660	24.17	3.13	24.80	3.42	0.756

Table 26 *Soft Skills Survey Goal Setting Section Independent T-Test*

Goal Setting Survey	Pre-Survey-SSTG		Pre-Survey-CG			Post Survey-SSTG		Post Survey-CG			Follow Up-SSTG		Follow Up-CG		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig
Q1	3.79	0.69	4.15	0.80	0.214	3.30	1.25	3.86	0.83	0.282	4.00	1.10	4.20	0.84	0.746
Q2	3.43	0.85	4.15	0.89	0.041	3.60	0.97	4.00	0.76	0.352	3.83	0.98	4.00	0.71	0.759
Q3	3.50	0.85	4.00	0.82	0.133	3.50	1.08	3.88	0.64	0.400	3.83	0.98	4.20	0.84	0.527
Q4	3.12	1.23	3.85	1.07	0.127	3.10	1.37	4.0	1.20	0.163	4.33	0.82	4.20	0.84	0.796
Q5	2.71	1.20	3.39	1.39	0.191	2.50	0.97	3.75	1.28	0.031	3.67	1.51	3.40	1.82	0.796
Q6	3.71	0.99	4.38	0.77	0.063	3.50	0.97	4.13	0.83	0.169	4.17	0.75	4.20	0.84	0.946
Total	20.29	4.03	23.92	5.00	0.047	19.50	4.88	23.63	4.63	0.087	23.83	5.60	24.20	3.70	0.903

Table 22 *Grade Point Averages*

	Pre-Intervention (Quarter 2)	Post-Intervention (Quarter 3)	Follow Up (Quarter 4)
SSTG	2.09	2.32	2.30
CG	2.43	2.95	2.89

Time Management. The Time Management section of the Soft Skills Student Survey had one item, Question 5 (*I consistently turn assignments in on time*), that had a statistically significant difference between the SSTG and CG, with the CG having a higher mean score. The other five items did no not have any statistically significant differences at the pre-survey administration between the SSTG and CG means. However, this was the only time that a statistically significant difference was found between the SSTG and CG; there were no differences at the post-survey or at the follow up survey. This data is found in Table 23.

Soft Skills Training Group participant results. When comparing the SSTG participants scores across time in the different survey administrations, there were no statistically significant differences in the Time Management section of the Soft Skills Survey. When comparing the individual questions in this section, there were also no questions that showed a statistically significant difference across survey administrations. Table 24 includes a summary of this data.

Table 24 *SSTG Time Management Paired T-Test*

Time Management Survey		Mean Differences	SD	Sig
Q1	Pre-Post	0.33	1.00	0.347
	Post-Follow Up	0.00	0.71	1.000
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.40	0.55	0.178
Q2	Pre-Post	0.00	1.18	1.000
	Post-Follow Up	0.40	1.14	0.477

	Pre-Follow Up	0.00	1.22	1.000
Q3	Pre-Post	-0.33	1.32	0.471
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	1.14	0.477
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.60	0.89	0.208
Q4	Pre-Post	0.22	1.09	0.559
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.89	0.374
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.60	0.55	0.070
Q5	Pre-Post	-0.11	0.93	0.729
	Post-Follow Up	0.40	0.89	0.374
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.20	0.84	0.621
Q6	Pre-Post	0.33	1.12	0.397
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	0.89	0.374
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.20	0.83	0.621
Total	Pre-Post	0.44	4.40	0.769
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	3.79	0.825
	Pre-Follow Up	-2.00	4.00	0.326

In the pre-survey, total scores in time management ranged from 13-29, with 30 as the maximum score. In the post-survey of the SSTG, total scores ranged from 15-29, and from 20-29 in the follow up survey. This section of the Soft Skills Student Survey showed less of an increase at the post-survey than other sections, but an increase was found in some questions at the follow up surrey. Twenty-two to 66 percent of the SSTG participants reported using time management skills often or very often in the post-survey. Question 4 (*I wait until my homework is done before I participate in other activities, like watching TV or playing video games*) had the lowest response rate with only one respondent indicating that they very often demonstrate that behavior. At the follow up survey, 40 to 100 percent of the items had an often or very often response rate. Question 3 (*I think about how long an assignment will take me before I begin to work on it*) had 100 percent of respondents indicate they often or very often use this time management strategy. Table 25 includes the response rates for each question in the survey section

Table 25 *SSTG Time Management Responses*

Time Management Responses of Very Often and Often	Pre-Survey	Post Survey	Follow Up Survey
Q1 When it comes to managing my assignments, I know my priorities	86%	67%	80%
Q2 I consistently complete my homework	57%	56%	60%
Q3 I think about how long an assignment will take me before I begin to work on it	43%	56%	100%
Q4 I wait until my homework is done before I participate in other activities, like watching TV or playing video games	14%	22%	40%
Q5 I consistently turn assignments in on time	36%	56%	40%
Q6 I feel confident in my ability to manage my time effectively	36%	33%	60%

Goal Setting. The Goal Setting section of the Soft Skills Student Survey had one item with a statistically significant difference between the SSTG and CG. Question 2 (*I track my progress until I've reached the goals I have set for myself*) was significant at the pre-survey administration between the SSTG and CG means, with the CG having a higher mean score. At the post-survey administration there was one item with a difference. Question 5 (*I make my goals known to others so they can help me reach them*) indicated a higher mean score in the CG. No other items showed a difference between the SSTG and CG in the pre-survey or post-survey. In the follow up survey none of the items had a statistically significant difference. Table 26 includes the means for each question in the Goal Setting section of the survey.

Soft Skills Training Group participant results. When comparing the SSTG participants scores across time in the different survey administrations, there were no statistically significant differences in the Goal Setting section of the Soft Skills Survey.

Table 27 includes this data. When comparing the individual questions in this section, Question 4 (*I make long term goals that will take a year or longer to complete*) showed a statistically significant difference from the pre-survey to the follow up survey (sig 0.025). This question may be connected to student goals of graduating from high school, which was a long-term goal for many participants in the group.

Table 27 *SSTG Goal Setting Paired T-Test*

Goal Setting Survey		Mean Differences	SD	Sig
Q1	Pre-Post	0.67	1.50	0.219
	Post-Follow Up	-1.00	2.00	0.326
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.40	0.89	0.374
Q2	Pre-Post	-0.33	1.12	0.397
	Post-Follow Up	0.20	0.84	0.621
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.60	0.55	0.070
Q3	Pre-Post	0.00	1.22	1.000
	Post-Follow Up	-0.20	1.48	0.788
	Pre-Follow Up	0.00	0.71	1.000
Q4	Pre-Post	-0.11	2.09	0.877
	Post-Follow Up	-1.40	1.67	0.135
	Pre-Follow Up	-1.40	0.89	0.025
Q5	Pre-Post	0.22	1.86	0.729
	Post-Follow Up	-1.20	1.64	0.178
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.80	1.10	0.178
Q6	Pre-Post	0.00	1.41	1.000
	Post-Follow Up	-0.40	1.52	0.587
	Pre-Follow Up	-0.40	0.89	0.374
Total	Pre-Post	0.44	6.00	0.829
	Post-Follow Up	-4.00	7.78	0.314
	Pre-Follow Up	-3.60	3.36	0.075

At the pre-survey, total scores in the Goal Setting section ranged from 13-27. In the post survey and follow up survey both total scores ranged from 13-28, with a maximum score of 30. In the post survey, individual item responses of often or very often ranged from 33 to 55 percent of respondents, which for five of the six questions,

indicated a decrease from the pre-survey scores. A possible reason for a decrease in scores at post-survey is a more accurate assessment of goal setting behaviors after having learned more about them in the SSTG, often call "response shift bias" in which participants rate themselves based on a different metric due to their new learning (Howard, 1980). A response shift bias is a kind of change in participants' metric for how they answer questions between a pretest and a posttest because of a new understanding of the concept being studied—it can happen when participants using self-report measures unknowingly apply a different standard between ratings. This is one potential explanation of an unexpected shift such as observed in this skill of goal setting. In the follow up survey, 5 items had 80 percent of respondents indicating they often or very often use goal setting. The individual question response rates are found in Table 28.

Table 28 *SSTG Goal Setting Response Rates*

Goal Setting Responses of Very Often and Often	Pre-Survey	Post Survey	Follow Up Survey
Q1 I routinely set realistic goals for myself	64%	33%	80%
Q2 I track my progress until I've reached the goals I have set for myself	64%	44%	80%
Q3 I make short term goals that I can complete in a few weeks or months	64%	44%	80%
Q4 I make long term goals that will take a year or longer to complete	79%	33%	80%
Q5 I make my goals known to others so they can help me reach them	43%	56%	60%
Q6 I feel confident in my ability to set goals for myself	71%	56%	80%

Qualitative Findings for Research Question 2. The qualitative data conducted in this study was, to some degree, limited by the nature of the alternative high school population, and the fact that participants were often reticent or unsure of how to articulate

their ideas. However, in looking across the data, synthesized from both the interviews and the researcher's own journaling during the sessions, there were multiple findings about each of the soft skills that this intervention addressed. These findings and skills are explored in student comments thematically (italicized), with findings reported below about (respectively) the skills of communication, collaboration, work ethic, time management, and goal setting, as studied in this intervention, followed by some overall takeaways about the value in supporting soft skills through training.

Communication is not innate, but it can improve. Communication was a very difficult skill for participants, especially in larger groups, with one participant noting that "when I have to do presentations or when I have to do group work," communication is difficult, but "if I can talk one-on-one I'm fine." Reasons for the communication challenges include being shy, not liking to talk in groups, or having anxiety about communicating, with such comments from students as "I don't like talking to a lot of people"; "in general communicating with people I get nervous" and "I feel like communication is kind of like hard for me because I don't really do that. Like I do that, but like I don't. It is hard for me because I get nervous and stuff and I don't really like meeting new people."

Reflections about communication skills focused heavily on improving communication with teachers; students rarely included communication with similar aged peers or parents when discussing their ability to effectively communicate. Participants would be more active in asking teachers for help: "like if like I needed help and stuff I would ask more and not just sit there kind of and wait" after participating in the group.

When asked about specific communication skills, all participants cited eye contact as an important element, but one that they struggled with. “Yeah, like the making eye contact and stuff, I felt that was cool because, like, you know you don't really do that, like how do you do that?” After the SSTG intervention they felt their skills improved: “for umm talking to people. . .I feel like I make more eye contact” and “lately I’ve been making more eye contact with people, I’d usually look down on the floor.”

Collaboration skills are affected by shyness or anxiety. Similar to communication, collaboration was a skill that many students reported having challenges with due to anxiety or shyness about talking to others. One participant still strongly dislikes collaborating at school, saying “I, I can’t I can’t. I can’t handle group work. I just can’t do it. I have panic attacks.” Despite this hesitation to communicate with others in a group setting, the participants were able to recognize the important link between these two skills and a need to gain communication skills in order to be a better collaborator. One participant reflected that “communication is key in providing a smoother and more enjoyable collaborative experience.” This lesson contained a hands-on collaboration activity that was well received, both at the time of the lesson and in the participant interviews weeks after the end of the intervention. The content presented in the specific session on collaboration was the only skill that all participants were able to remember without any additional prompting. Collaboration was also found in many examples of application of the skills in school and in the work place. Participants gave examples of group projects in school, from posters to presentations, that required good team work skills. Interview responses included an increase in student confidence to speak up in

group projects in the classroom, as well as to include time management in managing group project efforts.

In the qualitative data identified in session exit tickets participants included the communication formula presented during the lesson as something they found useful and would consider using in the future. However, in the individual interviews, none of the participants mentioned the communication formula or its use in real life situations. They did include feelings and emotions as a valuable reason to effectively communicate "to let people know how you are feeling."

Work ethic relates to motivation. Work ethic was covered in Session 4, which was the first session with a low attendance rate and as a result, the in-session discussion about the topic was limited compared to prior sessions. Participants indicated an understanding of how they became skilled at various activities; they enjoyed the activity, so they would spend longer on it, which lead to more practice. However, students did not make the connection that the opposite is also true; not enjoying an activity decreases the time spent, leading to less practice to create proficiency. Participants did make the connection that work ethic and work completion have with time management and goal setting, often citing these skills together in their examples of skill application in school. To assist in completing homework and other required tasks, participants relied on their cell phones—"on my phone I made some notes"—as the most often used strategy to increase their work completion.

Time management was a challenge to implement. In the time management session of the intervention, students were able to see a visual representation of their time use and

asked to adjust that usage to reach specific academic or work goals. “I know we did the paper to see where we spend most of our time and what we should work on, what we should have it be, like school work and I think mine had like a lot of extra time when I wasn't really doing school work, so putting more into school work then like watching tv and relaxing.” Participants were familiar with time management and the various strategies to assist them in using time wisely, with the use of cell phone reminders and planners as the most often mentioned strategy. In reflecting on their time use, participants were able to identify where they needed to make changes to reach their goals, such as sleeping less, but also ways to make these changes. However, in the interviews following the intervention it was difficult for many participants to implement their indicated strategies long term. Participants had a clear understand of what time management means and specific strategies that could assist them in using time wisely but using these skills after the intervention was rare.

Positive feelings around goal setting. Goal setting was covered in the first session where participants made both long- and short-term goals, and again in the final session when these goals were reviewed, and progress was shared. Goal setting was an area where participants had a high level of familiarity with the concept, even using terms about goal setting not presented in the intervention, such as intermediate goals. Participants reported high levels of positive affect when reaching their goals, saying they feel “proud,” “great” and “feel better about myself” and “overall better, accomplished, successful, happy, relieved.” They also use that feeling of positive affect as a motivation to continue to set and work toward their goals, saying that reaching goals “…makes me

feel motivated" and "feel like I can do more." However, the opposite is also true with one participant being hesitant to set goals because of the negative feelings when goals are not accomplished. Participants reported having strong supports for reaching their goals, specifically mothers, siblings, teachers, school counselors and friends.

Almost all of the SSTG goals made in Session 1 were related to academics, and included passing classes, completing packets, attending school, and graduating on time. At the follow up on goals in Session 8, progress was widely varied among the participants; some had reached their goal and already set new ones, while others did not remember their goal. Despite this variety of goal progress during the intervention, participants enjoyed hearing about the goals of others and the strategies they used to accomplish their goals, with a participant stating "just like sharing with the students more" as a positive piece of discussion. This discussion among group members was most reported as the favorite part of the lesson, and as the biggest take away from the session. When discussing goal setting, participants demonstrated a strong knowledge of goal setting and the elements that help support reaching goals, such as writing down their goals or sharing them with others. However, even with this knowledge few participants reported using these skills as they work toward their goals; participants were still setting goals but did not have a manner of check in or accountability set up to reach their goals. "I'm not writing them [goals] down, yeah, I should probably like have something to write things down on."

Soft skills self-efficacy improves through training. An overall thematic realization was the fact that, even only through a brief intervention, students did report increases or

improvement in self-efficacy. When assessing participants confidence level with using soft skills in the school context, all participants reported an increase in their confidence level, moving from a 2-6 (on a ten-point scale) before the intervention to 8-10 in their confidence level after the Soft Skills Training Group.

More importantly, participants were also able to give specific examples of what the soft skills would look like in the classroom, such as using communication, collaboration, and time management in completing a group project: "when you are making a poster, I guess about a specific topic, it is useful to be able to properly work with your team to make the best poster that you can, as well as communicating with each other. . . goal setting just setting up yourselves so you can have steps for everyone involved and time management could also work there so you could manage your time there and have a specific time limit." While most of the soft skills covered in the class were able to be used in an example of application, work ethic was only given as a skill to be used in school by one participant.

While participants were taught and interviewed about the soft skills individually, they were able to see the connections among many of the skills. The main connections were among communication and collaboration, and goal setting and time management. Participants not only remembered communication and collaboration as specific soft skills covered during the intervention, but they also were able to identify them as skills they could (or are) applying in the classroom. When discussing things that support reaching their goals, participants were able to identify the role that time management played related to needing to devote time to their goals. Specifically related to high school

graduation as a goal, students reported needing to have good time management, work ethic, and set goals to keep them on track with earning credits. High school graduation was the most frequent goal set during the first session of the intervention, with only three participants not listing a goal related to high school graduation.

While participants were able to clearly explain the connections between soft skills, especially the importance of communication in having a positive collaborative experience, participants were less clear in how they would apply these skills in their lives after the end of the SSTG. When reflecting on when they would use the skills, responses were vague, with such responses as "daily" and "in anyway possible." It was not until the individual interviews that participants were able to expand upon their soft skill use to articulate specific situations in which they have used the soft skills in school. But it was not without prompting from me as the interviewer that participants were able to provide specific examples, with asking follow up questions such as "what does that [specific soft skill] look like?", "which specific class have you used that skill?"

Participants reported both already knowing most of the content covered in the Soft Skills Training Group and viewing most of the information as a review of concepts they had already been taught, either at school or through specialty programs. Even with this previous knowledge, participants did not consistency demonstrate these soft skills, either before or after the SSTG. When asked why they don't use the soft skills, participants indicated a lack of motivation to use the skill, with one participant describing it as "honestly just prioritizing and not procrastinating" as what was needed to use soft

skills in his life. Based on the study's "trinity" emotions and affect play a large role in participant use of soft skills.

Thus, we can conclude that feelings, mood, and attitude were all topics found in the data as reasons why a participant would or would not use a soft skill; having positive emotions around previous success in the use of soft skill lead to increased confidence and further use of the specific soft skill.

Research Question 2 Summary. The second research question in this study was how, and to what extent, does participating in a soft skills training group affect students' knowledge and demonstration of soft skills? Soft Skills Training Group participants indicated that they were knowledgeable about the soft skills covered in the group, with high rates of agreement in survey responses. However, the qualitative data illustrated that the demonstrated of the soft skills was less clear to see. Participants appeared to struggle to consistently use soft skills in their time at school. While the SSTG may have brought their attention to soft skills and their value, the long-term application of the soft skills appears to still be a challenge for students as they look for motivation and support to continue to use soft skills.

Conclusion and synthesis of qualitative and quantitative findings

The qualitative data analysis process included creating themes from the coded materials. From the individual segments of code, I was able to examine the major themes that reoccurred throughout the data and the study's "trinity" or top three themes were found in the data. First, motivation or desire to use soft skills had a great impact on student use of their soft skills. Participants were able to clearly express the components of

each individual soft skill, as well as how the soft skills combined to be used in a classroom setting. However, they were not always motivated or convinced to use the soft skills.

Motivation to use their soft skill knowledge is also closely related to the second major theme of student focus on academic goals. Participant goals set during the SSTG, as well as their examples of soft skill use in the classroom focused specifically on high school graduation, with the individual elements of attendance, passing classes, and completing packets. These three elements were found throughout student goals and speaks to awareness of their value and necessity for earning a high school diploma.

The final major theme found in this study was the emotional health of the students having an impact on their soft skill use and confidence. Participants often spoke about anxiety, as well as a lack of confidence in stretching beyond their comfort zones. Participants were hesitant to participate in the intervention itself, and tentative in speaking about their personal experience with the SSTG. Based on the data provided by students and my researcher journals, students lack confidence to move beyond their comfort zone which limited their ability to gain self-efficacy in using soft skills.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This is chapter, I will discuss the findings of this project and how it will impact my future work with soft skills in high school. I will cover the lessons learned during the intervention, including the preparations and post-intervention stages. Finally, the connections found to previous research and implications for future research will be discussed.

Soft Skills Training Group Benefits

The Soft Skills Training Group participants were able to increase their knowledge and abilities related the soft skills taught during the intervention. When focusing on the employability skills covered, participants were able to gain more knowledge about how to create a resume, and the resources, both online and in person, that are available to support them. While participants may not have ended the intervention with a completed resume, they felt confident in their abilities to complete one in the future. They also increased their confidence in completing job applications and going to job interviews. Participants had a strong amount of knowledge of what to wear to an interview, but expressed appreciation for the chance to practice job interview questions and have a reminder of other items to consider, such as how to prepare for a job interview.

While participants had an increase in their confidence levels in their employability skills, their actual employment during and after the SSTG did not vary much. Employment may have been postponed in order to focus on high school graduation, as that as a goal on the minds of all participants. Setting goals around

graduation was the focus of the goal setting session, and of the senior participants who completed the SSTG, only one did not graduate on time.

SSTG participants understood the importance of communication and collaboration skills, both in the classroom and in the workplace. In school, participants expressed using communication and collaboration when working on group projects or posters. They also understood that these soft skills can be used in the workplace to divide the work that needs to be completed during shift. Anxiety and shyness are barriers for participants growing both their communication and collaboration soft skills.

Participants were aware of time management strategies, such as using a planner and setting reminders or alarms on their phones. However, they had not evaluated their time use to look for patterns or adjust that could be made to better align their time use with their goals. Many participants used a large amount of their time on sleeping, watching tv or checking internet sites not related to school work. After noticing these patterns in their time use, participants seemed aware of the changes that they needed to make, However, at follow up, the changes made to their time use were not lasting; some participants went back to old habits of time use after the completion of the SSTG.

Overall, the SSTG provided explicit instruction to participants about the soft skills included in the intervention and an opportunity to evaluate how they have used each soft skill in the past, and how its use can be beneficial in the future. The Soft Skill Student Survey indicated that participants increased their knowledge and confidence level in using the soft skills, and the Teacher Soft Skill Survey supports that participants did have an average use of the soft skills in class. Based on participant reflection journals and

interviews, participants understand the soft skills and can provide clear definitions and examples of the soft sills.

Lessons Learned from the Soft Skills Training Group

Feedback from participants and teachers supports continued instruction of soft skills at Granite Connection High School. Teachers were supportive of the SSTG and allowed students to miss class to attend, as well as communicated with me when students were absent and would not be in the session. Participants also reported enjoying the SSTG, saying they liked the group, found it valuable, and that it was an overall positive experience. They also often agreed that they would participate again; after a brief hesitation one participant even agreed to teach a session of the SSTG in the future. Elements of the SSTG have already been continued in the next school year. Specific sessions of the curriculum have been integrated into the small groups being run monthly through the counseling center.

When conducting the first cycle of this action research project, I had the assumption that students did not have the opportunity to have soft skills explicitly taught and subsequently reinforced at school due to a lack of regular school attendance. However, it appears that students, even with periods of absence from schooling, did receive previous instruction on soft skills. This instruction came in regular classroom settings, or in specialty programs similar to the SSTG intervention. Participants reported often and very often using soft skills in their lives. Instead of focusing on teaching the soft skills specifically, future intervention groups will need to focus more on practice of the soft skills and providing motivation to use soft skills in school and related to

employment. Lack of motivation was found as a reason to not use soft skills throughout the intervention, specifically in regard to using soft skills in reaching goals. Participants reported being lazy, spending a large amount of time sleeping, and not having enough time as reasons they struggled integrating the soft skills into their daily lives. Students have a strong desire to graduate from high school, as all student had at least one goal related to academics, but they had difficulty translating that desire into the actions necessary to complete graduation requirements.

Beyond finding the motivation to use their soft skill knowledge, students also lacked feedback about their growth and progress in their skill development. Participants all expressed having a strong support system of family and friends that they could use to support them in reaching their goals, as well as serve as a resource as they prepared for job interviews. Even with the reflection sheets and assignments to complete outside of the intervention meetings, there was not a time when specific feedback was given to participants about their soft skill development. Reflections remained anonymous, so I don't have a way to provide any feedback individually to students about how they are planning to use a soft skill. Because of the structure of the SSTG I also didn't have any connection to teachers for them to serve as a source of feedback either.

Participants liked talking to other group members about their goals and having activities together to get peer to peer feedback and support. Because peers are so important in high school, I believe it will be important to leverage the value of peer relations in a soft skills training program. Even though at Granite Connection High School we are a small school, with under 300 students at any time, we have over 900

students pass through the school during the year. Because of this high volume of turn-over in the student body, participants in the Soft Skills Training Group may not have known other members prior to meeting them in this group. Having more social time to build bonds and relationships in the group could be a powerful tool to provide motivation for students to use their soft skills. Ryan (2000) discusses peers as models who can demonstrate a skill that will then be copied by the observer. This can also increase students' self-efficacy of using soft skills after they are able to see a peer be success in their attempts at the skill. However, the relationship is also important; positive regard to the peer makes their use as a model more effective (Ryan, 2000).

Even with a lack of connections between the students, events happening around the school have an impact on all students, even if they are not directly connected to the event. For instance, there had been an increase of gang activity in the community, and during the SSTG intervention a shooting occurred at a neighboring school that resulted in a fatality. There were some direct connections to students at our school, including two participants of the SSTG. This event had an impact on two sessions of the group. The first session was influenced by the new mood of the school—which included a high alert on safety procedures and a lot of confusion and questions about the safety at our school. Some participants were well aware of the incident, while others were only hearing information second hand. This atmosphere of high emotions made its way into the session as participants were distracted and somber. The session the next week was also impacted as we were discussing time management and the activity was to review time use from the previous evening, which was the night of the funeral services. For those

participants connected to the death, the activity was not effective given the sensitivity of their experience and how this disconnected from the purpose of the group activity as planned. It was also challenging and uncomfortable for me as the teacher and researcher, since I was not informed about funeral and could not adjust the activity before the group met. This serves as an important reminder of the highly contextual and sometimes sensitive nature of research in practice—and the fact that emotions and life events also play a role in the challenges that students may face in learning about soft skills in such a setting.

Participant Recruitment and Retainment

When recruiting participants, it was relatively easy to present the research study and have students agree to participate and sign the student assent forms. However, a significant recruitment challenge occurred in being able to get returned parent permission forms. I followed up with students multiple times to remind them to return the signed parent consent forms, which took a great deal of time and further added to recruitment challenges. It would have been beneficial to have more time to meet with students and remind them to return the required paperwork, but I am hesitant that more time to gather the permission forms before the start of the intervention would have resulted in an increase in participants as some students said they had changed their mind about participating, or that their parents did not want to sign the consent forms. Returning parental permission forms is not a new challenge, as I have also faced this issue with minimal success for school fieldtrips and events. However, in this case it does serve as a point of consideration and troubleshooting for those undertaking research on non-

required school sessions such as soft skills, as well as those undertaking research in similar high school populations.

Since the number of students returning their parental consent forms was much lower than I originally anticipated, the SSTG was smaller than planned, having 14 participants instead of the planned 20-25 students. With a smaller starting group, it was essential that as many participants as possible remained in the SSTG for the full intervention. To remind participants about the sessions, I provided them with a schedule of the sessions, as well as individual reminders the day of the session. Teachers were also emailed each week with reminders to excuse the students from class to participate. While I was able to increase the number of participants at each session with the individual reminders to attend, it was very time intense and would not be sustainable for future student groups. Possible solutions would be to use the all call intercom system to announce for participants to leave class or adjust the session timing to increase the likelihood of participants remembering on their own.

Intervention Implementation

In implementing the intervention of the SSTG, I believe that the duration and number of sessions in the intervention could both be increased. The individual sessions were 30 minutes long, and some sessions had more content then I was able to be covered during that time. During the resume session, participants had approximately ten minutes to work on their resumes before the end of the session, allowing most participants to only add their basic information to the resume. In the interview session, participants were only able to have one mock interview question each. Because learning is more meaningful

when students both can fully engage in the content and can make relevant connections to their own lives, it would be imperative in future sessions to allow students time to more connect to the content and practice it with relevant connections.

In future SSTGs, I would adjust the timing to allow for 30 minutes of group introduction and discussion of the soft skill, but add an additional follow up session of 30 minutes at another time in the week to practice the skill in the group or to reflect on their efforts to use the soft skill in school and at work since the first session. The length of the intervention could also be increased to be a full quarter or semester to cover more skills or give some soft skills addition sessions. Some soft skills not included in the SSTG, such as organization, could also be added to the intervention. Teachers also agreed with this assessment, with one teacher saying the sessions needed "to be longer term and with more practice."

Post-intervention Reflection

At the conclusion of the SSTG, my researcher reflection focused primarily on logistics of the intervention, such as increasing the number and length of each session, as well as making larger changes by connecting the SSTG to in class work. Along with the addition of a follow up session to continue to practice the soft skill of the week, it could also be supplemented by having teachers focus on this soft skill in their classroom and providing clear feedback on student use of the soft skill. This would also allow for more specific feedback from teachers in the data collection as they work with students on a skill and can make observations about the use of the soft skill in real time, instead of at a follow up survey at the conclusion of the intervention, as was done in this research. By

collaborating with teachers, I would also be able to collect data about soft skills use in the classroom by making researcher observations to classrooms to determine practical use of the soft skills. A comparison of researcher observations with participant self-reflections could provide interesting insight into the ways students are evaluating their soft skills knowledge and use. These observations could also be used to provide feedback to students about their soft skills. Providing positive feedback could also increase student self-efficacy for using soft skills in the future.

Connections to Previous Research

As discussed in Chapter 2, soft skill building has been found to be successful when hands on approaches are used, such as volunteering (Khasanzyanova, 2017). Jain and Anjuman (2013) posit that experience-based training is necessary to effectively translate the soft skills being taught into application in the work place. While the SSTG attempted to have practical or real-life situations to help develop soft skills, the intervention did not reach a high level of hands on activities to support a long-term increase in soft skills use. Based on the interviews, while participants responded favorably to using soft skills, they were not able to explain how or when they used their soft skills, suggesting gaps for a variety of reasons. Based on the previous literature, the SSTG could benefit by having a project-based learning approach in combination with a soft skill teaching component (Musa et al., 2012). Such a project could be focused around a school or community issue, which could also draw students together to build their social bonds.

Soft skills are also developed with self-reflection of soft skills growth (Levasseur, 2013). Crosbie (2005) included self-analysis or self-study as a required component of successful soft skill training programs to reflect on adding the skills to their lives, as well as determining the effectiveness of soft skills use. Future interventions could benefit from additional time for students to self-reflect on their soft skill use during the school day, instead of as a homework assignment, as was implemented in the SSTG. The individual interviews gave some self-analysis to the participants as they explained their use and application of soft skills, but this was not done at a time that participants could use this self-reflection during the SSTG.

While self-efficacy connects well to soft skill development, after completing this research I think a few other theories could also be used to frame future research. Theories of motivation would be one such framework to use to guide students to apply the skills they have learned in their daily lives. Finding a way to motivate students to use the knowledge and skills that they have seemed to be lacking for these participants across time.

Self-Determination Theory asserts that there are three broad types of motivation, intrinsic, extrinsic, or amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Amotivation is the absence of motivation. Intrinsic motivation comes from internal desires to complete an activity or reach a goal (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The satisfaction of the activity itself is the reward that motivates an individual to participate. These activities are completed without an external reward, such as food or money, which can be found with extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation focuses doing an activity for the value given for completing the activity. The

extrinsic motivation might come in the form of a reward, such as money, or it could be to avoid a negative consequence, such as doing homework being extrinsically motivated to avoid parents being upset (Ryan & Deci, 2000). With long-term and consistent use of soft skills, students may come to enjoy using them because of the satisfaction they find it provides them to manage their school work and reach goals. However, there is a strong extrinsic motivation to be competent with soft skills to avoid consequences, such as planning ahead and using time management to avoid stressful situations or missing social events to complete other work.

Beyond motivation to use soft skills, a model around human development and needs might also be useful, specifically for a population of alternative high school students. While soft skills are valuable and necessary for success in school and in the workplace, many students also face challenges that take their time and attention before school. For this reason, a theory related to fulfilling basic needs, such as Maslow (1971), might be a beneficial way to frame further research projects in this area. In his work, Maslow (1971) asserts that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy, with the most pressing needs needing to be fulfilled before subsequent needs can be addressed. The first level of needs are physiological needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing. For some of the students at Granite Connection High, food insecurity and homelessness are challenges that must be addressed before the student can continue through the hierarchy.

The next level of needs are safety needs, which consists of security and health needs. At the next level, relationships become the primary need as individuals search for love and belonging (Maslow, 1971). The last needs that are reached are esteem and self-

actualization. These are the levels that soft skills would become a more prominent feature as students would be able to move beyond the physical needs they have to the more personal and individualized needs to respect themselves. Soft skills may often take a back seat for students when they have traumatic lives outside of school, which would make a lack of soft skill development understandable. For these students, a more appropriate approach might be to use the intervention to connect them to community resources to secure safety with proper housing and food access.

Future Research /Implications

Based on this research study, future research surrounding high school students developing soft skills should contain five components: (a) explicitly teaching soft skills, (b) providing motivation to use the skills taught, (c) connecting with teachers to provide practice, (d) providing personalize and constructive feedback, and (e) increasing the intervention duration. First, the soft skills need to be explicitly taught, as was done in this intervention. Even though some students had previous knowledge of the soft skills, there were still gaps in their knowledge and all of the participants reported learning something new during the SSTG. Next, finding motivation to use the soft skills outside of the intervention, as well as across time would be an underlying portion of the session content. Students need to have a reason to use the soft skill being taught, as well as a reason to commit to doing the intervention activities which will lead to soft skill mastery.

The third component of a successful soft skill development intervention would be to make it a larger program, beyond a single pull out of class time once a week. This includes making connections with teachers to focus on soft skill use in the classroom,

which may include integrating soft skills more purposefully into the current curriculum, as well as explicitly teaching it during scheduled times, such as an advisory period. Along with teaching the soft skills, structured times to practice the soft skill would be included in the classroom. This would also be when the additional component of personalized feedback could occur.

Beyond getting feedback from teachers, student would also self-reflect on their soft skill use and growth to be more self-aware of which soft skills they need to spend more time developing and to reflect on the progress they have made throughout the intervention. While a soft skills training group could function as a standalone intervention, it appears that all stakeholders—students, teachers, and administrators—support the continuation of the SSTG that is more robust, including the potential to connect to outside stakeholders, such as employers, to assist in the employability skills sessions.

In order to have the time to teach, reflect, and practice soft skills, the intervention sessions will need to be increased, both in the individual session length and the number of sessions. Having 30 minutes to teach a single soft skill may be sufficient, but an additional session would be required to have time to practice the soft skill and to conduct personal reflections. More sessions overall would be needed to provide time to practice before being in the classroom to practice in a real-world setting.

Brining all the components identified for a successful soft skills intervention together could also be done with a larger scale community project. Participants in this study identified connection to their peers as something they enjoyed and wanted more of,

specifically regarding goal setting updates. A connection to each other, and the community, could be made through the development of a project that would require strong soft skills. This project-based learning approach would allow for instruction of soft skills to be aligned with student use of the skills as they coordinate the completion of a project in the community. Research has demonstrated that students are most engaged in and constructive about their own learning when it has relevant connections to their lives, experiences, and world (Brundiers, Wiek, & Redman, 2010), so expanding the project at such a level could be a way to tap into this potential and power to support their learning and motivation.

Conclusion

As the job market continues to be competitive, employers have become well aware of the value an employee with strong soft skills brings to an organization. Companies are devoting professional development to teaching soft skills and creating training resources to provide employees with the soft skills necessary to be managers. Preparing high school students to have soft skills before reaching the workplace can provide them with great value as they are able to apply soft skills to their academic and personal life. Working with an alternative high school population heightens the need to provide students with soft skills as they work to overcome the negative situations they faced during adolescents. Any employability skill taught to high school students has the potential to support their future career goals. Soft skills cover a wide range of skills, and while it may be confusing to talk about, the positive impact soft skills training can have on high school students is clear.

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APPENDIX A

SOFT SKILLS STUDENT GROUP CONTENT

Soft Skills Training Group

Welcome!

- Weekly meetings
  - Make up sessions
- Activities together
- Written reflections
- Application assignments
- Soft Skills Folder

Schedule of group meetings

- Thursday, January 25
- Thursday, February 1
- Thursday, February 8
- Thursday, February 15
- Thursday, February 22
- Thursday, March 1
- Thursday, March 8
- Thursday, March 15

Introductions

Name

Grade

Career Interests

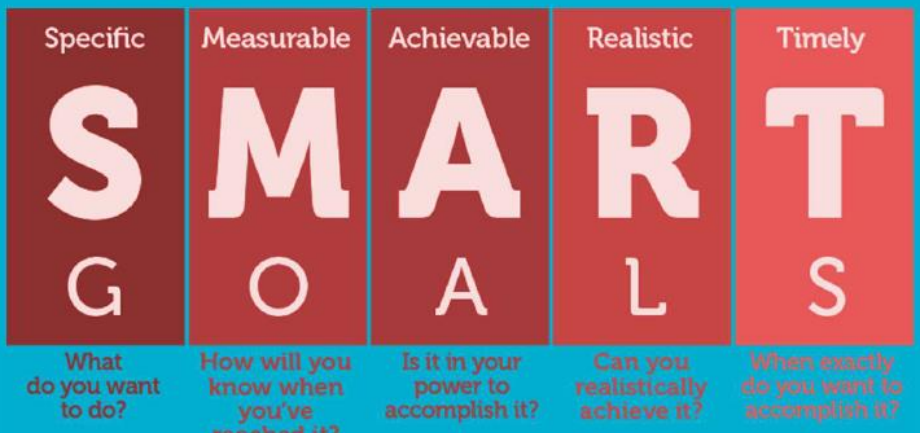
Session 1: Goal Setting

What do you want to accomplish?
- Short Term
- Long Term

When have you set a goal?

What challenges did you face?

SMART Goals



Practice — Share

Write a SMART goal that is a short term goal

Write a SMART goal that is a long term goal

Circle the 5 elements of a SMART goal

Share with your table to check for the 5 elements of a SMART goal

Application and Reflection

Share the goals you set today with friends and family members

Complete the goal setting reflection sheet before next week's meeting

Turn in your completed goal setting reflection

Session 2: Collaboration

What is collaboration?

When would you use collaboration?

Why is collaboration important?

Collaboration Activity

Round 1
Build the highest cup structure with rubber bands and string
NO TALKING

Round 2
Build the highest cup structure with rubber bands and string

Take 45 seconds to plan and discuss before time begins

Collaboration Activity

Take 45 seconds to plan and discuss before time begins

How did the activity change when you could talk and again when you could plan first?

Reflection and Exit Ticket

Complete your Exit Ticket now.

Turn in your Exit Ticket to get your note to return to class

Complete the reflection sheet before the next session

Turn in your completed collaboration reflection

Session 3: Communication

What is communication?

Why is it important to have good communication skills?

When do you need to have good communication skills?

What role do emotions play in communication?

Communication Models

Elements of communication

Communication formula

Practice and Reflection

Complete the scenarios on your communication handout

Complete your reflection before the next session

Turn in your completed communication reflection

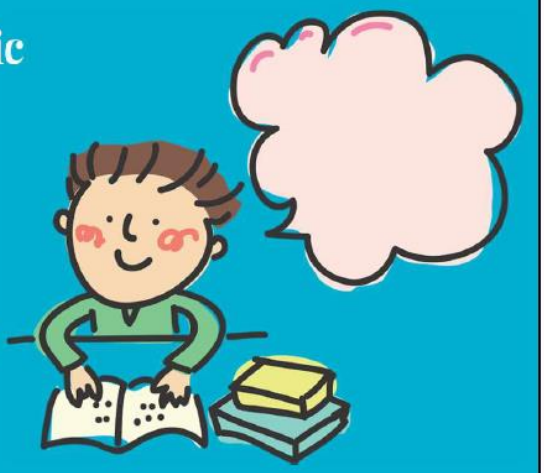
Session 4: Work Ethic

What is work ethic?

Examples of good work ethic

Examples of work ethic and collaboration

Why is it important?



Application

What can you do to improve your work ethic?

Clip about work and fun:

From Fran Kick, kickitin.com

Reflection and Exit Ticket

Complete your Exit Ticket now.

Turn in your Exit Ticket to get your note to return to class

Complete the reflection sheet before the next session

Turn in your completed work ethic reflection

Session 5: Time Management

How do you spend your time?
Complete the time use worksheet

How do you prioritize your time?

Why does time management matter?

Practice

Review your time use worksheet. What do you notice?

How would you change it to add:

School Project

1 hour=D, 2 hours=C, 3 hours=B, 4 hours=A

Don't need to be in a row

Work

Do need to be in a row and 4 hours=get a raise

Application and Reflection

Track your time to look for patterns

Complete the time management tracker AND reflection sheet before next week's meeting

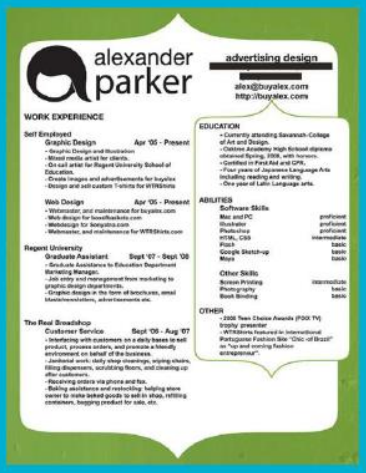
Turn in your completed time management ~~r~~reflection

Session 6: Resumes

What is the purpose of a resume?

What is important to include on your resume?

How can you build your resume in high school?



Practice

Create your resume

Reflection and Exit Ticket

Complete your Exit Ticket now.

Turn in your Exit Ticket to get your note to return to class

Complete the reflection sheet before the next session

Turn in your completed resume reflection

Session 7: Job Applications and Interviews

Job applications

- Where do you get them?

Job Interviews

- What to wear?
- What do you bring with you?
- What type of questions might you be asked?

Application and Reflection

Practice interview skills with your partner, refer to the worksheet for help

Complete the interview reflection sheet before next week's meeting

Turn in your completed interview reflection

Final Session

What soft skills have we covered?

Questions?

Review goals set in Session

Final Session

Complete final survey

APPENDIX B

SOFT SKILLS STUDENT SURVEY

Soft Skills Student Survey

Directions:

This survey is voluntary and your responses will remain confidential. You can skip questions and stop at any time. If you have questions during the survey, raise your hand and your teacher can help you. This survey will take you about 10 minutes to complete.

Name:

Gender: Male Female Other

Grade: 11th or 12th

Employment:

I have a job I don't have a job, but I am looking I don't have a job and I am not looking.

For each statement, select how often you display the behavior. You may select very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never for each item.

1. Communication

1. When I need help on an assignment, I am comfortable asking my teachers for help

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

2. I am able to communicate my needs.

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

3. When there is a disagreement with my friends, I am able to talk things out with them.

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

4. When discussing an issue with someone, I try to actively listen instead of planning what I will say next.

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

5. I am able to express my feelings clearly.

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

6. I make sure that my message is heard and understood

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

7. When I am at school I feel confident in my ability to communicate with students and teachers

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

2. Collaboration/Team Work

1. I am able to work with others to complete a project.

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

2. When working in a group, I give others the chance to talk and give their opinion.

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

3. I can give constructive criticism when working on a group project in class

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

4. I am able to share responsibility with others in my group

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

5. I am able to adjust my ideas after receiving feedback from the group

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
6. I make sure everyone in the group has an assignment to complete.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
7. When I am at school I feel confident in my ability to work on group projects with other students
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

3. Work Ethic (work completion/follow through)

1. After I finish my homework, I turn it in on time
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
2. If I don't finish my assignments in class, I take them home to finish
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
3. When I am asked to do something by my teacher, I can complete the task without a reminder
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
4. I see tasks through until the end
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
5. I want to do my best work on all of my assignments in class
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
6. I think I work hard while I am at school.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
7. I feel confident in my ability to complete my work for school
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

4. Time Management

1. When it comes to managing my assignments, I know my priorities.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
2. I consistently complete my homework.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
3. I think about how long an assignment will take me before I begin to work on it.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
4. I wait until my homework is done before I participate in other activities, like watching TV or playing video games.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
5. I consistently turn assignments in on time.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
6. I feel confident in my ability to manage my time effectively
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

5. Goal Setting

1. I routinely set realistic goals for myself.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
2. I track my progress until I've reached the goals I have set for myself.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
3. I make short term goals that I can complete in a few weeks or months.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
4. I make long term goals that will take a year or longer to complete.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
5. I make my goals known to others so they can help me reach them.
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never
6. I feel confident in my ability to set goals for myself
Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

In this section, please select the level to which you agree or disagree with the statement. You may select strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.

6. Employability-Applications and Paperwork

1. I know how to obtain a job application from the place I would like to work.
Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree
2. I know the process for obtaining documents needed to get a state identification card.
Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree
3. I understand how to complete an application for a job
Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree
4. I am aware of the types of documentation an employer will need me to provide in order to be hired.
Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree
5. I know how to do a search for job openings.
Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree
6. I feel confident in my ability to complete a job application
Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree

7. Employability-Resumes and interviews

1. I know how to create a resume to highlight my strengths.
Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree
2. I know how to dress when I go to a job interview.

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I understand the purpose of a cover letter for a job application.

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I know who will be a reference for me on job applications.

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I have up to date contact information for my list of references.

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I feel confident in my ability to complete a resume.

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I feel confident in my skills that I would use in a job interview

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX C

TEACHER SURVEY

Teacher Survey

Below is a list of students that participated in the soft skills training group.

Please indicate the degree to which participating students exhibited the following skills:

Communication (Examples include can ask for help, can use I statements, and can clearly express their point of view)

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Collaboration (Example include are able to work well in a group, able to delegate tasks to all group members, takes group feedback well)

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Work completion (Examples include: Turns in work on time, follows through on tasks requested of them, works hard in class)

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Time management (Examples include Uses time wisely in class, turns in assignments on time)

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Goal setting (examples include setting long term and short term goals, sharing goals with others for accountability, tracking progress toward goals)

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Knowledge of how to obtain employment (Examples include knowledge of how to complete a job application and create a resume, how to prepare for an interview)

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Are there any students from the list of participants that have been exceptional at one or more of these skills? Please explain how they are using the skills(s) in class.

Are there any students from the list of participants that have not demonstrated these skills? Please explain what information or skill the student is lacking.

Did you hear any feedback from student participants about their experience with the soft skills training group? If so, please include it below.

Please answer the following questions using a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree

1. I saw changes in students after participating in the soft skills group.

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Having a soft skills group is a good use of time

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I support continuing the soft skills group in the future

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. Students participating in the soft skills group worked with me to obtain their assignments missed during class time during to the group meetings.

Strongly Agree Agree neither Agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Any other comments about the soft skills group:

APPENDIX D

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience with the soft skills group meetings.
2. Can you name specific skills you learned in the group?
3. Do you think you will apply any of these skills to your schoolwork? If so, which ones?
4. How confident do you feel in using these skills in school?
5. Do you think you will apply any of these skills to your search for a job in the future? If so, which ones?
6. How confident do you feel about using these skills as you search for a job?
7. What was your favorite part of the group meetings? Least favorite part?
8. If you could make changes to the group, what would you change? Why?

APPENDIX E

INTERVENTION EXIT TICKETS

Exit Ticket 1
February 1

Last week we talked about goal setting; what was your favorite part of the lesson?

Today we talked about collaboration; what was your favorite part of the lesson?

Was the information presented useful for you?

Did you feel comfortable to participate? What would make it easier for you to participate in the group?

How will you use goal setting and collaboration at school and in work?

Exit Ticket 2
February 15

Last week we talked about communication; what was your favorite part of the lesson?

Today we talked about work ethic; what was most useful to you from the lesson?

Each week you have completed a reflection sheet. Have the reflection sheets helped you to think more about the topic of the lesson?

What other activities would help you to practice the soft skills covered in the lessons?

Exit Ticket 3
March 1

Last week we talked about time management; what was your favorite part of the lesson?

Today we talked about resumes; what was most useful to you from the lesson?

Have you created a resume before? If so, why did you make your resume?

Next week we will talk about job interviews. What questions do you have about going to a job interview?

What other soft skills would you like to learn more about for your future?

APPENDIX F

STUDENT ASSENT/CONSENT FORM

Soft Skills Groups in High School

STUDENT LETTER OF ASSENT

Dear student:

I am a student in the Doctoral Program at Arizona State University working under the direction of Dr. Danah Henriksen. I am conducting a research study to examine the effects of a soft skills training group on student self-efficacy and employability skills. The soft skills training group will be held during the second semester with the first session beginning on January 25. The training sessions will be held once a week for 8 weeks, and each session will last 30 minutes. Sessions and will be held during the regular school day, so you will miss class time. Based on the number of returned permission forms, you may not be able to participate in the soft skills training group, but may still be invited to complete the survey and interview described below.

I am inviting your participation in an in-class survey about your soft skills, such as time management and communication, as well as your level of career readiness. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty. The results of the survey may be published, but your name will not be used.

I may also be inviting your participation in an interview about what you learned during the soft skills group. The interview may be individually or in a group format and will be audio recorded. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty The results of the interview may be published, but your name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is an opportunity to share what you have learned and how you feel about soft skills and employability skills. The learning experiences in this training also have the potential to inform and strengthen your soft skills, which may be beneficial in future and personal contexts. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Responses will be kept confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your participation in the survey or interview, please contact me at (385) 646-6006.

Sincerely,
Michelle Glaittli

By signing below, I give consent to participate in the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Danah Henriksen at Arizona State University at (517)256-2344 or the Chair of the Human Subject Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

APPENDIX G

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Soft Skills Groups in High School

PARENTAL LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Parent:

I am a student in the Doctoral Program at Arizona State University working under the direction of Dr. Danah Henriksen. I am conducting a research study to examine the effects of a soft skills training group on student self-efficacy and employability skills. The soft skills training group will be held beginning on January 25. The training sessions will be held once a week for 8 weeks, and each session will last 30 minutes. Sessions and will be held during the regular school day, so your student will miss class time. Based on the number of returned permission forms, your child may not be able to participate in the soft skills group, but may still be invited to complete the survey and interview described below.

I am inviting your child's participation in a survey about their soft skills, such as time management and communication, as well as their level of career readiness. Your child's participation in this survey is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate, there will be no penalty Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate in the survey, there will be no penalty. The results of the survey may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

I may also be inviting your child's participation in an interview about what they have learned during the soft skills group. The interview may be individually or in a group format and will be audio recorded. Your child's participation in this interview is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate, there will be no penalty Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate in the interview, there will be no penalty. The results of the interview may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is an opportunity to share what he/she has learned and how he/she feels about soft skills and employability skills. The learning experiences in this training also have the potential to inform and strengthen students' soft skills, which may be beneficial in future and personal contexts There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child's participation.

Responses will be kept confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your child's name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in the survey or interview, please contact me at (385) 646-6006.

Sincerely,
Michelle Glaittli

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____ to participate in the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Danah Henriksen at Arizona State University at (517) 256-2344 or the Chair of the Human Subject Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

APPENDIX H

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Soft Skills Groups in High School

TEACHER LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear teacher:

I am a student in the Doctoral Program at Arizona State University working under the direction of Dr. Danah Henriksen. I am conducting a research study to examine the effects of a soft skills training group on student self-efficacy and employability skills.

The soft skills training group will be held during the second semester, beginning on January 25. The training sessions will be held once a week for 8 weeks. Each session will last 30 minutes and will be held during the school day. Once permission forms are returned, students will be randomly selected to participate in the training group.

I am inviting your participation in a survey about your perceptions of student soft skills, such as time management and communication, as well as level of career readiness. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty. The results of the survey may be published, but your name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is an opportunity to share your perspective as a teacher about the soft skills training groups themselves, as well as the use of soft skills you have seen in student participants. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Responses will be kept confidential and will not be labeled with names. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known/used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your participation in the survey or interview, please contact me at (385) 646-6006.

Sincerely,

Michelle Glaittli

By signing below, I give consent to participate in the above study.

_____ _____ _____

Signature Printed Name Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Danah Henriksen at

Arizona State University at (517)256-2344 or the Chair of the Human Subject Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

APPENDIX I

ASU IRB PROTOCOL AND APPROVAL

Instructions and Notes:

Depending on the nature of what you are doing, some sections may not be applicable to your research. If so, mark as "NA".

When you write a protocol, keep an electronic copy. You will need a copy if it is necessary to make changes.

Protocol Title

Include the full protocol title: Teaching Soft Skills to High School Students

Background and Objectives

3 Provide the scientific or scholarly background for, rationale for, and significance of the research based on the existing literature and how will it add to existing knowledge.

Describe the purpose of the study.

Describe any relevant preliminary data or case studies.

Describe any past studies that are in conjunction to this study.

The purpose of this study is to determine if teaching high school students soft skills has an impact on their self-efficacy to be successful in using soft skills, and how student soft skill knowledge connects to student employability skills and abilities. This study will investigate if and how students participating in a soft skills training group are able to use their soft skills in academic and career contexts. Preliminary data was collected for this study in Spring 2017 by interviewing teachers as to the extent they teach soft skills and how soft skills play a role in their classroom (ASU Study 00005829). This research indicated that teachers did not explicitly teach soft skills, but had high expectations that students would successfully demonstrate soft skills in the classroom.

Data Use

5 Describe how the data will be used. Examples include:

Dissertation, Thesis, Undergraduate honors project

Publication/journal article, conferences/presentations

Results released to agency or organization

6

Results released to participants/parents

Results released to employer or school

Other (describe)

The data will be used in a dissertation and may be used in publications/journal articles and conferences/presentations. Results may be released to parents/participants and to the school district and high school.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Describe the criteria that define who will be included or excluded in your final study sample. If you are conducting data analysis only describe what is included in the dataset you propose to use.

Indicate specifically whether you will target or exclude each of the following special populations:

Minors (individuals who are under the age of 18)

Adults who are unable to consent

Pregnant women

Prisoners

Native Americans

Undocumented individuals

Minors will be included in the study, with noted procedures for obtaining consent. As part of this school population, Native Americans and undocumented individuals may also be included, but they are not targeted for recruitment. Other groups will not participate

Number of Participants

Indicate the total number of participants to be recruited and enrolled*:* 45 students will be enrolled in the study: 30 students in the intervention groups, and 15 students in a control group. Participants will be recruited by the Co-PI in person during the school day, as described below in the recruitment methods, by providing a description of the study purposes and providing the parent consent and student assent forms.

Recruitment Methods

Describe who will be doing the recruitment of participants.

Describe when, where, and how potential participants will be identified and recruited.

Describe and attach materials that will be used to recruit participants (attach documents or recruitment script with the application).

The Co-PI for this study will recruit participants. Potential participants will be called from class to meet with the Co-PI and receive the documentation required to participate and gain appropriate consent/permissions. Potential participants will be all junior and senior students with the last name A-L who are enrolled in December 2017. All students fitting these criteria will be recruited. If over 45 students return consent forms, a random sample will be used to get the group to 45 students.

Procedures Involved

Describe all research procedures being performed, who will facilitate the procedures, and when they will be performed. Describe procedures including:

The duration of time participants will spend in each research activity.

The period or span of time for the collection of data, and any long term follow up.

Surveys or questionnaires that will be administered (Attach all surveys, interview questions, scripts, data collection forms, and instructions for participants to the online application).

Interventions and sessions (Attach supplemental materials to the online application).

Lab procedures and tests and related instructions to participants.

Video or audio recordings of participants.

Previously collected data sets that that will be analyzed and identify the data source (Attach data use agreement(s) to the online application).

Soft Skills Training Groups Intervention: Participating students will be randomly selected to be in the first or second session of the soft skills training groups. Each session will consist of 8 weekly meetings, lasting 30 minutes per meeting. Each session will focus on a specific skill: communication, collaboration, work ethic, goal setting, time management, creating a resume, job applications, and a final session to review the seven topics covered during the sessions.

Student Survey: Participating students will complete a survey about their soft skills. This will be done electronically and should take approximately 10 minutes per survey administration. The survey will be administered three times: as a pre-survey before the intervention, after the first session of the intervention and as a post-survey at the end of the second session of the intervention.

Student interview: A random sample of 4 students participating in the first soft skills training group will be interviewed. The interview will last at least 30 minutes, but not more than one hour. This timing is used to ensure students are not missing an entire class period. Interviews will be audio recorded with participant permission and informed consent.

Student Focus Group: A random sample of 4 students participating in the second soft skills training group will participate in focus group interview. This group interview will last at least 30 minutes, but not more than one hour. This timing is used to ensure students are not missing an entire class period. The focus group will be audio recovered with participant permission and informed consent.

Teacher Survey: Teachers who have participations from the soft skills groups will be asked to complete a survey. The survey will be done electronically and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Compensation or Credit

Describe the amount and timing of any compensation or credit to participants.

Identify the source of the funds to compensate participants

Justify that the amount given to participants is reasonable.

If participants are receiving course credit for participating in research, alternative assignments need to be put in place to avoid coercion.

There will be no compensation or credit for participating in the study.

Risk to Participants

14 List the reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences related to participation in the research. Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks.

Students will miss class to participate in the intervention aimed at strengthening their soft skills, and complete the student survey and interview/focus group. This may potentially inconvenience them as they will work with their teachers to obtain and complete any missing assignments. However, they will be made fully aware of this up front, and have complete freedom as to whether to participate.

Potential Benefits to Participants

Realistically describe the potential benefits that individual participants may experience from taking part in the research. Indicate if there is no direct benefit. Do **not** include benefits to society or others.

Participants have the potential to better understand the soft skills being taught, and have the opportunity to apply them to their academic and career work. . Extensive discussion in education has focused around the benefits of soft skills as being important for success in 21st century contexts. Through having the opportunity and learning experiences that strengthen these skills, participants may increase their employability and ability to speak to these skills in future professional and personal contexts. There are potential lifelong benefits to having good core sets of soft skills, so this training provides a chance to engage these skills and ideas for the future.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Describe the steps that will be taken to protect subjects' privacy interests. "Privacy interest" refers to a person's desire to place limits on with whom they interact or to whom they provide personal information. Click here for additional guidance on ASU Data Storage Guidelines.

Describe the following measures to ensure the confidentiality of data:

Who will have access to the data?

Where and how data will be stored (e.g. ASU secure server, ASU cloud storage, filing cabinets, etc.)?

How long the data will be stored?

Describe the steps that will be taken to secure the data during storage, use, and transmission. (e.g., training, authorization of access, password protection, encryption, physical controls, certificates of confidentiality, and separation of identifiers and data, etc.).

If applicable, how will audio or video recordings will be managed and secured. Add the duration of time these recordings will be kept.

If applicable, how will the consent, assent, and/or parental permission forms be secured. These forms should separate from the rest of the study data. Add the duration of time these forms will be kept.

If applicable, describe how data will be linked or tracked (e.g. masterlist, contact list, reproducible participant ID, randomized ID, etc.).

If your study has previously collected data sets, describe who will be responsible for data security and monitoring.

Only the Pi and Co-PI will have access to the data. Both have completed CITI training. The data will be stored on a password protected computer or in a locked file cabinet. The data will be stored for four years and then deleted or destroyed. To keep survey responses confidential, we will use a unique identifier known only to the student. The unique identifier will be the first three letters of the student's mother's name and the four digits representing their birth month and day. For example, Mar 0709, would represent the first three letters of Mary and 0709 are the four digits of their birth month July = 07 and day = 09; July 09. This identifier will be used to match students' initial set of responses to the later responses. Upon transcription of the focus group interview, identifiers will be deleted and audio recordings will be deleted. Data and consent and assent materials will be stored separately from one another.

Consent Process

Describe the process and procedures process you will use to obtain consent. Include a description of:

Who will be responsible for consenting participants?

Where will the consent process take place?

How will consent be obtained?

If participants who do not speak English will be enrolled, describe the process to ensure that the oral and/or written information provided to those participants will be in that language. Indicate the language that will be used by those obtaining consent. Translated consent forms should be submitted after the English is approved.

Michelle Gliattli, the Co-PI, will conduct the consent and assent processes. Parents will receive a permission letter that will be brought home by their student. Students will receive these permission letters during a meeting with the Co-PI in December. Students will complete assent in written form for participation the in intervention and the surveys; oral assent will be provided for the interview/focus group. Non-English speaking participants will not be recruited.

Training
19 Provide the date(s) the members of the research team have completed the CITI training for human participants. This training must be taken within the last 4 years. Additional information can be found at: Training.
Dr. Danah Henriksen, PI, CITI Training Certificate on file Michelle Glaittli, Co-PI, CITI Training Certificate on file.

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

APPROVAL: EXPEDITED REVIEW

Danah Henriksen

Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - West

Danah.Henriksen@asu.edu

Dear Danah Henriksen:

On 6/28/2017 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Teaching Soft Skills to High School Students
Investigator:	Danah Henriksen
IRB ID:	STUDY00006368
Category of review:	(6) Voice, video, digital, or image recordings, (7)(b) Social science methods, (7)(a) Behavioral research
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None

Documents Reviewed:	• Principal Letter of Support.pdf, Category: Other (to reflect anything not captured above); • Soft Skills Student Focus Group Questions.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Soft Skills Teacher Survey.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Soft Skills Student Interview Questions.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Student Assent Letter.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • IRB Soft Skills.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Teacher Consent Letter.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Soft Skills Student Survey , Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Parental Consent Letter.pdf, Category: Consent Form;

The IRB approved the protocol from 6/28/2017 to 6/27/2018 inclusive. Three weeks before 6/27/2018 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 6/27/2018 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

APPENDIX J

GRANITE SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEARCH APPROVAL

Granite SCHOOL DISTRICT

Research & Evaluation
2500 South State Street, 401A
Salt Lake City, UT 84115-3110

PHONE 385-646-2185
www.graniteschools.org

August 31, 2017

Michelle Glaittli
501 E 3900 S
Salt Lake City, UT 84107
maglaittli@graniteschools.org

Regarding: Teaching Soft Skills to High School Students

Proposal: 14108

The Survey and Research Request Committee has reviewed and approved your research pending the Principal's permission to conduct your research in their building and the informed consent of potential participants.

As you do your research please be advised of the following Granite District Policy:

Article X- Division of Instructional Services, Survey and Research Request Committee, 2.b.ii

> "As a condition for consideration of an application, individuals or entities requesting survey or research authorization shall agree to provide the District with the results of the survey or research prior to any release or publication in the event that authorization is granted."

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Todd J. Braeger
Chairman, Survey and Research Committee